



MAKING SENSE OF THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Academic Systems Literacy and Shared Educational Responsibility in the Public University

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ABSTRACT

University teachers exercise substantial educational responsibility within an institution that is at once academic and public. Yet the wider institutional context of their work is not always easy to understand or navigate. The paper takes as its point of departure an asymmetry in academic socialisation: while the norms, quality criteria, and forms of accountability associated with research are more routinely made explicit and related to practice, the wider normative and institutional foundations of the educational mission may remain comparatively implicit or fragmented. Their connections to everyday educational responsibility can consequently be harder to see and articulate. This conceptual paper introduces *academic systems literacy* as a relational concept for examining how university teachers and collegial groups make sense of and act within this wider institutional context while exercising disciplinary and educational judgement.

Drawing on complementary perspectives on literacy, sense of coherence, and multilevel organisation, the paper elaborates the concept through a relational multilevel model linking systems knowledge, navigational competence, and professional judgement to institutional system capacity. The model asks what makes educational responsibility sufficiently comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful in practice. It also considers how wider academic and public-law commitments bear on educational judgement and what institutional conditions make informed action possible.

Academic systems literacy brings teachers' and collegial groups' capacity to understand and act into relation with the university's responsibility to make the knowledge and support needed for responsible action accessible—and to learn from educational practice. From this perspective, educational responsibility is shared: responsibilities differ across individual, collegial, and institutional levels, but depend on one another. This interdependence matters for educational quality and equitable professional participation. The paper therefore argues for a more connected knowledge base in academic development, in which teaching and student learning are understood in relation to the wider organisational and normative conditions of educational responsibility. As a practical application, it proposes a 3-credit professional development course. Developed in the context of Swedish public higher education, the concept offers a framework for making the institutional context of university teaching more intelligible and for situating educational judgement within the wider responsibilities of the public university.

Key words: academic systems literacy; academic development; educational responsibility; higher education; institutional capacity; university teaching



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

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INTRODUCTION

University teachers make decisions about course content, assessment, and student participation within an institution that is at once academic and public. Their educational responsibilities extend beyond disciplinary knowledge to helping students develop independent and critical judgement and participate thoughtfully in society. This broader mission is realised both through what is taught and through how education is organised and conducted. Yet the normative and institutional foundations of this work are not always made explicit in teachers' professional lives.

The public-law framework within which Swedish universities operate embodies wider commitments concerning equal human worth and dignity, freedom of opinion, transparency, and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of public authority. These commitments intersect with the university's academic values and wider societal responsibilities (University of Gothenburg, 2021). Educational responsibility is therefore not merely an internal organisational matter: it also concerns fairness, academic integrity, participation, and the responsible exercise of institutional authority.

The paper takes as its point of departure an asymmetry in the professional formation of university teachers. Through doctoral education, peer review, and engagement with research ethics, academics are repeatedly socialised into the norms, quality criteria, and forms of accountability that shape research. The corresponding normative and institutional dimensions of the educational mission, including its legal framework, tend to receive less systematic professional attention. A related imbalance can be seen in institutional induction and professional development. In the institutional context from which this paper emerged, line managers receive substantial preparation in governance and organisational and legal responsibilities. University teachers encounter aspects of the legal framework through courses in higher education pedagogy, but systematic support of comparable breadth is more difficult to identify for those assuming responsibility for courses and degree programmes (University of Gothenburg, 2026). Teachers may consequently take on significant educational responsibilities while developing much of their understanding of the wider institutional and normative context through experience.

As Director of Studies in an educational unit at the University of Gothenburg, I sought to address this need by developing a problem-based professional development programme for teachers with responsibility for courses and degree programmes. Alongside it, I developed an organisational model intended to clarify how knowledge and responsibility could be shared and coordinated (Appendix 1).

These experiences prompted three related questions. What do university teachers need to understand the institutional systems in which they exercise educational responsibility and to act with sound professional judgement? What institutional conditions support their capacity to engage collectively and critically with the responsibilities and tensions of university education? How do university-wide strategies, administrative arrangements, and support functions connect with—and learn from—the educational work they are intended to sustain?

In response to these questions, the paper proposes *academic systems literacy* as an integrative concept linking systems knowledge, navigational competence, and professional judgement. It refers to the individual and collegial capacity to understand, navigate, and critically examine the institutional systems through which the university's educational mission is interpreted, organised, and enacted. These capacities help teachers bring disciplinary knowledge and educational judgement to bear within the institutional conditions of their work. Such literacy does not require exhaustive knowledge of rules or organisational structures. Rather, it involves understanding how relevant parts of the system relate to one another and to the purposes they serve, judging possible courses of action, and knowing where responsibility and relevant expertise lie.

The concept is relational: what teachers and collegial groups can understand and do depends partly on how the university makes its educational system intelligible, navigable, and usable in practice. Institutional arrangements are therefore not simply a neutral background to educational work. They shape the possibilities for informed and critical judgement and equitable professional participation. Educational responsibility is shared in this sense: individual, collegial, and institutional responsibilities differ, but depend on one another.

The paper develops the concept through a relational multilevel model. Its approach is conceptual and theory-building rather than a systematic literature review. It brings perspectives on literacy, sense of coherence, and multilevel organisation into dialogue and relates them to the academic and public-law norms that shape educational responsibility within Swedish public higher education. The purpose is conceptual integration rather than comprehensive coverage of each body of literature. As the paper does not report empirical research involving human participants or personal data, informed consent is not applicable.

As a practical application, the paper proposes a 3-credit course, *Academic Systems Literacy: University Teaching in Institutional Context*. Through practice-based cases, the course explores how disciplinary and educational judgement is exercised within the academic, public-law, and organisational conditions of university education (Appendix 2).

SENSE OF COHERENCE IN EDUCATIONAL WORK

Research on supportive pedagogical cultures suggests that shared goals, norms, and structures can support both the development of teaching and teaching teams' capacity to assume collective responsibility (Myllykoski-Laine et al., 2023). Yet their existence does not ensure that they become useful resources in teachers' everyday work. The question is whether teachers can make sense of these arrangements, find workable ways to fulfil their responsibilities, and relate those responsibilities to purposes and values worth engaging with.

The theory of sense of coherence (SOC) offers a way of approaching this question from the perspective of university teachers. In salutogenic theory, people are thought to be better able to engage with complex demands when these are experienced as *comprehensible*, *manageable*, and *meaningful* (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987). Comprehensibility concerns the extent to which information, demands, and events can be understood as structured and intelligible. Manageability concerns the extent to which adequate resources are available for responding to those demands. Meaningfulness refers to the motivational dimension of SOC: whether those demands are experienced as worthy of engagement and investment (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987; Eriksson & Lindström, 2007; Saboga-Nunes et al., 2019). Here, these dimensions are used to examine teachers' experience of educational responsibility in relation to the institutional conditions of their work.

For university teachers, comprehensibility concerns understanding how their professional responsibilities relate to the wider educational mission and to the institutional arrangements through which it is pursued. Teachers draw on disciplinary knowledge, educational expertise, and experience to interpret these relationships, while developing their knowledge of the university's academic and organisational framework. Such understanding involves active inquiry, dialogue with colleagues, and critical examination of institutional rules and practices. The university, in turn, needs to make relevant information and expertise accessible and create opportunities for this interpretative work. Comprehensibility is therefore not simply a matter of receiving clear information, but of being able to interpret it and assess its significance in concrete educational situations.

Manageability concerns whether teachers experience the resources available to them as sufficient to fulfil their educational responsibilities. These resources include their own knowledge, experience, and professional judgement, as well as collegial expertise and institutional support. Teachers draw on these resources to assess possible courses of action, work with colleagues, and judge when a matter requires action beyond their own remit. Their scope for action also depends on how responsibilities, authority, and support are organised. A teacher may understand what a rule or policy requires and why, yet lack the resources or institutional support needed to act on it. Where existing arrangements hinder responsible action, teachers may question procedures, propose alternatives, and contribute to institutional development. This does not mean that they should be expected to compensate individually for institutional shortcomings.

Meaningfulness concerns whether teachers experience their educational responsibilities as worthy of engagement and professional commitment. Such engagement is easier to sustain when teachers can see how the demands they encounter relate to purposes and values that matter in their work. Legal, financial, and organisational requirements may otherwise be encountered primarily as administrative obligations detached from the quality of teaching, students' rights, and disciplinary practice. Making these connections visible can help teachers understand such requirements as part of their educational responsibility. This does not mean that existing arrangements should simply be accepted as meaningful. On the contrary, understanding what they are intended to achieve can provide a stronger basis for questioning whether they support the purposes and values they are meant to serve.

