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## Teachers' Working Conditions amid Swedish School Choice Reform: Avenues for Further Research

**Abstract:** Since the 1990s, governance changes, including customer choice agendas, have permeated the public sector and, consequently, welfare sector professionals' work. One example is the education sector. The aim of this paper is to identify and discuss avenues for further research when it comes to teachers' working conditions in the light of current choice agendas. This is accomplished by presenting an overview of previous studies on implications of the reforms for teachers' working conditions. How are these conditions described in relation to the current school choice agenda in Sweden? What directions should be applied to increase knowledge of these conditions? We conclude by identifying some avenues for further research: the issues of organization of work, temporal and spatial dimensions of working conditions, and finally comparative studies of various forms, are suggested as warranting further investigation to highlight the diversified labor market in which teachers find themselves today.

**Keywords:** Competition, governance change, privatization, professional work, school choice, Sweden, teaching profession, working conditions

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In this paper, we examine implications of current choice agendas which involve allowing and encouraging citizens—or customers as they often are referred to these days—to make their own choices regarding welfare services. The school choice reform<sup>1</sup> in Sweden (SOU, 1991/92:95; SOU, 1992/93:230) is highly significant in terms of its impact on teachers' working conditions<sup>2</sup> (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Daun, 2003). This illustrates how choice agendas currently permeate the public sector, reflecting broader societal and global trends of competition, privatization, marketization, and individualization (Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000). Indeed, the idea of school choice in Sweden is based on the assumption that choice and competition improve quality (Carlgren & Klette, 2008; Vlachos, 2011). Although we have focused on Sweden, similar choice reforms can be found in public sector services in most western societies, giving the paper a wider relevance beyond the specific case.

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<sup>1</sup> School choice was made possible via two different reforms; one opening up for a voucher system, the other one letting students choose what school to apply to. For consistency, and as it is most commonly used this way, we use school reform in singular rather than plural, even though the two together make up the changed system.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst the concept of working conditions often refers to aspects of work such as wage levels and employment form, in this paper we refer to circumstances in daily work which impact on how one experiences work. It deals with wage levels, workplace characteristics, work content and management, and organization of work.

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Public sector professionals, such as teachers, are often described as key actors in knowledge-intensive organizations and society at large (Bourgeault, Benoit, & Hirschhorn, 2009; Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby, 2013). However, with the current choice and privatization agendas, the governance of these public sector professions has changed. This, in turn, has been shown to have implications in terms of changed and challenged professional identities. In fact, previous research on teachers and choice agendas in the education sector in Sweden points to identity diversification, whereby teachers' previous identification patterns with the logic of profession and the logic of bureaucracy compete with the identification with the logic of market (Fredriksson, 2009, 2010; Lundström & Parding, 2011; Parding & Lundström, 2011). In short, the logic of the profession is a governance ideal based on professionals controlling their own work, responsibility, and autonomy, as well as collegiality, trust, a shared profession-specific knowledge base, ethics, and culture (Freidson, 1991). The logic of the bureaucracy, however, is based on a strong emphasis on managers, bureaucratic procedures with standardization and evaluation, as well as accountability and efficiency. Coordination and long-term planning are practical examples (Freidson, 1991). Lastly, the logic of the market is based on meeting customers' (assumed) needs. Concepts such as profit, customers, competition, accountability, efficiency, and managerialism are central to this logic (Freidson, 1991). As teachers first and foremost choose their profession—to become teachers—rather than a specific employment setting, they tend to identify more strongly with the logic of the profession.

As mentioned above, the tension between the logics has been observed, in which teachers' identities can be seen as both challenged and changing (Lundström & Parding, 2011; Parding & Lundström, 2011). A correlating finding is that the signs of diversification in terms of how the logic of the market is seen by teachers, from positive to negative to indifferent, has been shown (Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Holm, and Lundström, 2014). The circumstances demonstrate the need for further attention to be paid to teachers' working conditions and how they relate to the current choice agenda, however, a shortage of studies focusing on this has been identified (Fredriksson, 2010; Forsey, 2010b; Parding, 2011). As Bejerot and Hasselbladh (2013) point out, there is a need to develop the ways in which public sector reforms, including the conditions for the professionals working in these organizations, are examined. In an attempt to address these concerns, the aim of this paper is to identify and discuss avenues for further research when it comes to teachers' working conditions in the light of current choice agendas. This is accomplished by presenting an overview of previous studies on implications of the reforms for teachers' working conditions. How are these conditions described in relation to the current school choice agenda in Sweden? What directions should be applied to increase knowledge of these conditions?

