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Academic development for tomorrow? Claiming a clearer role for university pedagogy through a holistic framework

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this theoretically oriented article is to promote the educational role and purpose of academic development in higher education by suggesting a holistic framework and theoretical articulation for university pedagogy. By discussing links between university pedagogy, academic development, and broader views of university education, our framework clarifies the concept of university pedagogy in the Nordic countries. The framework encompasses four themes: (1) the relationship between educational theory and pedagogical practice; (2) the interplay between knowledge and the curriculum; (3) the university as an organization and social institution; and (4) the agency in and of academic communities. We argue that university pedagogy operating within this framework has the potential to strengthen the scholarly foundations of the development of university education. The framework can enhance critical public discourse on the purpose of university education.

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Introduction

For the past three decades or so, developments in the teaching and learning have focused heavily on different approaches to teaching and learning (Biesta, 2006, 2010, 2021; see also Bowden & Marton, 2004). As Biesta argues, the language of learning has in many ways conquered the discursive space in education. Students are often referred to as “learners,” campuses have become “learning environments,” and teachers are called “facilitators of learning.” In higher education, one example of the language of learning is the dominant role of constructive alignment, which has “become required reading on the majority of higher education academic development programmes” (Loughlin et al., 2021, p. 119).

As Biesta (2010) points out, the language of learning may also promote the emancipatory possibilities of education and support individuals’ goals and interests as part of educational processes and practices. However, the problem that remains is that the language of learning has narrowed our understanding of the wider educational purposes of schools and higher education institutions. For example, setting aside some of the unique qualities of the student–teacher relationship, it has positioned teachers in a rather mechanistic position, so that teachers have begun to see themselves as facilitators of mostly measurable learning activities.

For those who work on the development of education at universities, the emphasis on the language of learning has been highly controversial (Ripatti-Torniainen et al., 2022). On the one hand, a focus on learning creates more demand for the work of developers and highlights the value of their expertise. There seem to be limitless possibilities for introducing and applying new

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platforms and methodologies to boost learning-related processes, assess students, or create solutions or support for often overburdened students and teachers. On the other hand, there are serious drawbacks to this hype. Following current political trends and discourses makes working on the development of education even more reactive, steering it toward the role of executing current learning-focused trends and discourses (see Evans, 2024). This is a form of unwanted progress because it distances the field from what Sutherland (2018) calls holistic academic development: the role in which academic developers use their academic expertise and autonomy to build a more sustainable future in higher education (see Sugrue et al., 2018).

In this paper, we pursue such a goal by proposing that university pedagogy be the main concept in the development of education in the Nordic countries. The concept of university pedagogy remains unclear, as do the relations between university pedagogy, academic development, and broader views on university education. We offer a framework that brings clarity to university pedagogy as a concept through four dimensions: (1) the relationship between educational theory and pedagogical practice at university; (2) the interplay between knowledge and the curriculum at university; (3) the university as an organization and social institution; and (4) the agency in and of academic work communities. The aim of this theoretically oriented article is to promote the educational role and purpose of academic development in higher education by suggesting a holistic framework and theoretical articulation for university pedagogy.

Due to our experience as research-based developers in the field of university pedagogy, our paper can be characterized as an academic position paper (e.g., Henao-Kaffure & Peñaloza, 2021) with autoethnographic features (e.g., MacKenzie et al., 2007). We devote one section to describing how our concept of university pedagogy developed amid the complexities of a reforming university. Then, leaning on the idea of promoting the educational role and purpose of what is commonly referred to as academic development in higher education, we suggest a holistic framework that takes into account relevant social contexts for university pedagogy and discusses them from the viewpoint of the educational purpose of university education.

University pedagogy is the Nordic parallel term to academic development. In Finland, it refers to a professional field of practice, development, and research on university education and supports the academic development of individuals and communities. That is, university pedagogy refers to the processes and bodies of developing university education, not merely to pedagogical practice at the university. For us working in Finland, the definition of university pedagogy follows the one that Leibowitz (2014) uses for academic development, namely, that it “is about the creation of conditions supportive of teaching and learning, in the broadest sense.”

The framework we propose anchors pedagogy and the development of university education in educational theory and the historically and institutionally specific nature of the university. By discussing the tensions, origins, and theoretical elements of the framework, we argue that university pedagogy has the potential to strengthen the scholarly foundations of the development of education at university (and the field often referred to as academic development).

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, we describe the conceptualizations that have been introduced in university pedagogy to date. Second, we characterize the scene more closely and illuminate the focus areas, tensions, and directions of the development of education by using as an example the organizational change we have witnessed in a Finnish university. Third, we introduce the conceptual framework for university pedagogy that we see as enabling sustainable development in the university context. Finally, we return to the educational nature of the university and reflect on our framework and its possibilities to contribute more broadly to educational development in universities.

