Final report for the project *Rhetoric in teacher training for scientific and technical professions* (116/G03)

Lärarhögskolan i Stockholm  
Box 34103  
100 26 Stockholm  

Project Leader:  
Professor Staffan Selander, Lärarhögskolan i Stockholm  

Writers:  
FK Maria Wolrath Söderberg  
Södertörns högskola  
Box 4101  
141 00 Huddinge  

Professor Lennart Hellspong  
Södertörns högskola  
Box 4101  
141 00 Huddinge
Abstract

Keywords: Rhetoric. Teacher education, Topoi, Perspectivism, Science, Technology, Epistemology, Culture Conflict
The goal of the project was to handle conflicts in teacher training between teaching styles and expectations of students with a technical background. A clash between different ways of looking at knowledge manifested in different ways of speaking e.g. by using different metaphors and value words. We wanted to use rhetorical theory to articulate these differences. But we soon discovered other tensions: between the trainers and the theories and between the theories and the curriculum. On a general level, these tensions were seen by the students as a mismatch of theory and practice. We consider this a structural problem not easily removed, but believe that a “topical” didactic approach can contribute to deal with it in a constructive way.
Rational for change and importance of the project

The starting point of the project was an observation at the Teachers Training College in Stockholm, that students with a scientific professional background being retrained to teachers were often sceptical to the pedagogical discourse about knowledge and teaching. They found the discourse of pedagogic training vague and unclear compared with the stringency of their own disciplines. We saw it as (partly) a clash between different disciplinary cultures and mainly of a discursive nature: different ways of using, organizing and communicating knowledge. We chose to see this as a rhetorical problem and assumed that an increased acquaintance with a rhetorical perspective on knowledge- and communication would help both teachers and students to handle this “discursive clash of cultures” and make it productive and creative instead of destructive and confidence-eroding. When we looked more closely at the problem, it turned out to be significantly more complex than we had imagined. Even if our picture of a conflict between two disciplinary cultures was confirmed, several other clashes were also discovered to have pedagogical consequences. The teachers looked upon the students as somewhat square and formalistic in their class-room behaviour and the students described the training as loose and unserious. But when the teachers explained the students’ complaints by referring to their background, this explanation was hardly complete. We noticed that the criticism was also caused by a frustration over what the students saw as inconsistencies in their training, a frustration that was aggravated since the problems were not articulated and confronted.

The comments of the students pointed to a number of internal contradictions in the teacher training. They had a feeling that the pedagogical theories did not interplay with the actual didactical practice. Many students asked how the theories could be applied in the class-room (that there was an extensive discontent in this respect was shown by the evaluation of the teacher training carried out by the National Board of Higher Education in 2005). Another example of internal conflicts concerns the predominant socio-cultural and dialogue pedagogical theories that the teacher students meet in their training. On the one hand there were conflicts between different theories, which were rarely taken into consideration in the teacher training. On the other hand, these theories with their high evaluation of dialogue come in conflict with how teaching at the teachers training centre was normally arranged. To a high degree, it took place in what the students considered to be monologue forms. And when the theories stress learning as action, there was a conflict with the strong direction of teaching towards goals of learning, whose focus on measurability tend to lead to descriptions of knowledge as a thing. Even inside the governing documents (styrdokumenten) there were tensions. An example is how the emphasis that the value ground work should rest on a christian humanistic basis violates the demand for tolerance and the principle that many voices should be heard on equal terms in a democratic class-room. Our experience was that these tensions taken together resulted in an apparent conflict between theory and practice.
With a strict demand for consistency, these conflicts could be experienced as deeply problematic. But with a multi-perspective view of knowledge (which we advocate) many values can be recognized as valid, although they sometimes come in conflict with each other. For that reason, the solution to the problem of internal tensions in teacher training is hardly transforming it to become more uniform and integrated. The crux is rather that these tensions are not accounted for. And to the extent that they are made explicit, tools seem to be missing for handling crashes between different perspectives in a constructive way. That goes for both epistemological tools and a concrete didactic action-repertoire for helping students reflect on these matters.

