

## ARTICLES

# Educating Police Officers in Sweden – All about Making Meaning

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## Abstract

*This article discusses the rarely investigated learning processes of Swedish intra-professional police educators: police teachers, police supervisors and police field training officers. Through the interpretation of three interview studies conducted from a theoretical perspective of experiential learning, reflection and meaning-making, a new understanding of professional development as viewed through the eyes of an educator emerges. The findings exemplify how the empowerment of positive, reflexive and creative intentions amongst intra-professional police educators can be seen as an important component of preparing new police officers as well as developing the Swedish police force. Moreover, it will be implied that this particular process is driven by both intrinsic (the internal drive of the educators) and extrinsic (the educational context of the Swedish police) forces.*

**Keywords:** meaning-making, police education, police educators, professional development, reflexivity.

## 1 Introduction

Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1)

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During the past 20 years, research and the literature regarding occupational and professional education have concerned, among other issues, professional development and professionalization, frequently from a learner-oriented and lifelong-learning perspective (Swennen et al., 2010). Hence, as the idea of transferring occupational knowledge from person to person has increasingly been regarded as obsolete, internship education through pedagogies of supervision, e.g. enabling and empowering processes within the new professionals (Cutcliffe et al., 2001; Tveiten & Severinsson, 2006), seems to have evolved during the past few decades (Lauvås & Handal, 2001; Tveiten, 2010). A common issue in contemporary studies on police education is the importance of developing a reflexive ability to be a professional and durable police officer (Chan et al., 2003; Rantatalo & Karp, 2016). The literature regarding current model of police education and training also reveals a shift toward a modern process-oriented and reflexive education in several countries within a changing society (Chan et al., 2003; Cox, 2011; Paoline III et al., 2000). Intra-professional educators (e.g. police officers educating new police officers) have been somewhat neglected in the literature, with some exceptions (Bowers, 2006; de Ruyter & Kole, 2010). Presumably, these educators have an important role in a process-oriented learning method, especially due to the socialization phenomena frequently described in worldwide research regarding the police occupation (Chan et al., 2003; Crank, 2004; Lauritz & Karp, 2013).

The main actors in this article, police teachers (PTs), police supervisors (PSs) and field training officers (FTOs) in Sweden, have the mutual task of educating new police officers and hence preparing them for a complex occupation. However, due to the varied education-related preparations, these three groups of police educators seem to perform their task with various preconditions in a constantly revised and developed Swedish police education environment (Bergman, 2009). Thus, the aim of this article is to describe and analyse how the conceptions of Swedish intra-professional police educators, as derived from three different studies, can be understood from a theoretical frame of learning through experience. The results and implications in this article can vitalize the discussion about how police educators, in both Sweden and other countries, can be better prepared to fulfil their educational assignment of creating capable and ethical police officers. Furthermore, the view of professional development through a reflexive approach can be applied to other similar occupations and professions.

## 2 Issues in police education

One of the pioneers in describing both the police culture and police training was Van Maanen (1975). He presented a snapshot of American police trainers' punishment of undesirable behaviour – an example of socialization into the street-cop tradition of avoiding getting into trouble and therefore doing as little as possible. This slowly broke down the motivation for the police mission among the new police officers:

The degrading nature of the recruits' role during the Academy's stress training serves to detach the newcomer from his old attitudes, resulting in a scaling down of high but unrealistic attitudes about the department. Hence, the Academy impresses upon the recruit that he must now identify with the new group – his fellow patrolmen. (Van Maanen, 1975, p. 222)

Van Maanen (1975) argued that this may have created an ideal of inactivity and led the so-called 'super cops' ('Gung-Hos') to become low ranked. Thus, loyalty to colleagues became more important than loyalty to the mission of the police was. The passive ideal and the waning motivation have also been confirmed by Swedish researchers such as Granér (2004) and Holgersson (2005). Another pioneer, Fielding (1988), similarly explained how new police officers are left to fend for themselves to a large extent. The instructors (tutor constables, TCs) who accompanied the probationers in their first faltering steps as police officers also ended up caught between their own cultures and their educational missions. Despite this, the task of educating recruits developed them as police officers, although in many cases they had to find their own training methods. Fielding suggested, therefore, that police training should be modernized so as to bridge the gap between education and police culture.