The education system in Sweden is currently facing a number of serious issues. The latest PISA report shows that Swedish students have the worst performance trends of all OECD countries (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2013a). In addition, several studies report poor and deteriorating working conditions for teachers (National Union of Teachers (NUT), 2013; Sveriges Företagshälsor, 2014:1; Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), 2012; TCO, 2013). In fact, the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) found that 50% of upper secondary teachers lack formal qualification in the subjects they teach (SNAE, 2014a), and the general director calls for a national action plan (Ekström, 2014).

The paper is structured as follows: We begin by describing some key developments in the sociology of professions regarding how governance changes and welfare sector professionals' working conditions have been studied. We then present the characteristics of the Swedish school choice reform to provide the context. Third, we outline the method used for literature collection and analysis. The

analysis itself follows, and we conclude with suggestions for future research.

## Background

Previous research on the conditions for professional work has unveiled power relations and the underpinning values of various actors. At the same time, this has often taken a rather normative critical stance, and a perspective that views professionals as victims is apparent within this strain of thought. As Dellgran, Fransson, Jonnergård, and Jordansson (2011) point out, much previous research has dealt with the governance, control, and regulation of professional practices and how organizational and professional structures and processes are related to each other, including the role of discretion and autonomy. It has often been argued that the changes over the last decade or so have posed a challenge to traditional professional values (Adler, Kwon, & Heckscher, 2008; Evetts, 2009b, 2009c). For instance, Farrell and Morris (2003, p. 129), while acknowledging certain benefits, also discussed that professionals' roles in what they term the neo-bureaucratic state have changed: "[W]hile they may have reduced hierarchy, paradoxically, the changes have increased bureaucratic tendencies." Farrell and Morris (2003) believe this change impacts all public sector workers, especially professionals and managers. Another expression of a victimizing approach is presented by Reed (2014, p. 525), who claimed that professionals in the public sector "find themselves under increasing pressure from a complex combination of changes such as the marketization of specialist labor services and the deregulation that normally comes with it." Concerns regarding the increase in pressure over performance and accountability have also been raised (Adler et al., 2008; Evetts, 2009b, 2009c). Evetts argue that this could damage the trust in professionals and that the increase in audits means that they will spend less time with clients and more on audit-related tasks. According to Evetts, this commodification of professional work, including an emphasis on individual performance, risks undermining professional cohesion, trust, and cooperation.

The examples above illustrate a rather normative stance in depicting professionals as passive victims of deteriorating working conditions. Lately, a shift has been increasingly evident (Adler et al., 2008; Bourgeault, Hirschhorn, & Sainsaulieu, 2011; Leicht, Walters, Sainsaulieu, & Davies, 2009; Noordegraaf & Steijn, 2013; Noordegraaf, 2011; Nygaard, 2012). The reason as to move beyond the previous victimizing approach is how policy and societal changes having occurred and currently occurring makes it "necessary to look again at the theories and concepts used to explain and interpret this category of occupational work" (Evetts, 2013, p. 779). For example, public and private partnerships (PPP) now blur the earlier, clearer differences between the public and private spheres of employment (Evetts, 2013). The shift seems to lie in the examination of professions as they relate to new governance models, marketization and privatization, viewing professionals as active agents (Dellgran et al., 2011). There are indeed a number of recent examples of more nuanced views on professionals and their relation to governance changes, such as those expounded by Evetts (2011, 2013) and Muzio and Kirkpatrick (2011), who emphasize the importance of following current developments in organizations that employ professionals—such as schools—as a means of examining alternative views. Professionals, in this strand of thought, are described as proactive agents striving to take advantage or, at least, make the best of their situation, rather than as passive victims of ineffective changes (Muzio, Ackroyd, & Chanlat, 2008; Noordegraaf & Steijn, 2013). Timmermans (2008) claim that it may even be beneficial for the professions to take on organizational initiatives and transform them into values correlated to professional logics. Another example is Waring and Currie (2009), who develop the idea of moving beyond the victimizing approach that sees professional work as being subject to top-down management or bottom-up resistance: "[W]e

suggest that managerial techniques and jurisdictions are also strategically drawn into professional practice and identity” (2009, p. 755). They describe a blurring of jurisdictions; wherein there is both agency and structure.