The rhetorical tradition has tried to handle the problem of many perspectives that must (in some way) be recognized as valid. Particularly, this has taken place within the frame of the so-called “system of topics” (topology) with the ambition of developing a epistemological understanding but also a critical repertoire for practically and dialogically working with many perspectives. We wanted to examine the pedagogical potential of the topics system for articulating and overcoming conflicts in the teacher training.

Review of relevant literature, research and theories

The idea of a topical didactics harks back to the pedagogical program of classical rhetoric (see e.g. *Ad Herrenium*). Important forerunners are the sophist Protagoras, stressing the human measures of knowledge and “antilogos” (it does not mean “non-logic” but rather “multi-side logic”), the anonymous author of *Dissoi logoi* sketching a perspectivist view of knowledge, the schoolman Isocrates emphasizing the particular in knowledge and the importance of internal deliberation, the generalist Aristotle with his interest in everyday understanding of reality (doxa), of the importance of common deliberation and of *fronesis*, wisdom in action, as a superior form of insight, the teacher of rhetoric Quintilianus with his pedagogical program based on the ethical principle of *vir bonus* (the reasonable speaker), as well as the philosopher Sextos Empiricus with his thoughts about how language both widens and shrinks our field of view. But even with later rhetoricians there are important approaches. Among them are the ideas of a topical thinking, an imaginative invention and a perspectivist knowledge formation that exists in among others Raimondus Lullus, Desiderius Erasmus, Giambattisa Vico as well as other Italians like Matteo Peregrini and Emanuel Tesauro and with the 20th century pioneers for a “new” rhetoric, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrecht-Tyteca. Common to all of them are insights about the dependence of knowledge on language.

In the rhetorical research of later years, a more principled and philosophically oriented discussion around topos has hardly had a prominent place. But there are a number of historical studies of the development of the notion of topos in the rhetorical theory (e.g. Leff 1983) and philosophical or philological studies of sophistry also considering topos (Sciappa 1993, Grassi 2001) as well as analysis of what topos means in textual criticism (Gabrielsen 2006) and for argumentation
and deliberation generally (e.g. Corbett 1986) and inside special fields of knowledge (e.g. Zagacki & Keith 1992). The pedagogical value of topos has been attended to in rhetorically inspired writing guides (e.g. Lauer 2004), but the possibility of a general topical didactics with relevance for all school subjects has hardly been examined. An exception is a paper by Jost (1991) which develops a broad pedagogical view of topos reminding of our own. In Mendelson (2003), we further meet an attempt to develop a pedagogical view building on a perspectivist relation to knowledge in an explicit adherence to the sophist tradition.

What we here call a topical didactic has several parallels in modern socioculturally based pedagogical theories but also some important differences. To the similarities belongs an awareness of the social and situated nature of learning and of its dependence on language. What distinguishes the topical theory is its emphasizing of an examination of perspectives and the development of a repertoire. To that comes the thought that the topical dialogue can be internalized as an inner deliberation. Moreover topical didactics focuses more explicitly than the sociocultural theory on the question how a dialogical pedagogic, where many perspectives meet, can be concretized in different ways and how it can use cognitive, linguistic and dialogical aides, as change of perspective with the help of linguistic figures, discursive patterns like narratives, informal conclusions like analogy and antithetical examination or mnemotechnical support for a reflective learning.

In Scandinavia, we only know of some few explicitly topically relevant approaches, among them Rosengren’s defence of doxa as a starting point for an open and topical epistemology (2002), Malmbjer’s survey of content structures in seminars (2005), Togeby’s classically inspired mapping of the topical “landscape” (1986) and Catanas’ interest in the topical-creative potential of the verbal figures (1999). The pedagogical and didactical potential of rhetoric is however a field under development and we ourselves have participated in research projects with relevance for our approach in this pedagogical project, among them 1) Progymnasmata – the forgotten text and thought form of rhetoric 2) The didactics of rhetoric. Rhetoric and its exercises as a way to the communicative goals of the school and of higher education.

Questions

Questions that we wanted to try to answer within the project were:

- Can a rhetorical analysis of discourse help us to see more clearly and explain how conflicts arise in teacher training?
- Can the topos system contribute to developing a way of handling clashes between disciplinary cultures?
- Can the topos system contribute to building bridges between theory and practice in teacher training?