White and Heslop (2012) identified different patterns in professional education concerning teachers, nurses and police officers in the UK. Teacher educators define their teaching practice as 'educating', and nursing educators, who are closer to the professional context, also speak highly of caring and education to legitimize the nursing profession. Police trainers, however, feel somewhat disoriented in the university, and academic police training is not highly regarded inside the police organisation. White and Heslop explained this phenomenon as the idea that the police college's theoretically based curriculum provides, or 'accessorizes', police students with the knowledge, as a complement to what is perceived as the police profession's more important and practical concept of training (White & Heslop, 2012). The gap or mistrust between police practice and academic research regarding police work is also well known in the police research field (Campbell, 2009; White & Heslop, 2012). However, the knowledge generated and skills of everyday policing are often neglected, and hence there is a need to further develop research regarding how good police work is conceived of among practitioners (Willis & Mastrofski, 2016).

Several studies on learning in police training and policing in Australia have revealed different views of knowledge and learning (Campbell, 2009; Chan et al., 2003; Tyler & McKenzie, 2011, 2014). These authors produced partly similar conclusions regarding ambitions among Australian police to renew themselves through student-focused pedagogy, counteracting the obsolete watch-and-learn training method (Campbell, 2009). Tyler and McKenzie (2014) came to comparable conclusions, implying that the FTOs within the Australian police, due to insufficient training in pedagogy, create their own personal teaching models based on the probationers achievements and the FTOs' own experiences from their probationer time. Tyler and McKenzie (2014) also implied that the professional development during the internship part of the training program is limited, mainly due to an

absence of time to question and reflect, and they argued in favour of changes towards a more modern model of education.

Once it is recognized that definitions of 'good police work' cannot be divorced from actual police work – providing policing service to citizens rather than some heroic vision of crime fighting – it is not difficult to formulate models of best practice. (Chan et al., 2003, p. 316)

Moreover, Chan et al. (2003) revealed that the structural realignment towards problem-oriented policing may have affected the partly outdated perception of good police work and the professional learning that was still occurring in police work. They implied that new police officers want to fit in and adapt, but through student-focused and problem-based education, they can act as change agents working towards a modern police culture. However, the FTOs who follow the police probationers during the internship period of the program have a major impact on the probationers' learning processes in the field. These instructors may be agents of an inherited destructive police culture, but they are also at the forefront of a new and more modern police force (Chan et al., 2003).

In the wake of Chan et al. (2003), Karp and Stenmark (2011) identified a similar phenomenon in the Swedish police training culture. By applying a frame-factor theory, they proposed a four-field model that can describe the various and sometimes contradictory forces to which aspiring police officers are exposed during their socialization processes. One axis consists of 'conservative' to 'innovative' forces, and the other axis describes 'occupation' and 'training' as opposites. Regarding other Swedish research on socialization and police training, Ekman (1999), Granér (2004) and Stenmark (2005) confirmed the strong process of socialization into police culture and described how principles of seniority come before knowledge and how social control encourages a closed culture. In this way, police knowledge pours down to the new police officers via water cooler conversations and informal leaders, and the street officers seem to be noticeably unaffected by the official leadership and policies (Ekman, 1999). However, the socialization that new police officers undergo has positive aspects. Many people seek the police occupation because they desire a strong social community and camaraderie at work, which they hope to find in the police force (Lauritz, 2009). Thus, socialization into a positive and constructive culture can presumably empower individual actors through the construction of a reflective consciousness and thus be a tool for change and the development of ethics and practice (Chan et al., 2003).

Two Swedish studies have also described how reflective activities are implemented at the police academy. Bek (2012) argued that, from the perspective of experiential learning theory (ELT) (Kolb et al., 2001), reflection was encouraged, but the teachers submitted to the students themselves to run processes and to achieve deeper reflections. Rantatalo and Karp (2016) painted a similar picture of how collective reflection in Swedish police training can be interpreted, but they drew different conclusions by identifying three types of reflective processes: polyphonic, dialogic and specular. According to Rantatalo and Karp, depth in

reflections can be achieved when a person can develop his or her ideas in monologue form (mirroring) without others who are participating in the call, in addition to listening.

Summing up issues in police education, all forms of individual and collective reflection have been topics in police education, both historically and contemporarily. Structured and teacher-directed, as well as unstructured and self-regulated, reflective activities are increasingly taking place in worldwide police education to create a more ethical and responsible police culture.

### 3 Theoretical perspective

John Dewey claimed that experiences gain meaning when they are reflected upon, and reflecting on activities is crucial in professional learning (Dewey, 1933/1998). The epigraph from Mezirow (1990) exemplified in the same line of argument how reflection can challenge taken-for-granted belief systems by allowing one to reflect on preconditions and hence create new meaning. Schön (1983) followed the footsteps of Dewey and used the concept of 'the reflective practitioner', which focuses on professional development by experimenting and 'reflection-on-action', rather than leaning on theories (Fendler, 2003). Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004) developed the concept of reflection-on-action into the concept of 'reflexivity' as an interactive process where the whole context should be involved in understanding learning in occupational settings. In the same line of argument, Moon (2004) presented a model of how to use reflection in professional situations, building on two case studies. The model includes four phases: (1) developing an awareness of the nature of current practice, (2) clarifying the new learning and how it relates to the current understanding, (3) integrating new learning with current practice and (4) anticipating or imagining the nature of improved practice<sup>1</sup> (Moon, 2004, p. 180).