The roles of pedagogy and education in university pedagogy

It is important to ask fundamental questions about the types of educational conceptions activated in university pedagogy because these play a key role in how educational ideas find their way into

academics' pedagogical practices and professional development. Thus, we should examine ways to follow Sutherland's (2018) proposal for a more holistic approach to what Sutherland refers to as academic development. For us, such a call refers to a more holistic approach to university pedagogy. This means broadening the focus beyond teaching and learning to consider the meanings of different aspects of academic careers, different groups of people, and different "ontologies, epistemologies, and emotions" (Sutherland, pp. 261–262).

As Biesta (2016) states, we are facing a time when there is a strong tendency to make education risk-free, predictable, and steered by best practices and student-proof measurable (learning) outcomes. When read side by side with the analysis of academic cultures by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), Biesta seems to refer to the merger of universities' developmental and managerial cultures. This means that the pursuit of individual and organizational development and maturation (developmental culture) joins hands with the aims of economic effectiveness and competitiveness pursued by strategic management (managerial culture). In the managerial culture of the neo-liberal university, learning is a commodity that is constantly measured, and its value is related to its utility as defined by the labor market. Similarly, Barnett and Peters (2018) point out that there seems to be less and less space for the university as an idea. Instead, there are many demands and pressures to redefine universities as institutions. The university as an institution is more interested in end results and accountability than it necessarily is in its educational foundations.

The developmental and managerial cultures also seem to have merged in Finnish higher education, in which higher education institutions' educational strategies seem to be increasingly focused on two main things: learning (outcomes) and individual students (see Bowden & Marton, 2004). There is nothing wrong with these topics as such, and both are relevant elements in teaching and learning; however, following Biesta's ideas (2010, 2016, 2021), neither is automatically educational by nature, so they may miss the point of what university pedagogy and its development should be based on.

Pedagogy remains a contested, even undefined, concept in university settings. In everyday use, pedagogy covers a wide range of meanings in universities, ranging from an independent discipline to the techniques and technologies used by teachers (Shah, 2021). In between lies the large area of developmental work in the teaching and learning sector. The combination of "university" and "pedagogy" thus activates diverse understandings, allowing versatile and often conflicting and contradictory interpretations. For us working as researcher-teachers in the field of university pedagogy in Finland, navigating in the middle of these contradictions, practices, and conceptual tools is a major part of our everyday work.

Despite disciplinary, regional, and institutional diversity in concepts, universities are increasingly including teaching- and learning-related aims and measurements in their strategies and operational plans and investing in the development of teaching and learning. The lack of conceptual and theoretical clarity of what is pursued leads to confusion, especially in universities undergoing large organizational, administrative, and strategic changes (Silander & Stigmar, 2019).

Separating the terms "university" and "pedagogy" has been a relatively recent phenomenon. One explanation may be that the two terms have been rather inseparable in the collegial academic culture that is the dominant way of understanding a research university (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). The university has been understood as an inherently educational institution that forms the person, relationships, knowledge, and social position of the student in comprehensive ways. The current overarching need to develop university operations through administrative initiatives does not necessarily make sense in such a concept of the university. Academics have been understood as the self-governing body of the university. Conceptually, a "university" has thus covered all the currently separated sections of research, teaching, learning, development, and administration. Although the passage of time has certainly preserved an ideal, rather than a historical academic reality, collegial culture constitutes an important premise for any developmental initiative at a university. Scholars and scientists continue to activate the collegial culture in their interactions, which has

tangible consequences in the developmental activities of university education and teaching (Ripatti-Torniainen & Stevanovic, 2023).

Characteristic of collegial academic culture are the primary values of disciplines, independent research, and scholarly autonomy (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). In this reading, “pedagogy” faces the same test of conceptual contestation and debate that characterizes any disciplinary discussion and interdisciplinary collaboration. To claim a share in such an environment, “university pedagogy” should either demonstrate its disciplinary nature or its affiliation to some other discipline or disciplines. Indeed, several universities in Finland host professorships in university pedagogy. Professorial chairs and the consequent long-standing research work provide university pedagogy with disciplinary authority in the scholarly community among other disciplines.

The foundation of the university pedagogy concept, at least in Finland, basically has two reference points. First, the concept refers to a team or a group of people who organize formal pedagogical training for academic teachers and often also teach in those courses. A teacher’s role in university pedagogy has been controversial and even viewed with suspicion because people in that role are easily considered couriers of the new managerialism and centralized power (Rinne et al., 2012). Universities have been trying to tackle these preconceptions by organizing university pedagogy studies as part of “the teacher’s pedagogical studies” (60 ECTS¹); that is, a legally regulated study module providing general pedagogical eligibility to work as a teacher at most levels of education.

The second reference point of university pedagogy lies in the basis of the actions of the people working in that field. During the past decade or so, almost all universities providing educational degrees have brought university pedagogy closer to their faculties of education. This provides an opportunity not only to organize the pedagogical courses within teachers’ pedagogical studies programs, but also to connect university pedagogy with the work of research groups in the education faculties.