Method
Innovation

In the rhetorical view of knowledge invention is central: the art of finding ideas befitting to a speech in a given situation with special demands on the speaker’s ability to meet his listeners on their terms. In this inventive meeting, the notion of “topos” plays a key role. Such “places” in the mental world of the listeners, which have meaning and value for them, can function as “meeting places” between the speaker’s ideas and the needs, expectations and previous knowledge of the listeners. Didactics must achieve a meeting of a similar kind. We can illustrate that with the situation of the teacher student.

In her practice, she is confronted with problems which touch upon different topics in her professional discourse: “teaching”, “learning”, “learner”, “pupil”, “democratic upbringing” and so on. Each of these topoi has a potentially rich content in school culture. For that reason, they can function as meeting places for a number of concepts, values and experiences. They are multiperspectival. But these perspectives might be rather unconscious and unproblematic for the teacher student. When the students meet a theoretical description of e.g. the teacher role, then they may simply memorize and reproduce it. In such cases, there is no dialogue with their own experience. In the opposite extreme, the students stick with their practical experiences without relating them to a theoretical analysis. But topical thinking facilitates a movement back and forth in order to bring theory and experience together in a shared topos, where they can enrich each other. Then the theory can give experience a greater analytical acuity and experience deepens theory with visual, motorical, emotional etc. concretion.

The starting point of the project was our conviction that the rhetorical topical pedagogic has a potential for contributing to a positive development of the pedagogical discourse of teacher training on several different levels. 1) On a meta-level, a linguistic analysis can make us conscious about our presuppositions about learning and knowledge, so that we can take a better responsibility for our own thinking. 2) On a pedagogical level, the topos system can offer a repertoire of theoretical and practical tools for working with different simultaneous and perhaps even contradicting perspectives in a critically exploratory way. 3) On a didactical level, the topos system can build bridges between theory and practice by using the participants everyday experience and linking them to common values. Thus, entrances can be opened to perspectives, which might otherwise be seen as inaccessible.

What the students saw as the main problem in their training was a conflict between theory and practice. They wanted concrete and specific instructions for their practical activity. But instead they got theoretical discussions, which they found fuzzy (students with another background might instead have described them as too abstract and theoretical). According to our analysis, part of the problem was the lack of a metadiscourse about how theory and practice can interplay (of the kind afforded by a topical didactic). Moreover, we think that the different theoretical perspectives were seen as mutually incompatible and also incompatible with the often unarticulated perspectives of the students. For that reason, it was difficult for the students to handle these different pedagogical
theories as tools for their professional work. These problem showed themselves in a clash between the what the teachers expect and what the students achieve. The teachers want the students to read texts, think about them and write about them, learning to observe reality from the theoretical concepts of the texts. But many teachers think that the reflections become rather flat. And the students find it difficult to use the theories as instruments for practical guidance, when reality does not look like the textbooks but offers unexpected experiences.

Some of the difficulties in making the pedagogical theories work practically were these:

1. Although the students can apply the theories to illustrating examples, it is more difficult for them to adapt the theories to everyday situations. They learn about the theories, but they do not learn to think with the theories.

2. The theories are seen as indivisible wholes by the students. But all theories consist of parts and aspects which can be more or less useful in specific situations.

3. The theories are conceived as something authoritatively given by a certain person. Therefore they are looked upon with respect. Even teachers can find it presumptuous to violate a theory by adapting it to a certain purpose. For that reason, the theories can be seen as dogmas rather than as changing parts of a developing knowledge. This becomes particularly conspicuous, when the theories themselves point to a non-dogmatic view.

4. The theories are presented as antagonistic in relationship to each other. Or a theory is presented against a background of shortcomings in an earlier theory. In the latter case, the theory can be seen as part of a linear development, where a new theory improves on its predecessors. As a consequence, older theories may be dropped as dated.

5. Theories that are marginalized by the dominant ideas can be seen as strange or even dangerous. Sometimes teachers seem to be afraid that the students will get in touch with “bad” theories, like e.g. Skinner’s behaviouristic pedagogy. But all theories try to solve certain problems. And they can have useful components, even if we do not accept them as whole-sale solutions. They can even have a value as negative examples by pointing at ways of thinking which we easily fall into, if we do not watch out for them.