## The school choice reform in Sweden

The school choice reform in Sweden is an interesting example to closer examine for a number of reasons, as Sweden stands out in many regards compared to other western countries. First, the Swedish case can be described as a rather full-blown school market (Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000). Although a quasi-market, it lies closer to a real market logic than many other countries (Lundström & Holm, 2011). It should also be noted that despite the decentralization of education, the state sets the national curricula for public as well as independent schools<sup>3</sup>. Second, neither independent nor public schools are allowed to collect fees. Instead, a full-scale voucher system is used, so all schools—whether independent or public—are funded by the government and the amount of funding a school receives depends on the number of students enrolled. Third, although school fees are not allowed, profits are. In fact, independent schools belong to education companies that are publicly traded on the stock market, meaning that profits can be distributed to shareholders. There are also examples of venture capital companies owning schools. In fact, today some 90% of independent upper secondary schools are stock corporations (SNAE, 2014b). For example, Academedia, which is the largest school operator group in Sweden, reported sales of more than €6.7 billion in 2013/2014 (Academia, n.d.; DN, 2015). Its operating profit totaled almost €48 million; even after tax and other financial items were deducted, €21 million remained (Academia, n.d.; DN, 2015). Fourth, currently, in Sweden, just over 20% of all employees in the public sector work for private companies (in the 1990s, virtually no public sector workers were employed by private companies), and this change has been most rapid in the education sector (Vlachos, 2011). Fifth, neither public nor independent schools can cherry-pick students; that is to say, public schools have to accept any students that apply, as they have a responsibility as guarantor of education for all; while independent schools do not have such a responsibility, they are also not allowed to cherry-pick. Sixth, the change in education policy in Sweden has been drastic, and Sweden has a long tradition of social-democratic education policies (Esping-Andersen, 1990), characterized by a strong central governance with the double aim of increasing the education level among the youth and promoting social equity, reflected in the slogan “a school for all.” This slogan emphasizes the belief that all students should have the right to the same educational conditions. In Sweden, public education is seen as a vehicle for providing equitable and accessible education opportunities. Today, however, independent schools receive significant support from all larger political parties. In fact, it has been claimed that both the left and the right have driven the current state of affairs, although their motives are based on different grounds (Wennström, 2014). That is, both the current social-democratic government and the previous right-wing government (2008-2014) are pro-market with respect to education. Most political parties claim they value equity in education, but they do not agree on how this equity should be achieved (Wennström, 2014; Wiborg, 2013). Finally, it should be mentioned that working arrangements and regulations differ between the public and independent sectors. One significant difference concerns the right to whistleblow; for example, to inform the media about maladministration at the school in which one works. In public schools,

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<sup>3</sup> By “independent schools,” we refer to the non-public alternatives that the school choice reform opened up. These schools are sometimes referred to as “private” and sometimes “non-public schools,” or as we do in this text: “independent.”

teachers can act as whistleblowers without fear of being given notice or suffering other forms of punishment from their employer. However, in independent schools, whistleblowers are not protected, as these schools (if they are stock corporations) fall under the Swedish Companies Act, and teachers employed in these schools accordingly run a greater risk if they inform the media about maladministration, for instance (Fredriksson, 2010). However, it should be mentioned that new regulations are underway that will enable teachers in independent schools to be able to whistle-blow too (SOU 2015:82).

Above, we have illustrated the specifics of the Swedish context, but this paper may be of relevance to other welfare sector professions in policy contexts similar to Sweden, as the choice agenda is indeed an example of “traveling policies” (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004). The results may also be applicable in other similar education policy contexts.

## Method

Our overview of implications of the school choice reform on teachers’ working conditions took as its starting point literature gathered in the previous review of research on school choice reform in a broader perspective (Parding, 2011). For the previous review, a scan of publications in mainly Swedish and Scandinavian journals in the fields of education and sociology was conducted; the timeframe was from the introduction of school choice (1991) until the then-current date (2011). The search terms were “school choice,” “independent school(s),” and “Sweden”; the primary databases used were ERIC and Google Scholar. From relevant publications, additional sources were identified from the reference lists; the first part of the previous literature search was thus structured and systematic (Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012; Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The area of review comprised research on the entirety of school choice reform identifying four units of analysis: Consequences in terms of the students, the school, an overarching level, and, finally, teachers. More than fifty publications matched the search criteria and were included. For this paper, we started by developing the teacher analysis unit, in other words, we focused on the reform’s implications on teachers’ working conditions. As literature reviews should be question-driven (Booth et al., 2012), we identified the following question: “How are teachers’ working conditions described in relation to the current school choice agenda that the Swedish school choice reform includes?” Relevant papers, identified with keywords including “teachers,” “working conditions,” “school choice,” “independent schools,” and “Sweden” were selected for analysis. Additional publications were identified from these papers’ references, including some from the same authors as well as new authors. This literature identification method can be categorized as initially structured and systematic, lending itself towards a snowball approach in a later stage (Booth et al., 2012; Machi & McEvoy, 2009). We also searched for relevant literature by scanning the appropriate unions’ publications as well as the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE), as these actors play a central role in terms of mapping teachers’ working conditions. This approach led to an identification of thirty-five publications of relevance. When analyzing the literature in terms of implications for teachers’ working conditions, the following categories emerged: Wages, what teachers work where, workplace characteristics, undue pressure, new tasks, possibilities for planning, and job satisfaction.