University pedagogy also comes close to the concepts of the scholarship of teaching and learning (e.g., Manarin et al., 2021) and academic practice (Kushnir & Spowart, 2021) that are used mostly in Anglo-American contexts. However, both have received criticism because of their lack of clarity. In the Nordic context, university pedagogy has been adopted, but its theoretical starting points have not been discussed. Himanka (2018) points out that there has often been a gap between university pedagogy and broader higher education research. Following his ideas, university pedagogical research in Finland has been quite narrowly focused. Consequently, the potential of university pedagogy has neither been redeemed nor even revealed. The disciplinary emphases also vary among universities. For example, at the University of Helsinki, university pedagogy relies more on educational psychology, whereas at Tampere University, it is featured in the social sciences, educational sociology and philosophy, and curriculum studies. In different universities, the actors in university pedagogy may be either close to or distant from strategic developmental initiatives under the university’s leadership.

Globally, we assume that university pedagogy is only in the developmental stage of becoming a field of scientific inquiry in its own right. Many universities still host special units or specialist networks that coordinate and connect academic development activities across the organization to enhance the quality of “academic practice,” the concept used by Weller (2019). These units and networks may include researchers and often include research-oriented academic developers, but they also include student psychologists, study and career counselors, digital support service staff, and staff for special projects. Instead of building a discipline, the primary mission of these units and networks is to contribute to a developmental agenda of teaching and learning in an organization and to implement that agenda. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) see the increased emphasis on the development of university teaching and learning as a manifestation of the developmental academic culture. If development is anchored in strategy-driven measures, another academic culture is often activated

¹ECTS refers to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. One credit is equivalent to 25–30 h of a student’s work.

here as well: the managerial academic culture, which refers to the employment of pedagogical means as tools of management and governance.

Our concept of university pedagogy emerges

Roxå and Mårtensson (2017) use the term “academic developers” and characterize their work as “a constant juggling of requests, demands, opportunities, and interests” (p. 97). Instead of structured and proactive reflection, they perceived that the work had become a “reflection in the midst of everything” (p. 97). At the same time, they realized that unexpected situations may create a space where it is necessary to step back and rethink and reflect the goals and practices of one’s work in pedagogical development as a broader entity.

As researchers and academic developers affiliated with a university that resulted from the merger of two research universities, we share the experience described by Roxå and Mårtensson. One university had an emphasis on the fields of social sciences, humanities, and medicine, while the other focused on the fields of natural sciences, technology, and engineering. In addition, a university of applied sciences with a vocational orientation joined the new university consortium. The academic development cultures of these institutions had similarities, but there were also evident differences. These differences were connected to institutional leadership, the organization of academic development activities, differences in teaching–research relationships, and the role of educational research in academic development, or the lack thereof.

Next, we clarify which fundamental conceptualizations of university pedagogy we saw being activated in a reforming university. University pedagogy as a field revealed itself to us at two levels of operation. First, our task was research-intensive: to conduct research in the field, pass on research-based results, and prompt discussion in faculties on pedagogical- and curriculum-related matters. In this regard, university pedagogy was primarily regarded as a research field, or even as an independent discipline, and we, as its practitioners, were seen as researchers who had outreach tasks in the organization. This notion of university pedagogy communicates with the collegial culture of universities (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Second, our task was to regularly participate in the teaching and supervision of academic personnel (Leibowitz, 2016) as part of formal pedagogical courses, support, and consultation. Here, university pedagogy was primarily viewed as an education- and development-intensive practice, and we were seen as educators and teachers, developers, and even trainers and consultants. This notion of university pedagogy communicates with the developmental academic culture (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008), the scholarship of teaching and learning, and academic practice conceptualizations of university pedagogy.

At the time of the birth of the new Tampere University, the first and third authors of this paper had a roughly seven-year history in a team devoted to university pedagogy that was situated in the Faculty of Education at the university, which has an emphasis on the social sciences, humanities, and medical sciences. These authors had built a curriculum for university pedagogy studies as part of the teachers’ pedagogical studies and conducted research related to curriculum and educational development at the university level. They had the identity of academic researchers who take a holistic approach to academics’ professional development (cf. Sutherland, 2018). Collaboration among university management, faculty leaders, and the university pedagogy team had become active. This collaboration included reciprocal critical discussions on pedagogical trends and directions. In a university with a strong tradition in the social sciences, it was common to be critical of the need for separate pedagogical courses for academics, but the necessity for a good education and good experience for university students was also widely acknowledged. The second author worked in a setting that was closely similar at the University of Helsinki.

In the new Tampere University consortium, pedagogical development departed from the above descriptions and was approached more directly as a strategic enterprise, reflecting the institutional traditions of the former university of technology. The new university’s strategic aim was to create a loose specialist network and a teaching and learning center connecting all academic development

activities across the large new organization and facilitating staff members' work toward similar strategic goals. Regardless of an attempt to unify the vocabularies for teaching- and learning-related strategies and development, the people dispersed in different units and locations continued to refer to very different and even contradictory aims, ideas, and implications of pedagogical development and practice. The lack of dialogue constituted a risk of contradictions and misunderstandings. New hierarchies and priorities emerged. University pedagogy took on traits of the managerial academic culture (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008).

