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## Letter from the Editor: A time of editorial transition and reflection on spaces, leadership, partnerships and inclusivity in Swedish education

Dear Reader,

This issue of *Educare* marks a transition from the dedicated work of my predecessor, Anette Svensson, to my own appointment as Editor-in-Chief. I would like to pay a heartfelt tribute to Anette's outstanding contributions and the thoughtful stewardship she brought to *Educare* throughout her tenure. Stepping into this role is both a privilege and a challenge. I hold deep respect for *Educare*'s legacy and am strongly committed to nurturing its continued growth and relevance in education studies. In the short time since my appointment, I have enjoyed engaging with our contributors, reviewers, editorial boards, support staff, and readers as we continue to foster a vibrant academic community. Together, we will ensure that *Educare* remains a platform for critical inquiry, innovation, and meaningful dialogue.

As a further tribute to Anette's leadership of *Educare*, I have chosen to retain the current cover art she introduced. This design conveys *Educare*'s values of openness and diversity—messages that are more important now than ever. I am committed to ensuring that this spirit of inclusivity and representation continues to be a defining part of *Educare*'s identity.

This issue of *Educare* brings together a rich collection of thought-provoking articles that explore the evolving landscape of educational space, leadership, university and school partnership, inclusive and reflective pedagogical practice in the Swedish context.

We begin with the article by Max Persson and Ann-Christine Vallberg Roth, which explores the didactic “where-question” in preschool education through the lens of theory-driven teaching arrangements. Drawing on extensive empirical material from an ULF network,<sup>1</sup> the authors present the concept of “multivocal pivoting spaces” (*flerstämmiga svängrum*) as a way to understand how physical and conceptual spaces shape and are shaped by teaching. Their work highlights the importance of spatial awareness in pedagogical planning and the potential of diverse, dynamic environments to foster democratic and inclusive learning experiences.

In the second article, Christina Grewell and Lena Boström continue on the theme of pedagogical spaces and learning environments by exploring how pupils in Swedish school-age educate freetime centres (*fritidshem*) perceive their indoor physical learning environment. Through walk-and-talk interviews, the study identifies four key themes—variation and diversity, privacy-protected spaces, premises and organization, and well-being and belonging—that simultaneously offer opportunities and constraints. The authors argue for the importance of designing learning environments that support both autonomy and a sense of community, emphasizing the role of student voice in shaping educational spaces.

In the third article, Carina Hjelmér, Maria Rönnlund, and Anna Olausson underscore the role of ongoing teacher learning and reflection in enhancing teacher agency, reflective practice and teaching effectiveness. They do this by investigating preschool teachers’ experiences of analysing their own and others’ teaching in spontaneously arising classroom situations. Grounded in an ecological perspective on teacher agency, the study reveals the critical role of professional development, collegial collaboration, and time allocation in enabling meaningful analysis. The authors emphasize how reflective practices can illuminate teachers’ interactions with children, though aligning spontaneous situations to specific curriculum goals proved to be a more challenging aspect of the process.

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<sup>1</sup> ULF stands for Education (*Utbildning*), Learning (*Lärande*) and Research (*Forskning*). This is a Swedish government-commissioned project that develops and tests sustainable collaboration models between universities and schools.

Sofie Lökholt turns our attention to the collaboration between local education administrations (LEAs) and school principals, focussing on the tensions between autonomy and control in school leadership. Through a qualitative study in a Swedish municipality, Lökholt examines the discursive manifestations of contradictions that arise in such collaborations. Her findings underscore the importance of shared interpretation and negotiation of these contradictions, which, if addressed constructively, can serve as catalysts for school improvement. The study offers a nuanced understanding of the tensions between autonomy, control, and support in educational leadership.

Anna-Carin Bredmar and Katarina Ellborg present a critical multimodal discourse analysis of two SVT television series portraying the Swedish school system. Their study reveals how public service media constructs a dominant discourse of school crisis, often simplifying complex educational realities and reinforcing a dichotomy between political power and pedagogical knowledge. The authors call for a more nuanced media narrative that includes the voices of educators and learners at the grassroots level.