## Previous studies on the impact of the school choice reform on working conditions

A number of dilemmas regarding the increased market development within the

school system can be identified (SNAE, 2012). Many of these issues are linked to the new competition situation.

The issue of wages is one example of a working condition. Some research claims that competition translates into higher wages. On average, this is only a modest increase, but newly graduated teachers, teachers in certain subjects and those in the most competitive areas are better off; this is true in both independent and public sectors (Hensvik, 2010, 2012). At the same time, there are reports of wages being lower in the independent school sector, and at the upper secondary level in particular (Swedish Teachers' Union (STU), 2013). These results possibly reflect the complexities of wage analysis and point at a possible diversification development.

There are also reports on what teachers work where. It has been shown that different sectors seem to attract different categories of teachers. Hensvik (2010) shows that independent and public schools have somewhat different recruitment patterns, whereby independent schools attract younger teachers and those who are subject-specialized. In addition, in independent schools, the value placed on formal merits is lower than in public schools. This means that a teacher working in an independent school is more likely to have colleagues with lower levels of formal competence. Another factor that may differentiate the teaching bodies in different schools is the student composition. It has been suggested that school segregation has increased (Stenlås, 2011), with the plausible consequence that different student groups, that is students from varying socio-economic backgrounds, characterize the teacher's job in terms of focus and content, depending on school context. In a recent study, it was shown that teachers follow the good students (Karbownik & Martinson, 2014). Teachers tend to leave schools where the student results are the lowest, resulting in a transient teacher population in some schools. This may bring problematic situations regarding low levels of consistency, which can be assumed to have a negative impact on the work climate as the continuity and possibility of building collaboration between teachers may become compromised. Conversely, it was also shown in the same study that teachers at schools with high-grade students stay; a possible reason is that teachers may find the job easier in these contexts. It was also shown that teachers in independent schools are more mobile than those in municipal schools and that the more highly educated teachers change schools less often (Karbownik & Martinson, 2014). These findings also point to a possible emerging diversification.

When it comes to what different workplaces are characterized by, it has been found that rather than identifying alternative, innovative and diversified pedagogical approaches and practices, school profiles are becoming more and more traditional and similar in nature (Hartman, 2011). The main difference seems instead to lie in how schools are organized and governed (Hartman, 2011). This indicates that even though teachers can now choose their employers in different ways than previously, their choices are perhaps between more of the same, rather than between different pedagogical approaches.

Another impact that is directly related to the current competition situation is that of undue pressure. As schools are under pressure to show that their students perform well, good results are attractive and sought after; for example, high grades are used for marketing purposes. It has been found that 20% of teachers had experienced undue pressure to give their students higher grades than what their results warranted, either from the students themselves, their parents, or the principal; the pressure is greatest among upper secondary teachers, where the greatest exposure to competition is experienced (Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2011; NUT, 2011; NUT, 2014). In addition, teachers' employment is directly correlated to the number of satisfied customers. That is, if parents and students are satisfied, they will most likely stay at their current school, but if they are not, there is the risk that students will change schools, lowering the number of students in the original school and possibly leading to the firing of teachers (Lundahl et al., 2014). Compared to teachers in public schools, those in independent schools experience a less supportive environment: "if the way

we work does not suit you, you are free to walk out the door” (NUT, 2011). The impacts of school choice can therefore be seen as a shift in the balance of power from the teachers to the students, parents and school management (Lundahl et al., 2014; Lundström & Parding, 2011; Parding & Lundström, 2011; Stenlås, 2011). One way of understanding this is by arguing that the level of autonomy has decreased (Lundahl et al., 2014; Wennström, 2014) in terms of a de-professionalization (Stenlås, 2011). At the same time, it seems reasonable to assume that school context matters regarding if and how the phenomenon of undue pressure exerts itself.