As scholars and practitioners of university pedagogy, we found ourselves not only at the intersection of diverse functions of academic work, but also at the intersection of academic cultures. Each of the three activated academic cultures – collegial, developmental, and managerial – assumed distinct orientations. As researchers, we could always execute independent judgment and adopt a critical approach, but the organization did not necessarily look for a particularly critical role from us amid extensive changes. Thought-provokingly, Roxå and Mårtensson (2017) asked themselves in their own context whether they, as academic developers, were “liberating teachers or [...] part of a machinery suppressing them” (p. 95). Instead of mere self-reflection, we offer our article to enhance collegial discussion of the topic.

Figure 1 captures the operational environment of the university pedagogy the authors experienced. The figure includes the vertical dimensions of university pedagogy promoting the pedagogical expertise of academic communities and university pedagogy supporting personal pedagogical expertise. The horizontal dimensions describe the developmental–managerial culture on the left and the collegial–developmental culture on the right.

While we locate ourselves on the right of the figure, experts closer to strategic processes and special projects may identify themselves on the left. The different sectors of the figure should not be mutually exclusive. To develop education and pedagogy for the whole university, strategic visions and guidelines are required and can be implemented with strategically led projects. Short training sessions about digital tools, accessibility, or specific skills may be important for individual teachers and for advancement of the university's strategic aims.

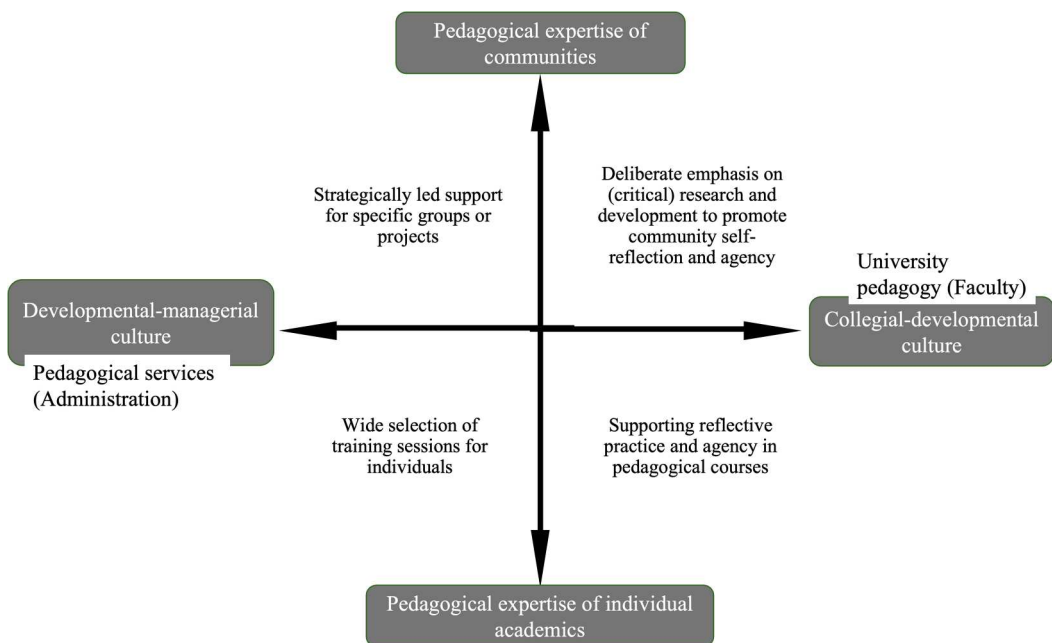


Figure 1. Operational environment of university pedagogy experienced by the authors.

Gradually, our understanding of university pedagogy changed to become something that was different from the expectations activated by the operational sectors in our reforming university and different even from the discussed academic cultures. We began to see university pedagogy as neither something defined merely by researchers exploring the field nor as being given or directed at the organizational level, but rather created together in dialogue with the academic community in context. The second author joined the university pedagogy team at Tampere University during the first years after the merger. We realized that the precisely dialogical community approach that addressed the contexts of today's university was unique and opened up prospects for establishing a holistic, theoretically anchored framework for university pedagogy.

Toward a theoretical foundation for a holistic framework of university pedagogy

We sketch a framework that is theoretically anchored in educational theory and addresses the historically and institutionally specific nature of the university. The framework is flexible enough to allow critical discussions and reflexiveness in the implementation of communal processes and in changing higher education contexts across different activities of university pedagogy.

Our framework identifies four thematic areas: (1) educational theory and pedagogical practice; (2) interconnections of knowledge and the curriculum; (3) the university as an organization and social institution; and (4) agency in and of academic communities, including students' and administrative staff's agency. A university pedagogy operating within our framework can potentially play a role in building bridges between different epistemological viewpoints (knowledge), encouraging the formation of the self and learning holistically in pedagogical practice (curriculum), supporting dialogues on the institutional character of the university (university as organization), and helping individuals to promote reflexivity, tolerance, and inclusiveness in education (agency).

Figure 2 depicts the thematic areas of the framework. In the following section, we first offer a rationale for each of the four thematic areas and then articulate our choice of theoretical perspectives within each area.