This application of SOC links teachers' experience of educational responsibility to the institutional conditions in which it is exercised. It asks not only what individual teachers understand and can do, but also whether the university makes relevant knowledge and support accessible. Meaningfulness also directs attention to the purposes and values that institutional arrangements are intended to serve. The next section therefore turns to the academic and public-law commitments that shape the normative context of educational responsibility.

MAKING NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS VISIBLE

If meaningfulness depends partly on being able to relate professional demands to the purposes and values they are intended to serve, the asymmetry introduced earlier comes into sharper view. Research and education are both shaped by normative commitments, yet those commitments are not always made equally visible in university teachers' professional lives. The question is not only how these foundations are formally articulated, but also how they are communicated, interpreted, and brought into educational practice. Teachers need opportunities to examine their significance for the responsibilities they exercise.

Research occupies a prominent place in academic careers, particularly in systems of advancement and recognition. External research funding and peer-reviewed publications carry considerable weight in recruitment and promotion, while educational work, despite its scale, is not always afforded comparable recognition (Evans, 2025; Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2022). Research norms are also made explicit through university education. First-cycle education is expected to develop students' capacity to make independent and critical judgements and to seek and evaluate knowledge at a scholarly level. The degree requirements for bachelor's and master's degrees include objectives concerning scientific foundations, critical evaluation of knowledge, and scientific and ethical judgement (SFS 1992:1434; SFS 1993:100). Doctoral education similarly aims to develop the capacity to conduct and communicate research and to introduce doctoral researchers to its norms and quality criteria (SFS 1992:1434; SFS 1993:100).

University teachers are therefore repeatedly called upon not only to uphold research norms, but also to interpret, justify, and communicate them to students. Through teaching and assessment in areas such as research ethics, philosophy of science, and methodology, these norms become objects of explicit professional attention. The scientific and ethical foundations of research thus belong both to the research role and to educational practice.

These foundations are also made visible through actors and institutional arrangements beyond the individual research group or university. Such actors do more than allocate resources, assess quality, or regulate procedures. They help sustain a shared language for understanding and discussing the purposes, values, and responsibilities of research. The Swedish Research Council's guidance on good research practice provides one example. Drawing on research ethics and the sociology of science within wider national and international frameworks, its 2017 guidance explicitly related requirements of honesty and openness to the 'ethos of science' expressed in Merton's CUDOS norms: universalism, the communal character of knowledge, disinterestedness, and organised scepticism (Merton, 1942/1973; Swedish Research Council, 2017). Guidance of this kind does more than state what researchers are expected to do. It explains the reasons for those expectations and provides concepts through which they can be interpreted and justified.

Ethical review provides a related example of how normative commitments acquire institutional form. Guidance from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority requires researchers to describe the scientific value of a project and to identify and justify anticipated benefits, risks, and safeguards (Swedish Ethical Review Authority, 2023). These requirements belong to a wider tradition of research ethics in which commitments to human dignity, autonomy, and protection from harm have been institutionalised through ethical frameworks, legislation, and peer review. Ethical review is therefore more than a regulatory procedure. It creates an established setting in which researchers must identify relevant principles, relate them to a concrete research design, and exercise reasoned judgement. Together, guidance on good research practice and ethical review illustrate how the normative foundations of research are repeatedly made explicit and related to practice.

The educational mission is likewise grounded in substantial normative commitments. Within Swedish public higher education, education is shaped by a partly overlapping framework of constitutional and public-law principles, including equality before the law, objectivity and impartiality, non-discrimination, public access to official documents, and procedurally fair decision-making (SFS 1974:152; SFS 1949:105; SFS 2008:567; SFS 2017:900). Behind these principles lie broader commitments to equal human worth, freedom of opinion, and protection against arbitrary exercises of public power. They express an understanding of public institutions as responsible not only for what they achieve, but also for how they act and exercise authority. For a public university, such principles are therefore not simply external constraints on education. How the institution organises and conducts its educational work is itself part of its mission.

These commitments also give the educational mission a wider societal dimension. University education concerns not only disciplinary knowledge and qualifications, but also the development of capacities for independent and critical judgement that enable thoughtful participation in society. Wider commitments take practical form in familiar educational responsibilities. A course syllabus embodies educational and disciplinary judgements about content and student learning, while also functioning as a regulatory document with implications for students' rights. In teaching, the ways in which participation, questioning, and disagreement are handled can give concrete expression to commitments such as equal human worth and freedom of opinion. Assessment likewise depends on disciplinary knowledge and academic judgement, but must also be conducted impartially and with procedural fairness (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2020). These connections do not mean that each educational interaction is the direct application of a legal principle. Rather, they show how broader academic and public-law commitments enter into teachers' educational judgement and action.

The contrast is therefore not that research is normative while education is not. Research is also legally regulated, just as education is grounded in academic and disciplinary norms. The asymmetry at issue concerns how explicitly these foundations are brought together and made available for professional interpretation. University teachers may be well socialised into a shared language for discussing scientific quality, research ethics, and good research practice, yet have fewer corresponding opportunities to examine the normative significance of their educational responsibilities. Connections between foundational commitments and everyday educational work may consequently remain

tacit, leaving rules and organisational arrangements to be encountered as isolated requirements rather than as expressions of wider purposes and values.

Against this backdrop, the analogy with the *ethos of science* suggests an *ethos of university education*: a constellation of academic, public-law and educational commitments guiding judgement and practice, rather than a uniform, codified set of norms. Some of these commitments might provisionally be articulated as AIRE: *autonomy* in sustaining independent and critical judgement in learning, teaching and collegial deliberation; *impartiality* in exercising educational and institutional authority; *responsibility* for educational quality, the conditions for responsible action and the university's wider societal mission; and *equality* in recognising equal human worth and enabling equitable educational and professional participation. These commitments concern both educational practice and the institutional arrangements that organise and sustain it, with differentiated but interdependent responsibilities across actors and organisational levels. Whereas research has a comparatively explicit normative vocabulary, this ethos is dispersed across legal principles, institutional purposes, pedagogical traditions and everyday practices. Making it more visible could provide a shared language for interpreting and critically examining these commitments, their tensions and practical implications.

Even when these connections are recognised, teachers may face tensions between professional values and institutional requirements. Research on ethical dilemmas in teaching and assessment highlights how ethical challenges are shaped by the interaction between individual judgement and institutional conditions, including organisational capacity, oversight, leadership, and support (Gbadago et al., 2025). Focusing on early-career university teachers, Zavelevsky and Quinlan (2026) examine how dilemmas arise where personal and professional values meet institutional constraints and wider policy demands. Such tensions may be particularly acute for teachers in less powerful institutional positions, where opportunities to act on professional judgement are limited. Responding to these dilemmas requires teachers to recognise the ethical significance of a situation and weigh competing commitments. It also raises the question of how universities recognise and support this work, both individually and collegially.

Making normative foundations visible does not mean that existing arrangements should simply be accepted. Nor do rules and procedures necessarily realise the values they are intended to express. Formalised routines may become ritualised and displace the purposes they were intended to serve (Strathern, 2000). Professional judgement and collegial deliberation are therefore needed to examine both educational practices and the institutional arrangements intended to support them. Institutional support should create opportunities for such interpretation and justified criticism, rather than merely communicate applicable requirements or leave this work to individual teachers and collegial groups alone.

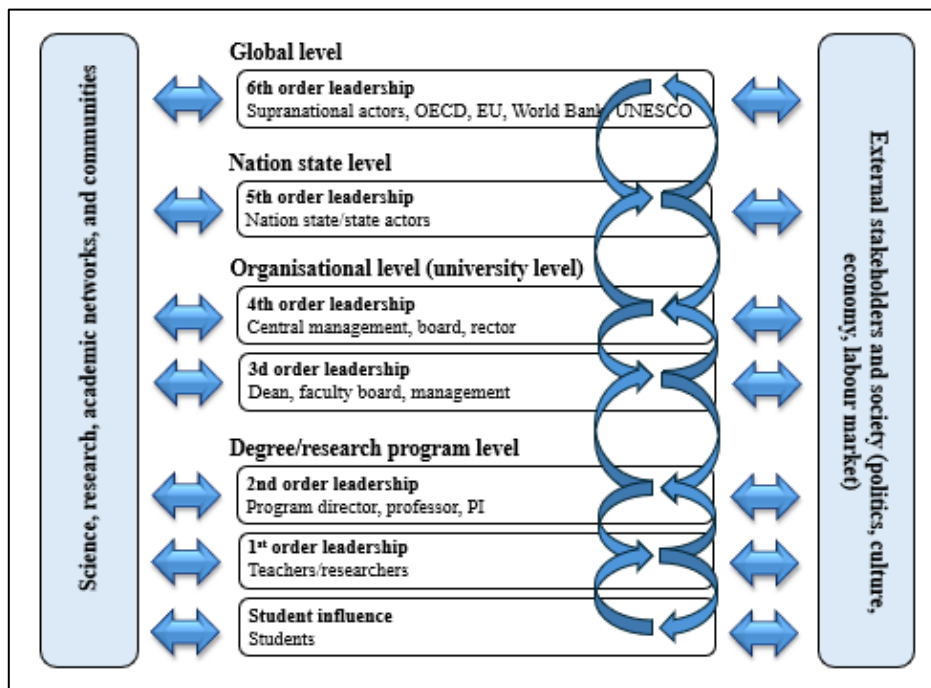
Seen through SOC, such shared reference points may support professional engagement and critical judgement, provided that collegial and institutional resources make informed action possible. The comparison with research ethics thus points not to identical frameworks, but to the value of a clearer shared language for relating educational practice to its wider responsibilities.