Concerning the historical perspective, Lauvås and Handal (2001) described the process of qualification for an occupation through an apprentice system. A disadvantage of the apprentice system is the tendency to preserve professional practices which consequently leads to limited space for innovation and development (Lauvås & Handal, 2001). However, during the past two decades, vocational and professional education and training have increasingly focused on theoretical education as a foundation for understanding the professional context, combined with subsequent internship field training. The main aim in this system is to create a constantly learning and flexible professional (Lauvås & Handal, 2001). Nevertheless, in this contemporary approach, a gap may emerge between the theory of practice and actual practice, which can be an obstacle in the introduction of a new professional. To counteract this possible effect, vocational and professional education and training have increasingly emphasized professional supervision, under which the theory of practice and actual practice can be developed (Lauvås &

1 In this study, phases three and four were combined into an empirically adapted phase three (see Conclusive Discussion).

Handal, 2001). Furthermore, as Handal et al. (1990) and Lauvås and Handal (2001) put forward, well-performed supervision with a reflexive approach from both interns and supervisors can, apart from developing the theory of practice, also balance the interdependent relation between these two actors (cf. Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Sundli & Söndén, 2007).

The ideas of Dewey and followers concerning the importance of well-prepared and conscious educators who can empower an adequate learning process, were used as a theoretical perspective in understanding the empirical data in this study.

#### 4 The context of Swedish police education

The last main revision of Swedish police education occurred in 1998, when a problem-based and process-oriented programme of two and a half years, including six months of internship training, was introduced. The general goals in the national syllabus for Swedish police education state that a police student after two years of studies shall be able to:

- Make independent and critical judgments;
- Independently identify, formulate and solve problems;
- Meet changes in working life;
- Seek and evaluate scientific knowledge in the police field;
- Stay up to date with the development of knowledge in the police field.

(Polishögskolan, 2014, p. 2)

These goals reveal how a modern and well-educated police officer shall be defined. The word ‘independent’ is used in two of the goals, and the others present a picture of a good and able police officer with certain academic knowledge along with adequate practical skills. Regarding this, it is easy to picture a broadly educated police officer who is able to work independently and take personal responsibility for his or her practice and judgments (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2012).

During the period of time when the studies included in this paper were conducted, the Swedish Police Basic Training Programme consisted of two years of police basic training in an academy setting at three different locations: Umeå, Växjö and Stockholm. The basic training programme included learning activities concerning theoretical knowledge, e.g. behavioural science, basic life support and practical skills such as gun training, arresting techniques and self-defence methods, computer systems and radio systems. In the police academy setting, the police teacher was assigned to teach by integrating theories with practice through leading seminars and practices, and assessing the students, e.g. an intra-professional role (Bowers, 2006; de Ruyter & Kole, 2010). Furthermore, the police teacher was preferably selected from the police supervisors, who had a 25-day-long course in supervising and pedagogy. However, the majority of the police teachers who was interviewed for this paper did not have an education in pedagogy or similar preparation.



The two years for police students on campus were concluded with a six-month internship period (*polisaspirantutbildning*) as a probationer police officer (*polisaspirant*) with full police authority. During the internship period, the police supervisor (*aspiranthandledare*) had the main responsibility of supervising and assessing the probationer for six months, whereas the FTO (*aspirantinstruktör*) followed the probationer more closely in actual police work as a learning support for two to eight weeks and completed the assessment task as well. At the time of the studies, the supervisors and FTOs received no extra salary benefits for this task, but the supervisors were granted a few hours during their ordinary work schedules to fulfil the assignment. At the time of the study, the FTOs were not offered a national education or preparation, but some big city regions provided a one-day course in preparing the FTOs.

## 5 Methods

This article is based on empirical data from three concluded studies. Here follows a description of the included data and the design of this study.

### 5.1 *The included studies and data*

The first study (Bergman, 2009) aimed to describe the police teachers' learning processes. Focus group interviews gave the police teachers the opportunity to challenge and extend one another's ideas and even to introduce new perspectives to one another, which helped them to go deeper in their conceptions of the educator role. The focus groups were voluntarily selected and consisted of equal numbers of men and women representing a range of amounts of time in the police force. Though they operated in three different academy locations, they also represented big city regions as well as small town police contexts.