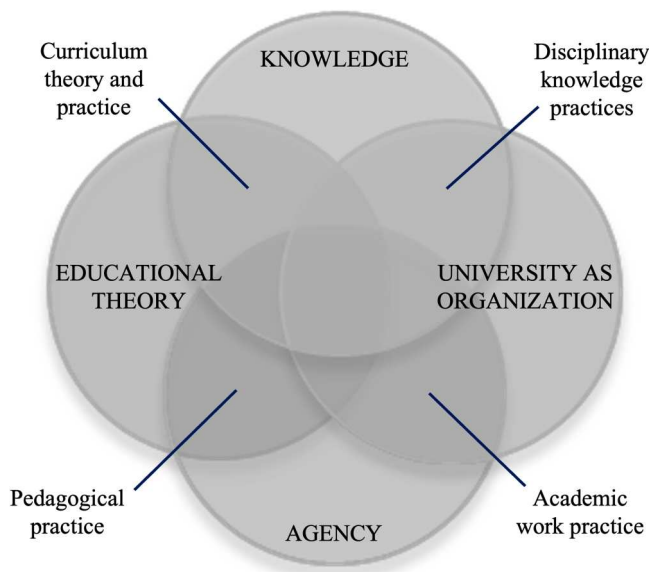


Figure 2. Holistic framework for university pedagogy.

Educational theory and pedagogical practice

The primary thematic area of our framework is educational theory. An educational-theoretical articulation is needed to conceive university pedagogy as a domain that preserves the notion of education at the university instead of promoting “bandwagon” vocabularies and reducing university teaching and learning to short-term goals. As soon as the request to anchor university pedagogy in educational theory is met, distinct preferences within educational theory emerge. In the following section, we discuss our preferences.

Biesta’s (2010) conceptual approach to the aims of education is extremely useful when considering the educational basis of university pedagogy. In his writings about education and the purpose of education, Biesta (2010) refers to the German tradition and particularly the concept of *erziehung* that emphasizes the formation of the self, which Biesta often describes as the process of subjectification (2010). For Biesta (2010, p. 2016, 2021; see also Ashwin, 2020), education is about a student’s relationship to the world and how it transforms along with pedagogical interventions. He outlines the purpose of education as constructed on the interplay among three dimensions: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Each of these is simultaneously present in educational practice, and good education should aim to strike a balance between them (Biesta, 2010).

The first dimension, qualification, refers to the process of providing appropriate knowledge, skills, and understanding to students. These skills can be targeted to a certain professional expertise, or they can be more generally connected to a good and meaningful life as an adult in a society (Biesta, 2010). The qualification function is undoubtedly a vitally important purpose of higher education. The problem is that institutions have been overemphasizing the skills and practices required in the current world of work at the expense of other important qualifications, such as cultural literacy or understanding the interconnectedness between nature and human life. One implication of this is the extensive use of the graduate attribute frameworks that have become major steering elements in higher education curriculum practices (Wald & Harland, 2019).

The second dimension in Biesta’s (2010) model is socialization, the educational process through which a student becomes attached to cultural values, knowing, ways of thinking, and shared goals and purposes. Socialization is attached to sociocultural and professional traditions, practices, and discourses that become a part of a student’s identity in pedagogical processes.

Subjectification, as the third dimension, refers to a student’s personal process of becoming themselves. For Biesta (2010), subjectification is “the opposite of [the] socialization function” (p. 21). If socialization is about bringing a student under the umbrella of current ways of thinking and practices in a field of study, subjectification refers to a process in which a student is able to look at that understanding from a critical distance and become independent in their thinking and acting (see also Young, 2013).

In a higher education context, an important aspect of Biesta’s conceptualization is that these three dimensions need to be balanced to enable a good and sustainable education. This does not seem to be the case in higher education today. The qualification function is overemphasized to the extent that it is quite difficult to find space to discuss the principles and pedagogical practices beyond this domain. This compares with the framework of Barnett and Coate (2005), who suggest that of the three curriculum domains of knowing, acting, and being, knowing and acting have become almost self-evident areas of pedagogical development. Their idea of “being” comes close to Biesta’s subjectification, and they all agree that a student’s process of becoming oneself needs much more elaboration in educational development.

Biesta (2010) compares the interplay of the three functions to a game of three-dimensional chess. Changing the balance in favor of one squeezes out the others. Accordingly, the overemphasized role of qualification has limited our ability to see the values and functions of both socialization and subjectification in higher education contexts. A major element of socialization, the student–teacher relationship and its complex but valuable role in the process of understanding, is largely missing in the development discourse (see also Biesta, 2021). The teacher’s role as a facilitator of learning

is highlighted, which then downgrades most of their expertise and has a negative effect on the meaningfulness of work. At the same time, power inequalities, as inseparable parts of education, remain hidden, and the problems around power become private without the possibility of trying to tackle them at the institutional level.

The emphasized focus on the qualification function also prevents us from paying enough attention to a student's subjectification process and seeing the role of pedagogical practices in it. This is particularly harmful in a world in which students have to deal with numerous situations that cause confusion, pressure, and instability for identity construction. Exhaustion, concentration difficulties, and underachievement (see Deresiewicz, 2014) are too often treated as individual issues. Higher education structures, values, and practices remain hidden, both as a cause of the situation and as a possible way out of it.