RESPONSIBILITY ACROSS LEVELS AND ACTORS

The normative commitments discussed above take form within a university system in which authority, expertise, and responsibility are distributed across actors and organisational levels. Elo and Uljens' model of educational leadership as a multilevel, multi-actor phenomenon provides a way of making these relationships visible in higher education (Elo & Uljens, 2024). Although developed to analyse educational leadership, the model is also useful here for showing how educational responsibility takes shape across a differentiated organisational system.

Elo and Uljens bring into view relationships extending from transnational and national frameworks through university-wide, faculty, and departmental governance to programmes, courses, and the work of teachers and teaching teams with students. These levels are not simply links in a chain of command through which decisions made at one level are implemented unchanged at another. Each is a site of interpretation. As wider commitments encounter disciplinary traditions and local conditions, their meaning is shaped through professional judgement and the possibilities for action. They may therefore be reinterpreted or reformulated along the way. Educational practice is shaped not only by the norms and decisions that enter the system, but also by what happens to them as they move through it.

Figure 1. Elo and Uljens' multilevel, multi-actor model of the organisational structure of higher education (adapted from Elo & Uljens, 2024, licensed under CC BY 4.0).



A perspective from Science and Technology Studies (STS) sharpens this point. Interpretation and translation are not merely forms of transmission. Collective action depends on how actors with different interests and priorities are brought into relation, and how these are negotiated and sometimes redefined in the process (Latour, 1987, 2005). Actors also differ in the authority, expertise, resources, and relationships they can mobilise to enrol others around particular definitions of what matters and what should be done. Power, from this perspective, is not reducible to formal position, but also arises through the capacity to assemble and sustain such alignments. Institutional purposes and values therefore acquire organisational significance not through formal articulation alone, but through the relationships and practices in which they are interpreted, negotiated, and translated into action. A formally stated norm or institutional ambition gains practical force as those involved relate it to the situation at hand, negotiate it alongside other priorities, and establish sufficient common ground for action.

The movement through the system should therefore be understood as reciprocal rather than simply as one from wider frameworks towards educational practice. That reciprocity is not symmetrical: actors differ in their authority, resources, and capacity to make particular interpretations and concerns visible beyond their immediate setting. Teachers and teaching teams interpret goals and decisions originating elsewhere in the organisation and give them practical form. Educational practice, in turn, generates knowledge about how those arrangements work in particular contexts, including where problems or unintended consequences arise. Reciprocity therefore depends on channels in both directions: ways of making wider purposes intelligible in educational practice, and routes through which experience from practice can inform decisions and institutional development. Just as wider commitments depend on educational practice for their realisation, institutional arrangements need to remain responsive to what is learned through that practice if they are to remain relevant and workable.

The system within which this reciprocal process takes place extends well beyond the individual university. At the transnational level, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area provide a shared framework for internal and external quality assurance (ESG, 2015). In Sweden, national governance combines extensive statutory regulation with substantial institutional autonomy (Swedish Higher Education Authority, n.d.). In Elo and Uljens' terms, fourth-order leadership at university level and third-order leadership at faculty and department level mediate between these wider frameworks and programme-level work (Elo & Uljens, 2024). At the University of Gothenburg, this is visible in the organisation of educational quality assurance: a university-wide policy establishes common principles, while faculty boards assume responsibility for their realisation and follow-up within their respective contexts (University of Gothenburg, 2024a). The significance of such arrangements lies not only in how wider purposes are interpreted locally, but also in whether experience from local practice can reach and influence the wider system.

This paper gives particular attention to course- and programme-level work because these forms of educational leadership have received comparatively limited attention in research, while occupying an important intermediary position within the university system (Elo & Uljens, 2024). At these levels, wider commitments meet disciplinary

practice, local educational conditions, and direct experience of working with students. Teachers with course and programme responsibilities are therefore not only involved in giving practical form to wider commitments; they are also well placed to identify issues that may require attention elsewhere in the system. Whether such knowledge becomes visible beyond the immediate educational setting depends partly on the routes for communication and influence that the institution provides. At the same time, much of the formal authority and specialist support on which this work depends remains elsewhere in the organisation. Substantial responsibility at course and programme level is therefore not always matched by equally coherent access to the knowledge, support, authority, or influence needed to exercise it. The proposed course is directed particularly towards this group for the same reason: not to place greater responsibility on individual teachers, but to strengthen the support available for responsibilities they already exercise and their capacity to bring experience from educational practice into the wider system.

Focusing on course and programme level does not mean that organisational level and the scope of educational responsibility coincide. A situation arising in direct work with students may simultaneously be shaped by national legislation, university-wide regulations, and local practices and delegations of authority (SFS 1993:100; University of Gothenburg, 2023, 2024b). Teachers should be able to work on the reasonable assumption that institutional arrangements have been considered at the levels where they are designed and authorised. Critical professional judgement remains necessary when those arrangements meet particular educational situations, but it should not become a substitute for institutional responsibility at the levels where the arrangements themselves are created. Organisational level thus concerns where responsibility, authority, and resources are located; scope concerns how far a particular matter reaches across those levels.

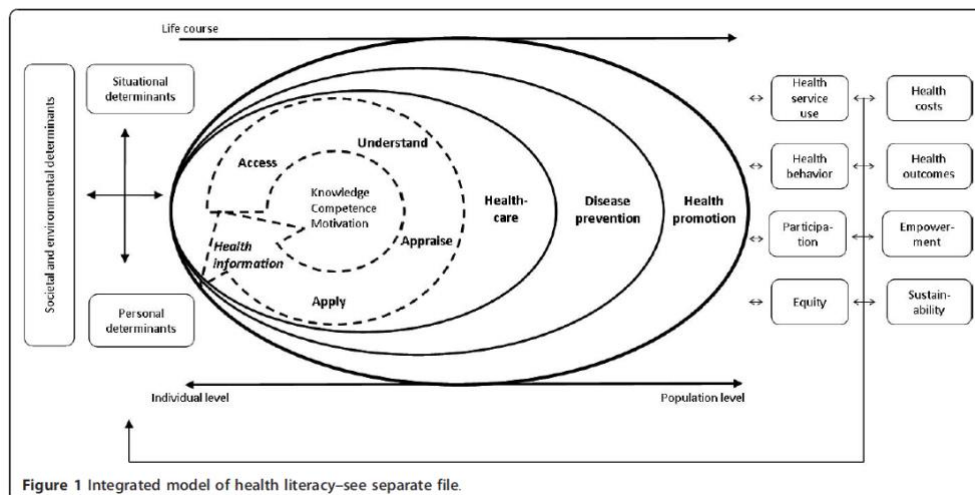
The multilevel perspective therefore shows educational responsibility as distributed, connected, and reciprocal. Teachers and collegial groups need to interpret wider commitments and exercise judgement within these relationships; the institution, in turn, needs both to make those commitments intelligible and to ensure that knowledge and critical perspectives arising from educational practice can inform decisions elsewhere. These responsibilities differ across actors and organisational levels, but depend on one another. This raises a further question: what capacities do university teachers and collegial groups need in order to understand and act within such a system, and what institutional conditions make this possible? The concept of literacy offers a starting point for addressing that question.

FROM LITERACY TO ACADEMIC SYSTEMS LITERACY

In a narrower sense, *academic literacy* refers to the ability to read, write, and communicate in accordance with academic and disciplinary conventions. Research within the *Academic Literacies* tradition has challenged this skills-based understanding by treating academic meaning-making as a social and institutional practice in which questions of knowledge, power, identity, and legitimacy come into play (Bassett & Macnaught, 2025; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007). Participation in academic life, on this account, depends not only on individual capabilities, but also on the conditions through which particular forms of knowledge and action come to be recognised as legitimate. Because the tradition has developed primarily around students' academic participation and meaning-making, however, it offers less direct guidance on the question addressed here: how university teachers understand and act within the institutional conditions of the educational mission.