We think that a topical didactics can help us handle problems of this kind by facilitating a deliberative approach to theories. Such an approach would also contribute to bringing the theories closer to the concrete teacher practice due to the fact that topical concepts are cornerstones of everyday knowledge. The point of departure is that we can only learn something by building on what we already know. In this work the topical didactics spans the gap between the life-world of the teacher students as it expresses itself in their values and motivation and the theoretical analyses of education.

The purpose of a “topical didactics” is handling problems of this kind by clearly putting the school culture in the centre of a dialogic and multi-perspective teaching. A precondition for this can already be found. That is the strong position in teacher training for socio-cultural pedagogical theory (Säljö) as well as for dialogue-pedagogical theories (Englund, Dysthe). These are also important elements in our own theoretical framework.
As is well known, socio-cultural pedagogic stresses the strong dependence of learning on its social and cultural context as well as the importance of social and cultural “tools” as supports for knowledge-work and knowledge-development. This is well in line with a “topical didactic”, since topoi in opposition to logical concepts are always related to doxa, the thoughts and habits (sometimes contradictory, heterodoxic) that exist in a certain social and cultural community. As focal points for a collective experience, they also support the thinking and acting of the individual. An important point of departure for our own attempt to build a bridge between “theory” and “practice” is to bring the general concepts of the theories into a context, a topical environment. In that way we think they can become more accessible for students as tools for reflecting on their own experience.

In Englund, the “deliberative dialogue” is a democratic form for questioning authorities by a collective and rational examination of school knowledge. From Englund we take the democratic and rational ideal for a topical discussion (which we want to fill out with what a “topical argumentation” can mean as an instrument for a practical rationality).

In Olga Dysthe’s pedagogical theory, the “multi-voiced classroom” is a forum, where many voices are heard and meet with respect and where a multiplicity of views is a value in itself. This multi-voice ideal is important also for our conception of a topical didactics. A topos is a meeting-place for many perspectives on a question. Different approaches can turn out to be useful in different concrete situations. For that reason a future teacher needs a repertoire of didactical approaches. The term used by rhetorical invention for this multi-perspectivness is copia, mångfald.

One of the values of topical thinking is that it encourages a reflective attitude to knowledge. A topos is open to interpretation and situation-adapted application. It cannot be strictly applied according to fixed rules. A topos cannot be defined, it would not even be desirable. Its potential lies in its creative elasticity.

The topoi that are particularly relevant in our case are such basic structures, procedures and perspectives which configure a specific theoretical approach. For instance, a topos for a person who talks and thinks along behaviouristic lines could be a pattern such as “stimulus-response”, while a topos for someone whose discourse is more cognitivistic might be the piagetian concept of “adaption” with the components “assimilation” and “accommodation”. Many topoi have a metaphorical touch: in the first example of a physical transmission of force and in the latter of the functions of stomach and eyes respectively (which also inspired Piaget).

A topos is a kind of mini-theory: it shows a way of structuring a material (e.g. thoughts about learning processes). In this way topoi function creatively. With their help, you can also get ideas for analyses and arguments, for instance, if we stay with the subject of pedagogic, to explain what learning means or for finding reasons for or against different ways of teaching. Topoi often frame solutions to specific problems which are easier to distinguish than the wider problematics of a whole theory. These specific problems are also easier to remove from the temporal and cultural context of a whole theory. In this way, the use of topoi can
help older theories come alive. And since topoi are always close to the basic principles for theoretical thinking inside a discipline, they make for greater accessibility than a fully developed theory. Often it is also possible to see how they connect to crucial aspects of “everyday thinking”. As a rule, topoi are the intuitively easiest entrances to a theory. If we approach a theory topically, it does not stand and fall like a monolithic block. Also outmoded theories can contain useful or developable parts (topoi). That means that a topical didactics allows an eclectic approach, which purists may scoff at but which is very useful for practical problem solving. If it is permissible or even expected to borrow bits and pieces (topoi) from different theories to find viable solutions, the chance is greater that the theories will be seen as useful tool-kits rather than remote abstractions. That makes the theories dynamic, not static. Instead of opposing theories as if they had absolute pretensions of truth, you could more easily see them as contributions to a multi-perspective description of issues without a univocal and permanently valid analysis. That can help students to an unprejudiced openness in their thinking, which from a rhetorical perspective lies at the core of a critical approach.