The purpose of examining perspectives on critical educational theory in university pedagogical practices and research is to support the visibility of educational values and foundations in both strategic decision-making and everyday practice. Educational research is an important part of supporting pedagogical leadership at all levels and can support researcher-teachers' professional development, too.

Educational research as a basis of university pedagogy also bridges educational theory and pedagogical practice. Researching, for example, local and global decision-making, structures, and institutional management cultures creates a systemic understanding of the tensions around higher education and may support reflexive practices in academic communities. Encouraging academics to take part in pedagogical courses for academics in all career phases is important, too. Courses based on educational theory provide academics with conceptual tools for recognizing and examining the researcher-teacher's educational role and encourage them to take part in educational development. There is affordance for this when participants have the possibility to reflect on their practices with the literature and to engage in critical dialogue with peers from different fields.

Interconnections of knowledge and curriculum

Another thematic area of our holistic framework is knowledge. Universities have been characterized as the cradle of knowledge. This refers to being the site of systemic and symbolic knowledge that has a strong basis in research and differentiates them from other types of educational institutions. The dynamics in decisions on knowledge can be characterized by using Bernstein's (2000) "pedagogic device," which regulates the potential discourse available to be pedagogized. This means, as Singh (2002, p. 573) puts it, that "this device constituted the relay or ensemble of rules or procedures via which knowledge (intellectual, practical, expressive, official or local knowledge) is converted into pedagogic communication." The pedagogic device models relationships among three hierarchical fields: production, where new knowledge is created; recontextualization, where knowledge is transformed into a curriculum with certain meaning potential; and reproduction, where knowledge is taught to students.

In all these fields, the boundaries of knowledge are negotiated, and disciplinary knowledge practices are created. The key questions are: What knowledge counts? Whose knowledge counts? The divide between "pure" and "profane," context-free, and context-bounded knowledge has a long history in curricular debates (Young, 2008). When thinking of university pedagogy, we need to take a stand on what forms of knowledge are brought forward (e.g., thinking tools vs. a practical toolbox). This concerns two levels: academics educating their students and the professional pedagogical development of the academics themselves.

During the last decade, the demand for more context-relevant knowledge has intensified. This is visible in universities with curricula emphasizing students' intended learning outcomes and paying attention to competencies relevant to the needs of industry and working life in general. Behind this approach are the OECD guidelines for economic growth, in which higher education plays a significant role (Petkutė, 2016). This has resulted in Europe-wide initiatives in education policy and

guidelines that trickle down through national policies to university strategies (Brøgger, 2019). We recognize that both students and academics have internalized the public discourse of useful, applicable knowledge. Students may question the usefulness of theoretical knowledge for their work careers, as may academics who expect to learn the latest digital tools or effective teaching methods in pedagogical courses.

Considering the role of universities in society and the world, we see their tasks as broader and more profound. One of the key tasks of university education is to support students' being and becoming, so that they have a personal relationship with knowledge that results in changes in the sense of who they are and what they can do in the world (Ashwin, 2020; Barnett, 2009). This type of approach enables students to encounter different forms of knowledge, face the complexity and limits of knowledge, and prepare for an unknown future in a more holistic and sustainable way. This will eventually benefit the contemporary professional needs of individuals and their working lives, but it extends further (cf. Ashwin, 2020).

The question of curriculum knowledge is topical because it defines the goals of higher education and the access it provides (Shay, 2016; Young, 2013). It is evident that education delivered at the university includes applicable and generic knowledge, whatever the disciplinary field is, with some fields being more professional and others more generic. Despite the differences in knowledge practices in different fields of science, it is important, even in the most vocational fields, to provide access to so-called powerful knowledge. This refers to a particular type of knowledge that one cannot learn through experience alone or in everyday life or work; rather, it is the abstract and conceptual knowledge that is specific to university education (Muller & Young, 2019; Wheelahan, 2010). Especially when considering the very different backgrounds of students – and the variations in disciplinary fields of the academics who join in their academic development – this is important. Access to powerful knowledge is a precondition for joining important discussions in society and democracy (Clegg, 2016). Creating stronger connections between research and teaching will certainly help in this.

Looking more deeply into curriculum theories would shed even more light on the fundamental choices related to curricula. Are we aiming for factory-like production, as suggested by Bobbit (1918/1972) more than 100 years ago, which is emerging today as the effective transfer of skills and knowledge? Or do we see it as important to acknowledge the emancipatory potential of the curriculum with a research-like relationship to curriculum knowledge (cf. Bernstein, 2000; Grundy, 1987; Muller & Young, 2019)? We argue that there should be room for questioning, incompleteness, and humanity. This would mean that students and academics learn to ask about the consequences of using certain knowledge and skills and what will follow from competent actions in different types of ecosystems. Pedagogical choices are always situated in broader contexts, networks, and relationships.