Health literacy research, although concerned with a different field of practice, offers a complementary conceptual resource. Health literacy concerns people's capacity to access, understand, appraise, and use health-related information. Nutbeam (2000) distinguishes between functional, interactive, and critical health literacy, while Sørensen et al. (2012) describe recurring processes of accessing, understanding, appraising, and applying information. These processes are not necessarily sequential: appraisal may prompt further inquiry, a revised interpretation, or a different course of action. Literacy, in this sense, involves active interpretation and judgement rather than passive acquisition of information.

Figure 2. Sørensen et al. 's integrated model of health literacy (reproduced from Sørensen et al. 2012, licensed under CC BY 2.0)



For the present argument, an especially important development in health literacy research is the move from treating literacy predominantly as an individual competence towards understanding it as relational and system-dependent (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2021). Whether people can understand and act on relevant information depends partly on the organisations and systems with which they interact. Baumeister et al. (2021) make this shift particularly tangible by showing how professionals' capacity to communicate and act depends on organisational conditions, and how individual staff may otherwise be left to compensate for systemic shortcomings. Sørensen et al. (2021) develop this systems-oriented perspective further through the concept of *health literacy system capacity*. From this perspective, the responsibility of the system extends beyond making information available: it also involves creating conditions in which people can make sense of what they encounter, find appropriate support, and participate meaningfully in decisions and action. Literacy thus depends on the relationship between actors' capacities and the capacity of the system in which they act.

This systems-oriented development in health literacy provides the relational basis for the concept proposed here. Applied to university education, it shifts attention from what individual teachers know to the relationship between professional capacity and the institutional conditions under which educational responsibility is exercised. *Academic systems literacy* concerns how university teachers and collegial groups understand and act within the institutional context of their educational work. It involves interpreting relevant institutional knowledge and judging its significance for the situation at hand. Such judgement brings institutional knowledge into relation with disciplinary expertise, educational considerations, and the wider purposes of university education. The paper focuses particularly on teachers with course and programme responsibilities, for whom these relationships become especially concrete. Their capacity to interpret the system and act with sound judgement depends, in turn, on whether the institution makes relevant knowledge, support, and routes for action accessible. Academic systems literacy does not require exhaustive knowledge of the university system, but sufficient orientation to understand relevant norms and purposes, how they relate, and where responsibility, authority, and appropriate expertise lie.

Academic systems literacy comprises three interrelated capacities. *Systems knowledge* concerns understanding relevant norms, mandates, responsibilities, and institutional resources, including how they connect across organisational levels. *Navigational competence* concerns knowing how to locate appropriate knowledge and expertise and where a matter can or needs to be addressed. *Professional judgement* concerns interpreting and critically weighing what is relevant in the educational situation at hand. Together, these capacities are exercised through recurring practices of accessing information, making sense of it, critically appraising it, and using it to support action (Figure 3).

Academic systems literacy is a professional and collegial capacity, but its development and exercise depend on *institutional system capacity*. Educational responsibility is often exercised collegially, where different forms of knowledge are brought into relation and shared points of reference can develop (Englund et al., 2018; Lindén et al., 2025; Myllykoski-Laine et al., 2023). The distinction is important: strengthening teachers'

capacity to understand and act within the system does not transfer responsibility for the system to them. The institution remains responsible for enabling informed and critical judgement and for ensuring that knowledge arising from educational practice can, in turn, inform the wider system.

A RELATIONAL MULTILEVEL MODEL

The preceding analysis raises a more specific question: what does academic systems literacy need to encompass if university teachers and collegial groups are to understand and act within this multilevel system? Figure 3 addresses this question by bringing the preceding perspectives together in a relational multilevel model of *academic systems literacy*. SOC foregrounds whether the institutional context is sufficiently comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful to those expected to act within it (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987). The analysis of academic and public-law norms draws attention to the purposes and commitments that give educational responsibility its normative direction, while keeping them open to interpretation and critical appraisal.

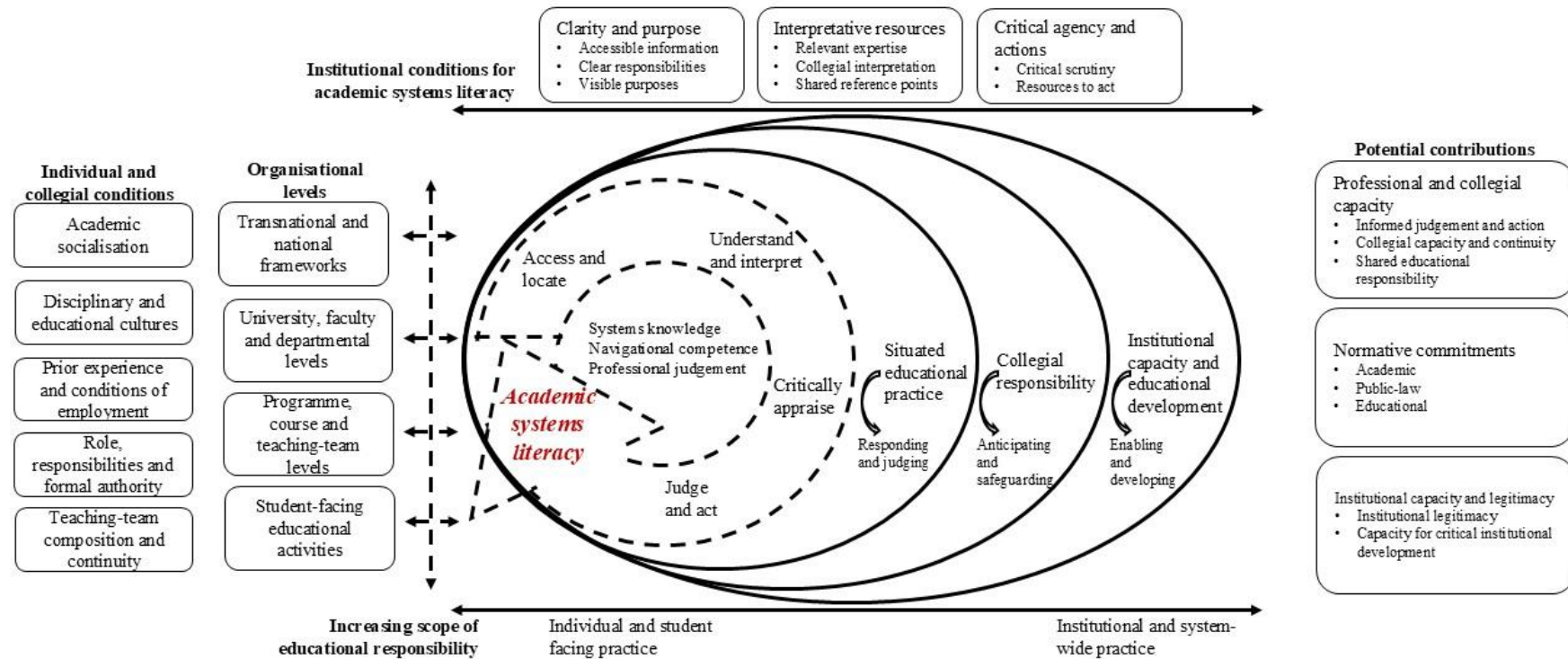
Academic Literacies, in turn, locates meaning-making within its social and institutional context. Health literacy adds the relational insight that people's capacity to understand and act depends on the system around them (Lea & Street, 1998; Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2012, 2021). Elo and Uljens' multilevel perspective, finally, shows how educational responsibility is distributed across organisational levels and why knowledge and experience need routes between them (Elo & Uljens, 2024). Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual basis for specifying both what academic systems literacy comprises and the institutional conditions under which it can be developed and exercised.

At the centre of the model are the three capacities defined above: *systems knowledge*, *navigational competence*, and *professional judgement*. These capacities are exercised through four recurring literacy practices: *accessing and locating* relevant information; *understanding and interpreting* it; *critically appraising* it; and *using* it to support appropriate action. Teachers and collegial groups draw on these capacities and practices when disciplinary knowledge and educational judgement meet the university's normative and organisational conditions. The process is recursive rather than linear. A question of student assessment, for example, may lead a teacher to seek further information, revise an interpretation, or take the matter beyond the immediate teaching team.

The model situates these capacities and practices within three overlapping domains of responsibility: *situated educational practice*, *collegial responsibility*, and *institutional capacity and educational development*. In situated educational practice, the immediate task is to reach a well-founded professional judgement in a concrete situation. In the collegial domain, the focus widens to shared ways of working and the capacity to sustain educational quality over time. Course and programme work often provides an important setting for this shared responsibility. The institutional domain concerns the conditions and development needed to sustain responsible educational practice.