Carolina Martínez broadens the thematic scope of this issue further by investigating how student teachers conceptualize age as a didactic dimension when designing digital competence education for pupils in school-age educare (children aged 6 to 12 years). Her study reveals a tendency to prioritize older pupils aged 9 years-old and older rather than younger pupils. This choice is often based on assumptions about media use and cognitive readiness in younger pupils. Martínez argues that teacher education programs should more explicitly address age-related pedagogical considerations. She advocates for encouraging student teachers to critically examine their assumptions about children's developmental capabilities in relation to digital competencies.

Gustav Fridolin and Johan Söderman contribute a compelling exploration of identity, class, and social perception among their study's student participants in a Swedish *folkhögskola* (adult education folk high school). Their interviews with these students reveal a complex interplay of pride, shame, and negotiation, as learners navigate societal attitudes toward non-traditional educational paths. The study highlights the emotional labour involved in reclaiming educational agency and the importance of fostering student recognition in pedagogical relationships.

Alexandra Söderman and Filippa Millenberg examine how ideals of participation shifted in folk high schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, they analyse teachers' narratives to reveal that fragility and interpersonal engagement were largely recognized as symbolic participant capital. In contrast, independence emerged as a more ambiguous trait, being both recognized and misrecognized. Their findings offer a critical perspective on how crises can illuminate underlying values in educational practice and reshape expectations of learner behaviour.

Ulrika Magnusson and Dorota Lubińska present a comparative analysis of teacher education programs in the subjects of Swedish and of Swedish as a Second Language (SVA) at upper secondary level. Their findings highlight significant differences in curricular content, particularly regarding literature and multilingualism. While teacher education in the Swedish subject emphasizes literary analysis and canonical texts, SVA programs prioritise language development and sociocultural perspectives. The authors raise important questions about how these differences shape subject conceptualisation and teacher preparedness. They also explore the implications of these differences in light of the national curriculum guidelines for both upper secondary subjects and the multicultural composition of the student population that future teachers are likely to encounter in today's Sweden.

In their timely position paper, Marie Thavenius and Martin Malmström advocate for a more intentional and reflective approach to university-school partnerships, emphasizing the need to rethink the evolving landscape of collaborative research between schools and universities. Drawing on their experiences in an ULF project focused on the subject of Swedish, they argue that truly equitable research partnerships which foster "a third space" of shared inquiry require time, trust, and mutual respect. Their reflections challenge the increasingly outcome-driven discourse surrounding practice-based research and advocate for a slower, more dialogic approach that values joint knowledge-building over quick fixes. Their work is a powerful reminder that sustainable educational development is rooted not only in results, but in relationships.

Finally, Gunnlaugur Magnússon rounds off this issue by offering a compelling book review of *Konsten att arreckla en välfärdsstat* by Åsa Plesner and Niklas Altermark (“The Art of Dismantling a Welfare State”). While not exclusively focused on education, the book’s analysis of the “austerity policy cycle” (*åtstramningspolitiska kretslöppet*) provides a critical framework for understanding the economic governance of public welfare institutions, including schools. Financial steering mechanisms, masked by political rhetoric, are shown to systematically erode the material conditions of education. Magnússon’s review situates the book within a broader landscape of critical literature on school governance and calls for more education research that addresses the economic and structural dimensions of schooling. This review serves as both a wake-up call and an invitation to engage more deeply with the political economy of education.

Together, these contributions reflect the richness and diversity of contemporary educational research in Sweden. They also share a common thread: a commitment to understanding and improving the conditions under which educators work, and children and adults learn. As we continue to navigate the challenges of decentralization, accountability, and pedagogical innovation, these studies provide valuable insights and guidance for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

I invite readers to engage with the ideas presented here as part of an ongoing dialogue about the future of education.

Happy reading from *Educare!*

*Trevlig läsning här från Educare!*

***Shaun Nolan***

(Editor-in-chief)