The university as an organization and a social institution

The next thematic area is the university as an organization and social institution. The socio-historically particular and systemic nature of the university is an integral factor in the holistic framework of university pedagogy because it constitutes the environment for individuals and communities with whom we work as researcher-teachers in university pedagogy. Despite the standardization of higher education, socio-historically developed concepts of university endure because the scientific-scholarly community voluntarily maintains them socially (Puaca, 2021). Academics keep activating socio-historically developed concepts in discussions and collaborations, which has tangible consequences in developmental projects. For example, in a robustly facilitated project to develop interdisciplinary teaching, scholars activated their separate disciplinary knowledge practices, insisting on the conceptual nuances of each discipline. The effort to enhance interdisciplinarity through pedagogical intervention turned into an implementation of managerial power (Ripatti-Torniainen & Stevanovic, 2023).

Even though universities as organizations have been reformed in recent decades, and their organizational structures bear similarities to many other organizations today, the university sustains its historical nature through the social negotiation of identities, relationships, and meaningful action. This means that inside the formal organizational structure, the scientific–scholarly community maintains its own understanding of the university as a social institution. The historical and social nature of the university partly explains why organizationally top-down managed change processes are often difficult or impossible to control and why these processes often have unwanted consequences (Bates, 2016). Stähle (2012; see also Stähle, 2008) describes the university as having many features of a “dynamic system.” This means that units and communities based on individual ongoing research processes and a high level of individual autonomy are multi-voiced and chaotic by nature and, as such, are in a constant state of flux. They have a high tolerance for internal chaos and the capability to self-organize (Stähle, 2008). Compelling or even steering change or self-organization from outside the community is difficult and sometimes even impossible. Self-organization is likelier to happen in areas where individuals are aware of their assets and where they can use them.

For this reason, it is natural that self-organization happens mostly in the research domain, which is also where a researcher-teacher’s professional identity is mostly rooted. Many incentives and evaluation criteria also emphasize research-related activities, such as project management, success in getting funding, and the amount and quality of publications. Teaching, by contrast, appears to be a somewhat problematic context for self-organization (van Lankveld et al., 2017). There does not seem to be a solid basis for self-organization around teaching, because quite often, researcher-teachers do not have the same kinds of expertise and educational background that they have for research. In addition, there are far fewer spontaneous small communities around teaching issues than around research.

One of the main features of a dynamic system is that there is an interdependency among individuals (Stähle, 2008). Academics working in universities share an understanding that individuals’ choices are always related to the actions and intentions of their colleagues. Interdependence can create a positive flow that creates spaces for self-renewal, improved coherence, and valuing identity work. According to Stähle (2012), collaborative action in communities eventually upholds the existence of the university. In appropriate circumstances, based on these systemic features, academic communities can generate new and creative modes of thinking and action, both in the fields of education and research.

Agency in and of academic communities

The final thematic area of our holistic framework for university pedagogy is agency, which refers to the projects of human agents played out in various ways in different situations and environments (Ashwin, 2009). In addition to individual academics, students, and support staff members, groups may also have agentic projects. This is why we highlight agency in and of academic communities. The agency of individual academics and students is enabled and restricted by the pedagogical and work cultures in the community, and the community’s agency is similarly enabled and restricted by the broader organizational and societal structures (Annala et al., 2023).

One of the key values of the university is academic freedom; therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to academics’ and students’ agency in university pedagogy and academic development. There is an ongoing debate on the extent to which teachers’ freedom in pedagogical issues should be guided (Finn, 2020; Macfarlane, 2024) and how much attention we should pay to disciplinary differences and contexts, the contradictory demands of academic work, and how to help academics engage and have agency both in research and teaching practice in the best way possible (Annala et al., 2023; Louvel, 2013).

If academics are required to join pedagogical courses and other events with the aim of training them to follow certain pedagogical trends efficiently, they may feel that their freedom in teaching and research is threatened (Magnússon & Rytzler, 2019). Similar experiences occur during

university-wide reforms, in which educational development initiatives are implemented in the same manner throughout all faculties and units, even though their educational nature, knowledge practices, and academic orientations are different. One example of this is the implementation of the Bologna process in Europe. Educational development initiatives offer space for agency differently; they can be implemented as an “engineering” type of activity, where certain processes are followed to meet the expected results, or as a “bricolage” type of activity with more space to make creative decisions (Louvel, 2013). Brøgger (2014) found that academics, as educational agents, did not simply cope as passive receptacles of suggested changes in the Bologna process. Instead, they negotiated, contested, adopted, and rejected them; thus they used their agency. Agency and engagement are required to make sustainable changes. Academics need to find the relevance and meaning of the suggested change initiatives. Further, engaging only a few people is not enough; members of the unit, degree program, research group, or others in the community should share the objective of the activity and find it meaningful, too.

As we write this article, students are demonstrating their agency publicly in ways that fall under all the themes we include in our framework. Campuses across the world, including in Finland, have become arenas for students’ activism that contains explicit criticism of the existing education, knowledge, and agency of universities. By protesting against, for example, insufficient action to combat climate crisis and biodiversity loss, wars, colonialism, and sexism, students not only appeal to politicians. They are also demanding local changes in curricula, academic cultures, leadership, and universities’ international relations. Thus, we suggest that students’ agency as an ongoing reflection on how they exist in the world with others, with society, and with the world should be an educational topic in university pedagogy. Students’ agency moves in the existential domain of education (Biesta, 2021). It also reflects the powerful knowledge included in our proposed framework of university pedagogy. Finally, students’ agency addresses universities as organizations in which power not only relates to external political currents, but also operates through socially maintained structures and relations.