The domains are inspired by the movement within health literacy models from responding to immediate needs towards preventive and enabling work, but they describe a widening scope of responsibility rather than separate organisational levels (Sørensen et al., 2012). The same educational issue may therefore require judgement in practice, collegial coordination, and institutional action.

Figure 3. A relational multilevel model of academic systems literacy.



The model separately distinguishes the *organisational levels* across which responsibility and authority are located. Drawing on Elo and Uljens (2024), these range from transnational and national frameworks, through university, faculty, and departmental levels, to programmes, courses, and teaching teams, and ultimately to student-facing educational practice. Distinguishing these levels helps show where a matter reaches and where relevant responsibility and authority lie. The relationships between them are deliberately represented as bidirectional rather than as a simple implementation chain. This retains the reciprocal logic developed above: wider commitments acquire practical form through local interpretation, while experience from practice needs routes back to the parts of the system where institutional arrangements can be reconsidered.

The development and exercise of academic systems literacy are also shaped by *individual and collegial conditions*. Teachers do not approach the institutional system from identical positions. Academic socialisation and disciplinary and educational cultures shape the interpretative resources they bring to a situation. Employment conditions and organisational roles may affect their scope for action, while the continuity of a teaching team influences what can be shared and sustained collegially. These conditions influence, rather than determine, how academic systems literacy can be developed and exercised.

Alongside these individual and collegial conditions, the model distinguishes the *institutional conditions* that enable or constrain the development and exercise of academic systems literacy. In the figure, these are grouped as *clarity and purpose*, *interpretative resources*, and *critical agency and action*. In practical terms, they concern whether the system makes its purposes intelligible, provides usable support, and remains able to learn from educational practice. Support structures form part of this relationship, but formal availability is not enough: relevant knowledge and expertise need to be accessible under the conditions in which teachers actually work, and routes for interpretation and action need to be workable. Nor is system capacity merely a matter of solving immediate problems. If academic systems literacy is to be sustained rather than remain dependent on particular individuals, the surrounding arrangements also require continuity and institutional stability (Sørensen et al., 2021).

The model also indicates a number of *potential contributions*. The term *potential* is important: the model is conceptual and does not claim empirically established effects. At the professional level, academic systems literacy may support well-founded professional judgement and a clearer normative orientation. Collegially, it may help sustain shared capacity beyond particular individuals. These developments may have implications for educational quality and procedural fairness. At institutional level, the reciprocal movement of knowledge between practice and the wider system may contribute to critical institutional development and to the university's legitimacy as a public institution. These relationships may themselves be recursive: stronger collegial and institutional capacity may, in turn, help make responsibilities clearer and institutional support more accessible and usable.

Taken together, the model treats academic systems literacy as a professional and collegial capacity held and developed by teachers and collegial groups. It comprises systems knowledge, navigational competence, and professional judgement, exercised

through recurring practices of accessing, understanding, critically appraising, and using relevant institutional knowledge. This capacity enables teachers not only to act responsibly within the system, but also to recognise where existing arrangements may need clarification or development and to contribute constructively to that process. The literacy remains theirs; institutional system capacity concerns the conditions that enable it to develop and be exercised, and through which knowledge from educational practice can inform the wider system. The model thus distinguishes academic systems literacy from institutional system capacity while showing how the two are interdependent.

FROM MODEL TO COURSE DESIGN

The model points to a gap in academic professional development. Disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical competence remain fundamental to university teaching, but teachers also need opportunities to develop the systems knowledge required to situate their educational work within its wider institutional context. Recognising this need institutionally can make the educational role as a whole more comprehensible and manageable, while making clearer how organisational and normative commitments relate to educational work.

A course in academic systems literacy is therefore proposed as a complement to existing academic professional development. Its primary aim is not to provide additional training in rules and procedures, but to provide structured opportunities to bring into relation the different dimensions of educational responsibility that converge in practice. This is relevant both to teachers' working conditions and to the university's wider mission, including educational quality and the responsible exercise of institutional authority.

As one practical application of the model, this paper therefore proposes the 3-credit course *Academic Systems Literacy: University Teaching in Institutional Context* (see Appendix 2 for a draft course syllabus and detailed course design). The course is intended to complement existing academic professional development, with particular relevance for teachers who assume responsibility for courses and programmes. Its purpose is not to provide exhaustive knowledge of the university system or to transfer responsibility for making that system navigable to individual teachers. Rather, it provides a structured opportunity to develop the capacity to interpret and act within the institutional conditions of educational work, while also considering when and how experience from educational practice needs to be communicated elsewhere in the system.

A proposed course in academic systems literacy

Component	Content
Scope and target group	3 credits. University teachers, with particular relevance for those with course and programme responsibilities.
Purpose	To develop academic systems literacy for well-founded educational responsibility that is collegially supported and institutionally grounded.
Learning outcomes	On completion of the course, participants should be able to explain key relationships between the university's academic and public missions, their normative foundations and educational practice; locate relevant norms, mandates, and institutional resources and assess their significance for educational practice; analyse an educational issue across multiple organisational levels; justify possible courses of action by relating disciplinary and educational judgement to relevant normative and institutional conditions; and distinguish what can be addressed individually, carried collegially, and secured institutionally.
Core content	The university as an academic knowledge community and public authority; the normative foundations of its academic and public missions; responsibilities, mandates and organisational levels; supervision and assessment; quality

	assurance and enhancement in courses and programmes; the relationship between wider institutional priorities and educational practice; and institutional resources and support.
Learning activities	Document analysis, case-based seminars, collegial workshops and analysis of a practice-based case from the participant's own educational setting.
Assessment	An individual case analysis in which the participant examines the relevant normative and organisational conditions, justifies a course of action, and considers its implications for individual, collegial, and institutional domains.

The educational design follows from the relational logic of the model and adopts an inductive, problem-oriented approach to learning. Rather than beginning with an abstract set of rules or organisational models, participants start from a concrete educational situation and examine it in relation to the wider institutional conditions, purposes, and values at stake. They move between the particulars of the case and the wider system, identifying relevant expertise and authority, considering possible courses of action, and progressively developing a broader conceptual and systemic understanding. Concrete educational practice thus provides the entry point for interpreting how different dimensions of educational responsibility relate to one another (Pettersen, 2008; Prince & Felder, 2006; Power & Handley, 2019; Pitchford et al., 2021).

A shared analysis of a course syllabus provides a common point of departure, allowing participants to trace how educational and disciplinary judgement relates to wider institutional conditions and purposes. The shared analysis also creates a structured setting in which participants can compare interpretations, make implicit assumptions visible, and develop common points of reference before applying the approach to their own cases. Participants subsequently apply the same analytical approach to a practice-based case drawn from one of three areas: supervision and assessment of bachelor's and master's theses; quality assurance and enhancement in courses and programmes; or the translation of wider institutional priorities into educational practice, such as initiatives relating to internationalisation or sustainable development. They then move outward from the case, placing it within the university's multilevel system and identifying the norms, responsibilities, and forms of expertise that matter to it. Attention is also given to what prior institutional knowledge the situation presupposes and whether the support needed to act is genuinely accessible in practice.

In this way, the course also moves through the model's three overlapping domains of responsibility. A case is first approached as a concrete situation requiring professional judgement. The perspective then widens to what requires shared collegial responsibility and, finally, to the institutional conditions on which responsible action depends. Participants examine where individual and collegial responsibility begins and ends, how systems knowledge can be shared, and when a matter needs to move to another part of the organisation. The analysis also identifies where institutional arrangements need clarification or development. The university's arrangements thereby become objects of professional and critical inquiry rather than a fixed organisational backdrop.

The proposed course thus gives practical form to the model's central assumption: academic systems literacy develops through engagement with the relationships between educational practice, normative purposes, and organisational conditions, not through information transmission alone. The course does not presuppose a settled account of how the normative, educational, and institutional dimensions of educational responsibility relate to one another. Rather, it provides opportunities for these relationships to be explored and critically examined through concrete educational situations.

At the same time, the course cannot by itself compensate for institutional arrangements in which relevant purposes, knowledge, or support remain difficult to access. Developing academic systems literacy therefore depends on both professional development and institutional system capacity. This interdependence provides the point of departure for the discussion that follows.