Topoi can also be used to structure the understanding of a whole theory. If the subject to be taught is pedagogic, you may e.g. pick out different metaphors for learning in order to see which one is best adapted to a specific theory (not seldom having an image, a metaphorical topos, at its core). This may help the students to understand what the theories hide, namely their presuppositions.

By way of topoi, the students can be stimulated to set up theories of their own. As teachers, we do not want our pupils to passively cite and reproduce theories received from others, but to be able to theorize their own experiences, since this ability is the basis for a reflective attitude in studies, profession and life.

Procedure and students
The pedagogical experiment was carried out at the Teachers Training Centre in Stockholm. Its focus was a supplementary course in three semesters for retraining professionals with a technical-scientific background to become teachers. It was chosen for a specific reason. The teacher trainers had called attention to what they saw as a tension between the scientific view of knowledge held by the students and a more humanistic one promoted by the teachers, causing frequent conflicts and misunderstandings. Specifically, we worked within the framework of the course “Education, Communication and Learning” (UKL), 10 points, given under the later part of the first term of the training program. This course addresses “practical” questions like giving marks and analysing goal-documents, but also deals with pedagogical theory. The latter is the main part of the course, both as to time and as to pages in the course literature. As a parallel to the course, which is done in seminar form (on this occasion with 18 students), there was also a number of lectures on issues in pedagogical theory. We saw the course as a convenient occasion to try out a more rhetorical approach. Because of our culture-clash hypothesis, we wanted the students to meet this approach rather early in their training. The course was carried out in cooperation between (mostly) Maria
Wolrath Söderberg from the project and two teachers at the Teachers Training Centre in Stockholm (LHS).

Initially, our plan was to form a working team with teachers from the Teachers Training Centre. They should first acquaint themselves with the working methods that we wanted to try. With the project members, they were the to try a new approach to one or several of the courses in the teacher training program. In our experiment, we had a literature list and a centrally adopted course plan to stick to as given preconditions. But we wanted to try a new pedagogic for handling the tensions observed. This in its turn would then be evaluated by ourselves and by the participating teachers and students. Aided by these evaluations, we would revise the planning of the course and do it once more. But practical problem as well as observations of internal conflicts in the structure of the teacher training led us into another direction.

We realized that our objective of developing an action repertoire for this type of didactic problems would be best served not by remaking a single course but rather be gathering a working team of experienced teacher trainers to share our experiences with them. In this way, we could try out ideas relevant to the problem in another fashion. After having tested our method in the classroom, we turned to working on a teacher level.

For this reason, we called on people active in or with long experience of teacher training to form a focus group of teachers. The teachers came from The Teachers Training Center, Södertörn University College’s Teacher Training and from Mälardalen University College Teacher Training. Our aim was to use our own experiences as well as relevant literature to discuss how a “topical didactic” could contribute to teacher training. The teachers met six times. In the group was also a former teacher student, now doctorand. Our focus was particularly on how to make pedagogical theories useful for giving a concrete meaningfulness to theories. The participants contributed with their own reflections about both problems and successful experiences and used the seminars for trying out pedagogical ideas for their own teacher practice.

The evaluation of the project has to a large degree been accomplished by writing continuously. We have not tried a statistical approach, since our material seemed much better suited for a hermeneutical dialogue. This dialogue has landed in a number of texts, which have been used in our seminars with the working team as a basis for discussion and will be presented in an anthology this autumn. As a side-effect, we have collected material for no less than three comprehensive research applications with topical learning as a central aspect (for two of these we received planning grants already last year).

**Results**

During our work with the project topical learning itself has shown broader possibilities than we first expected. That has led to us to apply for research grants for two projects supposed to explore the potential of topology as a theory of learning, as a field of didactics and as a theory of knowledge. It has also led to several pedagogical changes in our own practice as teachers and within our
academic culture. Our students are trained to work topically in rhetoric, but this is more pronounced now than earlier. We have also got inspiration to work topically within the teacher training at Södertörn University College, where we if possible find our experiences even more relevant since Söderörn UC has as a special task to take on students from non academic families and to work multi-culturally and inter-disciplinary, which make a pedagogical approach to pluralism quite necessary. This autumn we have the opportunity to try parts of our concept in a large scale within a course dealing with the communicative practice of learning for all new students in teacher training at Södertörn UC.