Treating academics and students as objects is not sustainable (Louvel, 2013). Instead, we argue that it is important to elicit voluntary engagement in university pedagogy and academic development, thereby preserving room for personal reflection and ownership. This requires a critical and reflective approach to the tensions in academic work in the community and spaces for analyzing these together with colleagues in pedagogical courses and other events for academics. Sharing experiences across disciplinary boundaries may make the teaching and learning cultures in one’s own unit or community more visible, yet it should be clear that in educational practices, “one size fits all” may be a false expectation (Annala, 2023).

Examining conceptions of the similarities and differences in epistemological premises and historical practices in different disciplinary fields opens up new possibilities for self-reflection. This reflection is particularly important these days when, as Barnett (2009) points out, academic communities themselves should adopt a stronger agentic position and take more responsibility for communally interpreting both their identities and their working context. Opening cross-disciplinary discussions will potentially help us to understand the backgrounds and reasons for different approaches and critically examine the principles of our own disciplines.

Figure 1 includes a depiction of the pedagogical expertise of individuals and the expertise of the community. Often, academic development opportunities are targeted to individual academics to increase their knowledge and skills in pedagogy and broaden their expertise; however, we suggest that the quality of individual teachers does not guarantee a good educational experience for students. Students study and live through the curriculum of the whole degree program; thus, pedagogical expertise needs to concern the broader community and its educational cultures (Annala et al., 2023). This is why it is important to pay attention not only to curriculum knowledge in university pedagogy or the broader organizational structures, but also to the ownership of individuals and communities as actors and agents in university pedagogy and academic development in general.

University pedagogy for the future

We have suggested in this article that in the Nordic countries, university pedagogy could be the main concept used in the field of developing university education. Toward this aim, we have introduced in this article a holistic framework for university pedagogy and an outline for anchoring the framework theoretically. Through the framework consisting of the thematic areas of (1) educational theory and pedagogical practice, (2) interconnections of knowledge and curriculum, (3) the university as an organization and social institution, and (4) agency in and of academic communities, we have provided our answer to Leibowitz's (2016) request to deliver "a more scholarly turn" in the field of academic development, including "theorising teaching and learning and a strong assessment of the purpose and value of higher education" (p. 165). We argue that the viability of university pedagogy requires a theory-anchored articulation of these four areas. Furthermore, the thematic areas refer to the socio-historically developed roles and positions of the university in society and reveal the encompassing potential of university pedagogy for the future of the university. Articulation of the four areas is needed to allow critical reflexivity inside the university and public discourse on education, teaching, and learning in context. Failure to do so would leave scholarly discussion and public discourse on the academic development of teaching and learning without direction, preventing dialogue and debate on the aims that university pedagogy orients to serve.

The university pedagogy discussed in this paper follows the idea of what Barnett and Bengtson (2017) call "an ecological university" (p. 9). They point out that instead of operating outside the rest of the world and emphasizing the intrinsic value of knowledge, or just as a business/university focusing on the most useful knowledge, a university can consider different ecosystems and spaces of action both locally and globally.

This notwithstanding, we do not offer the framework as a static guideline for university pedagogy. Instead, we see the framework more as a space for "transformative oriented reflection" (Mälkki et al., 2022). As such, our framework refers to a space where cross-disciplinary critical dialog is encouraged, facilitated, and connected with educational scholarship and pedagogical practice (Mälkki et al., 2022). A space for transformative-oriented reflection provides individual academics and communities with the conceptual tools to explore their pedagogical preconceptions, resources, and strengths (Mälkki et al., 2022).

Such dialogues may take place in university pedagogy courses, but they can also materialize in everyday situations in degree programs or leadership forums. The purpose is, amid different institutional demands, structures, and tensions, to find appropriate spaces for individuals and communities to explore shared pedagogical possibilities, construct identities, self-organize, and practice autonomy in the field of education in a manner similar to the field of research. Here, university pedagogy occurs in contact and in congruence with local research communities and their inherent identities and value bases. Furthermore, a teacher's pedagogical capacity is not individualized but is instead linked to the discussions of the wider teaching community (cf. Mäkinen, 2013).

Despite the critical approach adopted here, we acknowledge the value and function of university leadership and management as well as strategic and operational planning and implementation. This position paper, which was developed through a combination of a literature review and autoethnographic reflections within a specific Nordic context, offers a limited contribution. Therefore, further research is necessary. This should clarify empirically how university pedagogy allies with critical discussions among research-teaching personnel and students on the one hand and university leadership and management on the other and how the inherent tensions are negotiated and solved in developmental action. Furthermore, our colleagues in the field of university pedagogy may articulate positions other than those we have raised here. We offer our contribution as an invitation to join the discussion with new voices.

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