Another finding is that new tasks have been added on top of the existing workload, not least regarding documentation and administration. Today, in the name of competition, teachers perform work such as attending fairs, designing marketing leaflets and keeping up to date with what competing schools offer, on top of more pedagogical and didactical tasks (Lundström & Parding, 2011; Parding & Lundström, 2011; Frostenson, 2011). There are also signals of teachers feeling that pedagogical discussions have vanished, replaced by discussions on how to get students to write “good” evaluations (NUT, 2011; Parding & Lundström, 2011). This indicates that not only are new tasks being added, but some tasks considered valuable are now being given less room. This change can certainly be seen in the light of the NPM reform movement; it is widely established that teachers’ work has become intensified and that teachers experience more stress (Aili & Hjort, 2010; Lundström & Holm, 2011; NUT, 2013; Sveriges Företagshälsor, 2014:1; TCO, 2012; TCO, 2013). In fact, primary school teachers estimate that they work 9 hours and 40 minutes per day, equalling a 48-hour weekly workload (SNAE, 2013b). The effects of work intensification have been shown in various work environment reports. For instance, in a study on 30 different occupational groups in Sweden, three categories of teachers (pre-school teachers, primary teachers, secondary and upper secondary teachers) experienced the highest levels of work intensification; 72-84% found their work has been intensified, whereas the mean for all occupations is 46.6% (Du & Jobbet, 2013). The increased emphasis on documentation can be traced back to a general accountability trend and is also an effect of the need to present good outcomes in league tables. Several studies have reported on this change (e.g., Houtsonen, Czaplicka, Lindblad, Sohlberg, & Sugrue, 2010; SOU, 2014:5; SNAE, 2013b). The issue of new competition related tasks, including work intensification, seems to happen across the board, and in contrast to most of the previous issues, does not seem to bring any obvious diversification.

Student number fluctuations during and between term time have certainly become a reality in public schools, as well as independent schools, which makes planning ahead problematic. The SNAE (2010) has previously warned that many municipalities expected it would become more difficult to plan their upper secondary schooling in the coming years. These often uneven fluctuations can certainly be assumed to impact teachers’ daily work, but exert themselves in very different ways depending on the specific work context; it is reasonable to assume that this diversification is related to the level of competition.

Finally, it has been found that teachers in independent schools were more satisfied than those in public schools (Vlachos, 2011). However, when comparing the number of reported absences due to illness for independent and public school teachers, which can be seen as a more objective indicator of the work environment and job satisfaction, there is neither a positive nor negative correlation (Hanspers & Hensvik, 2011).

To sum up, judging from the above presentation, it seems that the school choice reform has had a substantial impact on teachers’ working conditions. The review also illustrates how other parallel governance changes have been unfolding; it is reasonable to conclude that there is an interplay between these changes.

## Conclusions and avenues for further research

One main finding is that competition-related issues significantly influence teachers' experiences, although much depends on whether they work in a highly competitive or less competitive area; context matters (Lundahl et al., 2014). For example, teachers in highly competitive areas, who work in schools where the number of students is dropping, appear to be more severely affected, whereas teachers in competitive areas, working in schools with a good reputation and a waiting list of students, often have a quite different experience. This means that it is not necessarily whether or not one works in a public or independent school that makes the difference when it comes to how working conditions are experienced. We will now discuss issues that need continued focus and also new perspectives.

The key aim of this paper has been to identify and discuss avenues for further research regarding teachers' working conditions in the light of current choice agendas, in an attempt to identify perspectives which have been less explored, and that can assist in pointing future research in directions that move beyond "more of the same" (Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2013; Jensen & Smeby, 2014). Rather than taking on a normative approach and aligning with either previously described victimizing approach or the view of professionals as active agents, our review highlights the need to continue identifying and scrutinizing the complexities surrounding professional work.