DISCUSSION

Shared educational responsibility

The concept of *academic systems literacy* has been proposed here to bring into a common frame dimensions of university teachers' educational work that are often approached separately. The perspectives drawn on in the paper illuminate different aspects of this problem: sense of coherence foregrounds comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness; Academic Literacies situates meaning-making within institutional and social contexts; health literacy contributes both recurring literacy practices and a relational understanding of system capacity; and multilevel and STS perspectives make visible how purposes, knowledge, authority, and experience are interpreted and connected across organisational levels. The model brings these contributions together by specifying the capacities involved in academic systems literacy, the practices through which they are exercised, and the individual, collegial, and institutional conditions with which they interact.

What emerges from this synthesis is a reciprocal understanding of educational responsibility. Academic systems literacy remains a capacity held and developed by university teachers and collegial groups, but its development and exercise cannot be understood independently of the institutional system in which educational work takes place. Teachers and collegial groups interpret wider commitments and give them educational form, while the university needs to make relevant knowledge, expertise, and routes for action accessible and to remain responsive to experience arising from practice. Educational responsibility is therefore shared not because responsibilities are the same across actors or organisational levels, but because differentiated responsibilities depend upon one another. A central implication is a shift in where the problem of orientation is located: not only in what teachers know, but also in how the institution organises the knowledge, expertise, and opportunities for action on which their professional capacity depends.

A connected knowledge base for academic development

This relational understanding raises a further question for academic development: whether its knowledge base makes visible the relationships that university teachers need to understand and work within. If university teaching brings disciplinary judgement, educational purposes, normative commitments, and organisational conditions together in practice, academic professional development needs to make these relationships more visible and intelligible. Higher education research, however, often approaches these dimensions within more delimited fields of inquiry. Such specialisation is necessary for developing detailed knowledge, but it can leave the relationships between them less visible. Mappings of higher education research point to this tendency. Studies of student learning, organisation, and higher education systems tend to form relatively separate areas, while research connecting multiple levels of analysis is less common (Daenekindt & Huisman, 2020). Research on academic development has similarly been criticised for

conceptual ambiguity, epistemic provincialism, and a strong concentration on teaching and learning (Evans, 2024). More recent Nordic research has begun to develop broader frameworks that include the university as both an organisation and a societal institution, together with agency within academic communities (Lindén et al., 2025). Systems-oriented perspectives are therefore present within higher education research, but the connections between them are not necessarily available as a coherent knowledge base for academic professional development.

The systems-oriented shift in health literacy research helps sharpen this point. By expanding the unit of analysis from the individual actor to the relationship between actor and system, it makes visible how capacities depend on the conditions under which they are exercised (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2021). Applied to academic development, this means asking not only what teachers need to know, but how different forms of knowledge can be brought into relation and what institutional conditions enable them to be interpreted and used in practice.

Familiar educational tools illustrate why this wider frame matters. Bloom's taxonomy and its revised version provide useful ways of formulating learning outcomes and considering progression in student learning (Bloom et al., 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Taken on their own, however, they do not illuminate the normative status of the course syllabus or its relationship to the university's wider educational mission. Nothing is lacking in the taxonomy on its own terms; the limitation arises when an educational tool is disconnected from the institutional setting in which it has to be used. The teacher who formulates a learning outcome is not only making an educational judgement, but doing so within a course structure that has disciplinary and institutional significance. Understanding that work in its fuller context therefore also requires attention to how the course forms part of the university's wider educational mission.

A similar analytical delimitation can be seen in research on doctoral supervision. This field has developed nuanced understandings of supervision as a relational educational practice and of how it can support doctoral students' growing autonomy (Lee, 2007; Taylor et al., 2018; Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017). Doctoral supervision can thus be approached not only as a pedagogical practice, but also as an ethical and normative one. Much as research ethics makes the normative dimensions of research visible, supervision provides a setting in which academic norms and values become visible as they are interpreted and given practical form in concrete learning situations. This, in turn, invites a wider question: what forms of participation in academic life is this growing independence intended to enable? Independence is commonly understood in relation to becoming an independent researcher and developing the judgement needed to participate in disciplinary, epistemic, and ethical research practices. This is an important educational aim, but this emphasis also makes visible the asymmetry discussed earlier. Less attention is given to the educational, legal and organisational dimensions of the university teaching roles that many doctoral graduates subsequently enter (Priebe, 2020). Doctoral education is also a principal route into academic employment, where responsibility for university education may constitute a substantial part of academic work (SFS 1992:1434; SFS 1993:100). Doctoral supervision therefore provides another example of why preparation for academic life may need to encompass educational responsibility alongside preparation for independent research.

The point of these examples is not that every educational analysis should encompass the university system as a whole. Specialised knowledge depends on analytical boundaries. The problem arises when those boundaries obscure relationships between elements that, in practice, have to work together (Latour, 1999; Law, 2004). A taxonomy of learning or a theory of supervision may illuminate an important dimension of academic work while necessarily leaving others outside its immediate field of vision. Academic systems literacy draws attention to relationships that such specialised analyses may not themselves capture, but that teachers nevertheless need to understand and work within. The model therefore does not replace specialised higher education research with an all-encompassing systems theory. Rather, academic systems literacy provides a way of connecting specialised educational knowledge with the collegial, normative, and organisational contexts in which teachers need to interpret and use it.

Scope, equity and further research

The model developed here is conceptual, and the relationships it proposes should not be read as empirically established. Empirical research is therefore needed on how academic systems literacy develops and is used in university teachers' work, including how teachers learn to interpret and navigate institutional conditions over time. One important dimension concerns the equitable development and exercise of academic systems literacy. The ability to make sense of and act within an institutional system is not socially or organisationally neutral. University teachers may differ in their opportunities to acquire systems knowledge depending on disciplinary environment, employment conditions, organisational role, institutional experience, and access to collegial and informal networks. Formally identical expectations may therefore create different practical demands when important institutional knowledge is assumed rather than made readily accessible. Insights from *Academic Literacies* and systems-oriented health literacy research are particularly relevant here: individual capacity needs to be considered in relation to how responsive the surrounding system is to differing circumstances (Lea & Street, 1998; Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2012, 2021). What appears as a difference in individual competence may therefore also reflect differences in how readily institutional knowledge, expertise, and support can be understood and used. Equitable professional participation therefore concerns not only formal access to opportunities, but whether the knowledge and institutional resources needed to make use of them are genuinely accessible.

Research could examine how systems knowledge is distributed, which formal and informal routes provide access to it, and whether reliance on tacit knowledge and informal networks creates uneven opportunities for professional participation. This question is particularly relevant in light of research highlighting the role of social capital, networks, and mentorship in academic careers (Behtoui & Leivestad, 2019), although the present argument does not establish that academic systems literacy accounts for observed career differences. The concept should therefore not be treated as an individual competence requirement detached from the conditions under which it can be developed and exercised. Research should also examine how institutional initiatives intended to strengthen systems literacy alter these conditions: whether they reduce dependence on tacit knowledge and informal networks or inadvertently reproduce it, and how different institutional arrangements enable or constrain teachers' and collegial

groups' capacity to understand and critically engage with the system. A related question is whether a more intelligible institutional context enables teachers to connect educational practice more clearly with the university's wider purposes and to exercise judgement across the educational and institutional dimensions of their work.

This, in turn, raises questions about how the normative foundations of educational work are interpreted and brought into relation in practice. The provisional articulation of autonomy, impartiality, responsibility, and equality (AIRE) proposed earlier offers one way of making this educational ethos more visible, but it should not be read as a settled or exhaustive framework. Further conceptual and empirical work could examine how these commitments are understood, how they relate or come into tension in practice, and whether other commitments need to be brought into view. Such work could also explore how the ethos of university education takes form through educational and institutional arrangements rather than existing as an abstract layer above practice. Of particular interest is how teachers with course and programme responsibilities interpret these commitments where disciplinary judgement, educational purposes, and the university's responsibilities as a public institution meet. If implemented and studied empirically, the proposed course could provide one setting for examining these processes and the conditions that make such interpretation more comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. It could also illuminate how normative interpretation becomes a basis for critically examining whether institutional arrangements continue to serve their stated purposes and values.

A complementary line of inquiry concerns the reciprocal movement from educational practice into institutional learning and development. Research could examine the structures and routines through which experience from courses and programmes reaches actors able to respond, including how support functions are positioned, resourced, and mandated to connect educational practice with university-wide decisions and development. This would extend the study of institutional system capacity from the accessibility of knowledge and expertise to the university's capacity to learn from educational practice.

Finally, the model has been developed in the context of the Swedish public university, and its public-law dimensions are tied to this particular institutional setting. They cannot simply be transferred to other higher education systems, although the relational question at the centre of the model may be more widely applicable. Comparative research could examine how the relationship between professional capacity and institutional system capacity is configured under different legal, organisational, and academic conditions, and which aspects of academic systems literacy remain meaningful across contexts.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined what makes educational responsibility comprehensible, manageable and meaningful for university teachers. Its point of departure has been an asymmetry in academic socialisation: the wider foundations of educational work may receive less explicit attention than the norms of research. Viewed through SOC, this is more than a question of what teachers know. It concerns how they understand the purposes of their work and whether the surrounding institution enables them to act responsibly.