Publications connected to the project are:
Hellpong. Lennart. 2006. Giambattista Vico och idén om en retorisk didaktik. i Rhetorica Scandinavica 38
Wolrath Söderberg, Maria. 2005. En metaforisk didaktik, i Språk på tvärs, ASLA
Wolrath Söderberg, Maria. 2006. En topisk pedagogik, i Rhetorica Scandinavica 38
Wolrath Söderberg, Maria. 2006. Topiskt lärande. uu.

We have participated in the following conferences with our experiences:
Nationell Retorikkonferens i Uppsala 2004
ASLA Södertörns högskola 2004
Ämnesdidaktisk konferens i Örebro 2005
Pedagogisk utvecklingskonferens i Karstad 2005
Ämnesdidaktisk konferens i Kristianstad 2006
Nordisk retorikkonferens Oslo 2006
Discussion

Administrative inflexibility
A problem underestimated by us was what can be called administrative inflexibility. To enact rapid changes in a big educational institution, even rather marginal ones like introducing a new course or trying out a new form for teaching an existing course, seems if not impossible at least very energy-consuming. Probably, many creative ideas come to waste because of this resistance. What we are referring to is not a lack of good will from particular administrators (who often are committed teachers themselves) but a structural problem. An administrative system is in principle set up to operate according to fixed routines, and both this and the complexity of a big organisation lead to a lack of flexibility resulting in the need for a pedagogical experiment to have a long planning time.

Our purpose was not to set up a course in rhetoric (even if that could give the students a tool for handling the “discursive clash of cultures”) but to introduce a rhetorically inspired didactic in one of the ordinary courses of the training program. We thought the course chosen to be suitable in principle, since “education”, “communication” and “learning” are central to it. We had hoped to start in the spring of 2004 to make an optimal use of the short experimental time (2 years). However, it turned out to be impossible, in spite of many meetings and personal contacts. In stead, we had to wait until the autumn of 2004 before getting hold of teachers who wanted and could carry out a joint course with us. A drawback with regard to the dissemination of our results was that no one of the teachers participating in the course had a tenure. Maria WS notes: “Since the start was postponed, we could not devote the spring to communicating with the teachers and let them in on our concept, make them familiar with topical thinking. Instead, we had to explore the subject during the course. We only had time to try it out on some few occasions, before the course started. We had a lot of interrupted project meetings all the time. Conclusion: you have to be prepared for a long starting distance.”

Difficulty to identify pedagogical problems
Our project assumed that the problems that had been observed (that the scientifically trained teacher students saw their training as loose and unsystematic) were of a pedagogical nature. This may be a natural and basically constructive reaction in teachers. As a teacher you take full responsibility for how you work. But you cannot be sure that you have identified the problem correctly. We can take our case as an example. During the course, it became clear that much of the criticism of the pedagogical training for being unstructured was not directed at the methods of education nor at its content but at its administration (late scheduling and booking of localities, uncertainty about which teachers should be responsible for different courses, bad coordination of different courses and parts
of courses and lack of contacts between the teaching departments). Thus, we can say that by identifying the difficulties too hastily, we exposed ourselves to the risk of trying to solve administrative problems with didactical methods.

**The problem of being an outsider**

The participants in our project who had the main responsibility for carrying out the pedagogical experiment at the Teacher Training Centre in Stockholm came from another institution of higher education, Southern Stockholm University College (and more precisely its rhetorical department, which has developed a rather special culture, with a great amplitude for didactical experiments and a highly developed and tightly implemented system for teacher cooperation). Such a cooperation between two separate institutions and between two teaching cultures offers great creative possibilities. But it is not without problems. Here are some of our experiences, positive and negative:

1. We were afraid that the teacher trainers involved in the experiment would look upon our presence as a menace to their prestige and autonomy, since we participated in practically all lessons of the course. But instead we met with a great openness to let outsiders in. Without this willingness, our work of course would have been impossible.