One direction for future studies is to continue focusing on the organization of teachers' work as public sector professionals, as it relates to public sector reform agendas such as school choice. The landscape of professions is increasingly dominated by the interests and priorities of employing organizations (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011), and welfare sector professionals' experience of work is largely influenced by the manner in which it is organized (Fredriksson, 2010). However, even though the outcomes of professionals' work are highly dependent on the conditions surrounding it, the specific context has less often been in focus in studies of professional work (Svensson, 2008). One form of organization of work that has been particularly present in professional work is collegiality. Collegiality is based on occupational cohesion wherein collaboration and joint decision-making, founded on a normative (governing) logic, states what should be done, what should not be done and how the former should be done—this rationale governs work. Collegiality can be seen in terms of logic or a form of legitimacy; bureaucratic organizations, on the other hand, are based on rules and hierarchy. Private enterprises, such as independent schools, are based on market ideals—the customers' choice, the company's ability to satisfy the customer and the company's ability to make a profit. It is important to continue to examine these changes in the educational landscape because they influence how teachers' work is organized and experienced.

When individual performance (e.g., of students and teachers, GPs, and consultants) is linked to the success or failure of the organization, then this amplifies the impact of any failure. The danger in this is that professional cohesion and cooperation are undermined, and competition can threaten both teamwork and collegial support (Evetts, 2009a, p. 7).

When the organization of work changes, this is bound to impact on the conditions for professionals. For example, a previous study on teachers and nurses found that changes in an organization resulted in changes in intra-professional relations that conflicted with the collective building of a knowledge base (i.e., collegiality decreased) (Jansson & Parding, 2011). Cheetham and Chivers (2001) highlighted the importance of professionals being physically close to colleagues, as this facilitates the development of competence in everyday work. The relationship between intra-professional relations and the physical organization of work can also be linked to issues of space and place; known as labor geography. Herod et al. (2007) claim that



space is as important for social relations as physical geography is constitutive for social praxis. Based on the results of the review, and the above line of argument, we would like to argue that future research should take temporal and spatial dimensions of work into consideration, including the conditions of employment. This is of high importance in examining the conditions surrounding teachers' work, as they relate to current choice agendas (Hanson Thiem, 2009; Herod et al., 2007; Herod, McGrath-Champ, & Rainnie, 2010). Such an approach would help clarify the organization of work and its implications (Rainnie, McGrath-Champ, & Herod, 2010), and if and how different school contexts such as geographical regions equate to different working conditions. Indeed, as professional practice has developed within the frameworks of formal education, training and professional networks and associations, while simultaneously being controlled by government agencies in close collaboration with the profession (Hasenfeld, 1983; Lipsky, 1980; Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2011), it can be claimed that teachers are "located within a cultural milieu that shapes, but does not determine, their choice and behaviors" (Forsey, 2010a, p. 78). It is reasonable to argue that teachers in different school contexts have varying opportunities and constraints, pointing to a diversification of the conditions surrounding teachers' work. In fact, a previous study has discussed teachers' identities as diversified, due to simultaneous and sometimes contradictory changes (Parding, Abrahamsson & Jansson, 2012). More concretely, examining teachers' objective as well as subjective working conditions in different school contexts, including reasons for staying at one location or changing schools, as they relate to current choice, competition, marketization and privatization agendas, is of high relevance.

Adopting a comparative approach is also of relevance when designing studies of teachers' working conditions as one example of the experiences of welfare sector professionals. In fact, few studies provide a general account of occupational changes; most have a rather limited focus such as a single profession or country (Adams, 2015; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2011; Muzio et al., 2008). By comparing professions and nations, future studies could advance our knowledge of professional work with respect to changes in governance. Adams, for example, argue that "more international and comparative work is required to develop a better understanding of professions and professional regulation" (2015, p. 1). Such an approach would help elucidate the interplay between professions and changing welfare states. Although it is difficult to make cross-national comparisons regarding professionals due to historical, social, cultural and economic differences (Forsey, Davies, & Walford, 2008), such comparisons are beneficial as examining cases that are similar in certain respects but different in others helps define the problem and identify areas for improvement (Burau, 2007). One highly practical way forward would be to apply the typology developed by Bejerot and Hasselbladh (2013); they identified five types of interventions when examining reforms in public sector organizations—political interventions, interventions by laws and regulations, interventions by audits and inspections, interventions by management and interventions by rationalizing professional practice. Comparative studies could potentially also assist in identifying temporal and spatial aspects and their relevance.

To move forward, we argue that it is highly worthwhile to examine more closely teachers' working conditions through the organization of work in their specific contexts, taking into consideration temporal and spatial aspects. By doing so, the diversified labor market for welfare sector professionals can be scrutinized in more detail, and a more diversified picture can be unveiled, reflecting current changes in the provision of welfare sector services.

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