These responsibilities connect everyday teaching with the university's wider societal mission. They concern not only what students learn, but how education is organised and conducted. The provisional AIRE formulation—autonomy, impartiality, responsibility and equality—offers a starting point for articulating and critically examining an *ethos of university education*. Its academic and public-law commitments take form in educational practice and institutional arrangements. Making them explicit provides grounds for questioning whether those arrangements serve their stated purposes. The multilevel analysis traces how such commitments are interpreted across organisational levels. It also shows that actors differ in their authority and opportunities to influence the conditions of educational work

Academic systems literacy is proposed as a conceptual response to this problem of professional orientation. It offers a language for bringing systems understanding into relation with disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical expertise. Its focus is the capacity of teachers and collegial groups to interpret their educational responsibilities and act with informed, critical judgement. The aim is not to add another isolated competence requirement, but to make the connections between these forms of knowledge clearer and more usable in practice.

The relational multilevel model (Figure 3) gives visual form to this account. It relates teachers' systems knowledge, navigational competence and professional judgement to the organisational conditions in which these capacities are exercised. Drawing on systems-oriented health literacy, it distinguishes *academic systems literacy* from *institutional system capacity* while showing their interdependence. Developing teachers' capacity does not remove the institution's responsibility to make that capacity usable. Where systems knowledge remains tacit or circulates through informal networks, formally similar expectations may create unequal practical demands. Usable institutional support is therefore also a matter of equitable professional participation. As a conceptual synthesis, the model provides a basis for further inquiry rather than evidence of established effects.

For academic development, the implication is a more connected knowledge base. This should bring specialised fields into dialogue without replacing them with a one-sided focus on the institutional system. The proposed three-credit course offers one practical application, particularly for teachers with course and programme responsibilities. It is intended to support responsibilities they already exercise and strengthen their capacity to contribute constructively to institutional development. It cannot, however, substitute for institutional arrangements that make responsible action possible.

The central conclusion is therefore one of *shared educational responsibility*. Teachers and collegial groups need the capacity to interpret the educational mission and give it practical form. The university must provide workable conditions for this responsibility and ensure that knowledge and critical perspectives from educational practice can inform decisions elsewhere in the system. Responsibilities remain differentiated across actors and organisational levels, but their exercise is interdependent. Shared educational responsibility, in this sense, depends on a university system that teachers can make sense of and act within—and that can, in turn, learn from their knowledge and judgement.

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APPENDIX 1. ORGANISATIONALLY FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The professional development work that informed the development of this paper took place at the University of Gothenburg. It combined clarification of roles and responsibilities with recurring problem-based professional development for programme coordinators and educational development days for a wider group of teachers. The aim was both to develop individual teachers' knowledge and to create structures through which knowledge could be shared, responsibilities coordinated, and educational development supported within the local educational organisation.

The proposed organisational structure clarified, among other things, the role of the programme committee and the distribution of responsibilities between programme coordinators, course coordinators, administrative staff, and student representatives; elements of this structure were later incorporated into the department's rules of procedure. The recurring professional development for programme coordinators was integrated into their ordinary work, with meetings every two weeks over the course of a semester. The educational development days broadened the focus from the specific responsibilities of programme coordinators to the educational environment as a whole. Topics included student rights, educational organisation, approaches to teaching and learning, digitalisation, progression, and forms of assessment.

In retrospect, this approach can be understood as an early practical engagement with several of the issues brought together in this paper under the concept of *academic systems literacy*. It sought both to clarify responsibilities, mandates, information pathways, and support functions, and to create collegial forums in which knowledge could be interpreted and brought to bear on concrete educational issues.

Theme	Examples of content and questions
Roles, responsibilities and mandates	The programme coordinator's areas of responsibility and mandate in relation to national, university-wide and local guidelines; boundaries between the roles of programme coordinator, course coordinator, Director of Studies, administrator and other functions; induction of new course coordinators.
Educational organisation and collegial coordination	The role and working arrangements of the programme committee; communication and division of work between programme coordinators and programme administration; approaches to planning, follow-up and feedback within the programme.
Student matters, rights and case handling	Which student matters fall within the programme coordinator's remit and how they should be handled; recognition of prior learning; the role of the study adviser; support for students requiring additional support; students' rights and responsibilities.
Programme and course syllabuses and progression	Introduction and phasing out of programme syllabuses and the implications for individual courses; entry requirements; thematic and generic progression across programmes; how programme-

	level learning outcomes and profiles are given concrete form in course structures and teaching.
Educational quality and development	Student-centred learning, problem-based learning, approaches to teaching and assessment, digital tools for teaching and learning, and shared discussion of educational aims and student learning.
Programme profile and the wider educational context	Discussion of programme profiles, including the integration of themes such as migration and health, gender and human rights, and how such overarching themes could be given concrete expression across courses. Internationalisation and the relationship of programmes to further study and working life were also addressed.
Planning, resources and implementation	Applicant demand and the number of available places, introductory weeks, timetabling, coordination of course coordinators, and planning of the programme's ongoing work. The organisational model also clarified programme coordinators' responsibility for planning and the allocation of resources within the programme.
Collegial knowledge development through current issues	Professional development was progressively linked to issues arising in day-to-day work. The fortnightly meetings therefore served both as a means of coordination and as forums in which concrete problems could be discussed, knowledge shared and ways of working developed.

APPENDIX 2. COURSE PROPOSAL

Draft syllabus

Academic Systems Literacy: University Teaching in Institutional Context, 3 credits

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of the course, participants should be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

- describe the university's dual character as an academic knowledge community and a public authority, and explain how academic, public-law and educational commitments shape the professional role and educational responsibility of the university teacher;
- identify and explain key relationships between different levels of governance, public-law principles, academic norms, policy documents and institutional mandates, including the purposes they serve in educational practice at course and programme level.

Skills and abilities

- locate, interpret, and critically examine relevant regulations, governing principles and distributions of responsibility, and use this understanding to analyse and respond to concrete educational situations;
- analyse and justify possible courses of action in educational matters by weighing disciplinary requirements and educational considerations alongside relevant legal and organisational conditions.

Judgement and approach

- critically appraise possible courses of action in relation to student rights, educational quality, academic norms, public-law principles and the university's wider societal mission;
- analyse how systems knowledge and shared practices of interpretation can be developed and sustained collegially, and identify when experience from educational practice needs to inform institutional clarification, support, or development at another organisational level.

Course content

The course takes as its starting point that educational responsibility is exercised at the intersection of a scholarly discipline, student learning and the institutional conditions of the university. Academic systems literacy is approached as a relational capacity through which disciplinary and educational judgement is brought into relation with the academic, public-law and organisational conditions of university education, and with the institutional structures and resources that make informed action possible. These relationships are explored through concrete issues arising in courses, programmes and student-facing educational practice.

The course considers the university as an academic knowledge community, a public authority and a societal institution. It addresses key relationships between transnational, national and local levels, and between public-law principles, academic norms, institutional policy documents and local mandates. It also examines the university teacher's responsibilities and scope for action at course and programme level and in student-facing educational situations. Particular attention is given to how regulations, administrative procedures and collegial practices are intended to give practical form to principles such as objectivity, impartiality, procedural fairness, academic integrity, openness and critical scrutiny, and to how their purposes and consequences can be critically appraised in educational practice.

Participants apply a systems-oriented approach within one of three areas: supervision and assessment of bachelor's and master's theses; quality assurance and enhancement in courses and programmes; or the translation of wider institutional priorities into educational practice, such as initiatives relating to internationalisation or sustainable development. The course also addresses collegial interpretation, educational culture and the organisational conditions that support systems knowledge and shared practices of interpretation as collegial rather than person-dependent resources, including routes through which experience from educational practice can inform institutional clarification and development.

Teaching and learning activities

The course is delivered in an intensive format and combines short lectures, document analysis, case-based seminars and collegial workshops. A shared analysis of a course syllabus provides a common point of departure for examining how disciplinary and educational judgement is exercised within legal and institutional conditions. Participants subsequently apply the same analytical approach to a case from their own educational setting. The work is grounded in concrete issues from participants' own disciplinary, course and programme settings or from student-facing educational situations.

Participants identify relevant system levels, actors, documents, norms and mandates, and examine the purposes and values they are intended to support. They analyse possible courses of action and discuss how disciplinary, educational, legal and organisational considerations can be weighed in relation to one another.