2. There was a need for plenty of time to build personal trust. Maria WS notes: “You have to calculate with time for positioning. Different teachers have different ways of dealing with this. The project is not just about technique but very much about teacher personality, about ethos, about gaining confidence. It is not established once and for all but has to be re-established at each new meeting. When you work with people in their teacher roles, they are very vulnerable. When you challenge how a teacher works, you challenge her whole personality. This is especially true for committed and experienced teachers. They also have more to risk in this situation. Much time is needed for these changes. We thought we could start early with theory, but the whole summer was devoted to ethos and trust.”

**Conflict between consciousness raising as pedagogical goal and respect for the integrity of the students**

A main purpose of the didactical experiment was to increase the ability of the scientifically trained students to see the existence, the legitimacy and the contextual underpinnings of various forms of knowledge and communication. As all educational goals, this one requires the students to make a journey to reach it, to acquire new ways of looking at things and leave old ones behind. In many cases this is quite unproblematic. But to be seen as naive or dogmatic when it comes to quite central concepts like “knowledge” and “communication” can be experienced as humiliating. Maria WS remarks: “Something I had not counted on was how these students tended to reject the knowledge system that had fostered them at the same time as they were deeply formed by it. They got quite upset, when we happened to give vent to our own prejudices about how technicians and
scientists are likely to understand matters.” Our didactic experiment inspired a considerable enthusiasm in the participants, but it also challenged their received attitudes. This double effect required a considerable tactfulness of the teacher trainers as well as a confidence in their own ability to handle moments of uneasiness and confusion.

**A strong need for consistency**

Another type of result is that we have become aware of the need for consistency in a broader perspective. We believe that this wish for consistency and the fright for contradictions results in problems dealing with built in tensions in may field. And that it would need to be dealt with epistemologically. We find this an interesting field within the area of scholarship of teaching.

**Experience of the seminar series for the teachers**

The focus group showed that topical learning could arouse great curiosity and interest. The participating teachers saw many concrete possibilities for its application in their own professions. Within the seminars we tried to practice a topical didactic on ourselves. We worked topically, in an interchange between the topical theories and a topical analysis of our teaching practices. This was something of an aha-experience, and we were reminded of the value of trying our didactical ideas on ourselves. For instance we identified central metaphors in influential pedagogical theories and tried them on planning seminars and lessons as well as on analyzing pedagogical situations which gave us material to compare practical and theoretical consequences of different pedagogical theories on a more qualified and critical level than we had expected. There were also some unexpected results. Some of the participants were working not only in teacher training, and our experiences seemed to have wider implications. For instance we found new ways of approaching religion and the history of ideas as subjects.

The experience of the seminar series also showed us the need for pedagogical dialogues in higher education. There are of course excellent courses in university pedagogic, but what became especially successful in our focus group was the constant interplay between theory and practice and that the participants themselves gradually developed the series of seminars to a course benefiting for their own practice which rather deepened thematically, than felt additive.

**Conclusions**

This project has, as already mentioned, inspired us to apply for research grants for three different projects, all in different ways concerning the need of a pedagogy for handling pluralism in academic cultures. 1) The New Teacher Training in Sweden in the gap between Theory and Practice. Reflective Learning through “Topical” Pedagogic. Vetenskapsrådet. 2) What is Needed for a “Topical” Didactic. A Survey of the Conditions for a Reflective Learning in Rhetorical Form Based on the Pedagogical Discourse in Three Democracies. Östersjöstiftelsen. 3) Critical Thinking for a pluralistic University. Vetenskapsrådet.
We are also planning to finish a book on topical learning this autumn. We have several articles in the pipeline and we are planning a conference on topical learning.
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Author Note

Project Leader:
Professor Staffan Selander, Institutionen för undervisningsprocesser, kommunikation och lärande, Lärarhögskolan, Stockholm
staffan.selander@lhs.se

Writers:
FK Maria Wolrath Söderberg, Institutionen för svenska, retorik och journalistik, Södertörns högskola, Stockholm
maria.wolrath-soderberg@sh.se
Professor Lennart Hellspong, Institutionen för svenska, retorik och journalistik, Södertörns högskola, Stockholm
Lennart.hellspong@sh.se

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