The learning activities combine individual analysis with collegial discussion and development. Participants explore ways of sharing and sustaining systems knowledge within teaching teams and of distinguishing between issues that can be addressed through professional judgement and those that need to be taken further for institutional support, clarification or decision-making.

Assessment

The course is assessed through an individual written case analysis within the participant's chosen area of application. The participant is required to:

- situate the case in relation to relevant system levels, actors and mandates;
- locate, interpret and critically examine relevant regulations, academic norms and policy documents;
- formulate and justify a course of action that is educationally and academically well founded and critically informed by relevant legal and institutional conditions and their underlying purposes;

- distinguish what can reasonably be addressed through individual professional judgement, what needs to be carried collegially, and what requires institutional support, clarification or action at another level, including what knowledge from the case may need to inform that response.

The analysis should make visible the values, rights, responsibilities and institutional purposes involved, as well as any tensions between them. It should also consider how the issue can be addressed collegially and what institutional support may be needed to ensure that knowledge and capacity to act do not become dependent on particular individuals.

Course design

Before the course week: A practice-based case

The course week is based on the premise that educational responsibility is exercised where disciplinary knowledge and student learning meet the university's academic, normative and organisational conditions. Cases are used to explore how these dimensions can be understood and weighed together in educational practice.

Participants select a situation from their own work within one of the course's three areas of application: supervision and assessment of bachelor's and master's theses; quality assurance and enhancement in courses and programmes; or the translation of wider institutional priorities into educational practice, such as initiatives relating to internationalisation or sustainable development. The case accompanies the participant throughout the course week and forms the basis for the final assessment. Before the course begins, participants prepare brief responses to the following questions:

1. What was the educational issue, and what was I, or the teaching team, expected to decide or do?
2. Which disciplinary, educational, normative and institutional considerations appeared relevant, and what purposes or values were at stake?
3. Which actors, roles, documents and organisational levels seemed relevant, and where did I seek knowledge, expertise, support or authority?
4. What was clear or unclear about responsibilities, mandates, support and possible courses of action?
5. What could reasonably be addressed through individual professional judgement or collegial action, and what appeared to require institutional clarification, support or decision-making?

Day 1: The university's role and organisation

09.00–12.00: The university as a multilevel, multi-actor system

Introduction to transnational and national levels, as well as university-wide, faculty, departmental, programme and course levels. The emphasis is on understanding that these levels do not form a simple implementation chain. Interpretation, prioritisation and translation take place at each level.

1. What purposes, normative commitments and forms of authority shape university education across different organisational levels?
2. How are wider commitments, requirements and priorities interpreted and given educational form at course and programme level?
3. Where do professional judgement, collegial influence and institutional responsibility come into play?

13.00–16.00: The university's different institutional roles

Seminar on the university as an academic knowledge community, public authority, education provider, employer and societal institution. Attention is given to how these roles entail partly distinct but intertwined academic, public-law, educational and societal commitments and responsibilities.

Case: A newly appointed university teacher is given responsibility as course coordinator and examiner. What does the teacher need to understand and judge, what needs to be interpreted or carried collegially, and what knowledge, expertise, support and conditions does the institution need to make accessible?

Outcome: A systems map of the relationships between normative commitments, institutional roles, mandates, expertise, responsibilities and routes for action.

Day 2: Normative foundations of university education

09.00–12.00: Academic, public-law educational commitments

Introduction to academic, constitutional, public-law, educational and ethical commitments relevant to university education, including equality, impartiality, non-discrimination, freedom of opinion, academic integrity, openness, critical scrutiny, student rights and participation. Attention is also given to how these commitments are expressed through legislation, regulations, institutional policies, pedagogical traditions and everyday educational practice.

1. What commitments and values shape university education, and where are they expressed?
2. How do different commitments become relevant, and sometimes come into tension, in concrete educational situations?
3. How can professional judgement relate rules and institutional arrangements to the purposes and values they are intended to serve?

13.00–16.00: The course syllabus as a shared example

Workshop in which the course syllabus is analysed as a disciplinary, educational and regulatory document with wider normative significance. Participants examine the relationships between disciplinary content and progression, learning outcomes, teaching, assessment, student rights and the wider purposes of education. They also analyse how academic and educational judgement is exercised in relation to legal and institutional conditions when a syllabus is developed, interpreted and used in practice.

Outcome: A concise analysis of how educational purposes, normative commitments, formal requirements and professional judgement come together in a course syllabus.

Day 3: Selected areas of application

09.00–14.00: Introduction and application

Participants work in parallel groups on supervision and assessment of bachelor's and master's theses; quality assurance and enhancement in courses and programmes; or the translation of wider institutional priorities into educational practice. All groups use the same analytical questions:

1. Which normative commitments, rights, obligations and educational purposes are at stake?
2. Which actors, mandates and documents shape the issue, and what is their status?
3. Which disciplinary, educational, legal and organisational considerations need to be interpreted and weighed together?
4. What course of action is justified, and how should it be communicated and documented?
5. What can be addressed through professional judgement or collegial action, and what requires institutional support, clarification or decision-making?
6. Do existing arrangements adequately serve their stated purposes, or is there reason to reconsider or develop them?

14.00–16.00: Comparative seminar

The groups present their analyses and proposed courses of action. The seminar draws out shared patterns and relevant differences across the three areas, including differences in how normative commitments, professional judgement and institutional conditions interact in practice.

Outcome: A preliminary proposed course of action for the participant's own case, accompanied by an account of its normative foundations and institutional conditions.

Day 4: Collegial judgement and responsibility

09.00–12.00: Exercising educational leadership without formal managerial authority

Lecture and discussion on educational leadership, the coordination of education, line management, collegial responsibility and administrative coordination.

1. How can shared interpretations and ways of working be developed while differences in professional judgement remain open to collegial examination?
2. How can systems knowledge and collegial capacity be sustained and renewed as teaching teams and institutional contexts change?
3. What can a teaching team question, change or develop within its mandate, and where are the boundaries of its authority and capacity to act?
4. When and how should issues or experience from educational practice be taken to another organisational level for support, decision-making or institutional development??

13.00–16.00: Simulation of programme and teaching-team work

An educational programme has low completion rates, recurring student criticism and demands for greater relevance to professional practice. At the same time, members of the teaching team are concerned that greater professional relevance may come at the expense of disciplinary depth. The programme must also meet the national degree requirements, promote widening participation and ensure procedurally fair assessment.

Participants analyse the educational purposes, values, academic norms, mandates and institutional conditions that need to be brought into relation, how competing considerations can be weighed collegially, and what the teaching team can address within its own scope for action. They also identify where additional resources, support or institutional action may be required.

Outcome: A proposal for a collegial process for decision-making and educational development, specifying how different perspectives can be considered, what can be addressed within the teaching team, and what requires support, decision-making or development elsewhere in the organisation.

Day 5: Building collegial and institutional capacity

09.00–11.00: Further development of participants' own cases

Participants refine their case analyses using the course's analytical model:

1. Which purposes, normative commitments and educational considerations are at stake in the case?
2. Which actors, organisational levels, mandates, forms of expertise and resources shape what can be understood and done?
3. What course of action is professionally justified when disciplinary, educational, legal and organisational considerations are brought into relation?
4. What can reasonably be addressed through individual professional judgement or collegial action, and what requires institutional support, clarification or decision-making?
5. Where do existing arrangements enable responsible action, and where might they need to be clarified, reconsidered or developed to make educational responsibility more comprehensible, manageable and meaningful?

11.00–12.00: Collegial feedback

Participants review one another's analyses with particular attention to the normative foundations of the case, the reasoning behind proposed courses of action, the distribution of responsibility and authority, the accessibility of relevant knowledge and support, and whether existing arrangements enable or constrain responsible action.

13.00–15.00: Workshop on collegial and institutional capacity

Each participant develops a concrete proposal to test in their own educational setting, for example:

1. an induction programme for newly appointed university teachers;

2. a recurring collegial review of course syllabuses;
3. a forum for issues concerning assessment and academic judgement;
4. role and mandate descriptions for course coordinators or university teachers with programme responsibilities;
5. a systems map of decisions, documents and support functions;
6. a model for connecting university-wide goals and normative commitments with programme- and course-level practice, including routes for bringing experience from practice back into institutional development;
7. a process for determining when institutional clarification or formal decision-making is required.

15.00–16.00: Presentation and concluding reflection

The proposals are presented and discussed around the question: What should be part of professional and collegial capacity, and what conditions does the university need to secure institutionally?

Participants also reflect on whether the proposed arrangements make educational responsibility more comprehensible, manageable and meaningful; strengthen teachers' and collegial groups' capacity to exercise informed and critical judgement; and create routes through which experience from educational practice can contribute to institutional learning and development.