The aim of the second study (Bergman, 2017a) was to describe and interpret the learning processes of the police supervisors as a case study. Therefore, course evaluations from all police supervisor courses (PSCs) in 2014 (N=58) were combined with longitudinal focus group sessions executed with four PSC participants in 2014. The informants in the focus group sessions were voluntarily selected and consisted of three women and one man from four different police regions and with five to fifteen years' experience as police officers in the police force. Though the PSC was national, the course evaluations concerned 58 police officers from all regions in Sweden, presumably with equal numbers of men and women who represented a large range of years and tasks in the police force.

Finally, the aim of the third study (Bergman, 2017b) was to investigate the FTOs' articulation of conceptions, relations and creating meaning. Hence, an interview study with a qualitative and exploratory methodology was used. Through individual in-depth interviews with 10 voluntarily selected FTOs, five women and five men from four urban regions in Sweden, a rich collection of material emerged. The interviews allowed the FTOs to articulate conceptions, reflections, meta-reflections, opinions and knowledge about the FTO task and about police work in general.

Table 1 below shows an overview of the data derived from the three different studies included in this paper.

**Table 1**      *Data overview*

Study	Method	Groups and sessions		Total time	Pages
1. Police teachers (2006-2007)	Focus group interviews: 4 participants from 4 different educating settings	3 groups, session 1 & 2 1 group, session 1 <sup>a</sup>	13 (11 <sup>b</sup> )	11 hours and 40 minutes	161
2. Police supervisors (2014)	Course evaluations: Police Supervisor Course	-	58	-	21
	Focus group interviews: 4 participants	1 group, session 1, 2 & 3 (longitudinal)	4 <sup>c</sup>	4 hrs. 11 min.	96
3. FTOs (2015)	Individual in-depth interviews	-	10	12 hrs. 56 min.	288

<sup>a</sup> Only one session with one focus group and two participants.

<sup>b</sup> 13 participants in session 1 and 11 in session 2.

<sup>c</sup> Is included in the 58 above.

5.2 Interpretation and analysis

In executing a comprehensive study that included all three studies on Swedish police educators, a three-level interpretation model was constructed following Alvesson and Sköldb​erg (Alvesson & Sköldb​erg, 2008, 2009).

At the first level, the researchers made primary interpretations of how the interviewees interpreted the questions and what initially seemed interesting, surprising and understandable in the eyes of the researchers, e.g. through the researchers' transcription process (Alvesson & Sköldb​erg, 2008). At the next level of interpretation, adjacent research was used to reveal different repertoires and possible alternative interpretations of the empirical data.

Finally, a critical self-reflection was performed from a methodological and theoretical perspective, which is the third level in the reflexive interpretation process. In this particular study, the researchers' bias in their views on knowledge and sympathy in light of the complexity and demands that the police educators had to deal with, was disclosed. Acknowledgement and comprehension of this phenomenon empowered the process of evaluating, choosing and interpreting quotes according to the views presented and the conclusive results that gradually emerged (Alvesson & Sköldb​erg, 2008).

This process of interpretation revealed data in three themes that emerged in relation to the given theoretical framework. Although Dewey (1933/1998), Mezirow (1990), Moon (2004) and others emphasized the importance of reflexivity



in order to make meaning in professional learning, we searched for conceptions which accentuated reflection and meta-reflection. For example, one quote from a police teacher, 'when you get to look over this mission once more, it strikes you what a multifaceted and difficult task the police mission really is', clearly shows a reflexive conception and approach. This kind of elucidating quote was then organised in several different themes, which finally were condensed into three themes connected to the aim of the paper that emerged.

Concerning the credibility and generalizability of this article, some circumstances need to be put forward. First, different kinds of validity exist in qualitative research: descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, generalizable and self-authenticating validity (Cohen et al., 2011, pp. 181-182). This means that data must be authentic, interpreted in an accurate way and set against an adequate theoretical framework that explains the phenomena exposed in the study. By being transparent about the exploratory process and exposing several quotes for the reader to interpret, we aimed to increase credibility and hence show that we had not adjusted data in line with an already-chosen theoretical framework (Creswell, 2014). Regarding generalizability, the persons chosen for interviewing may not fully represent the majority of the Swedish police force, as not everyone has the drive to take on the role of an educationist or to participate in a research project (Larsson, 2009). Moreover, the data included were collected over a ten-year period, and we will comment on this particular circumstance in the conclusion section. However, we believe that the claim of this study, as described in the introduction section, is equivalent to that of the related research and the empirical material presented. Thus, this article can be seen as one piece of the jigsaw puzzle (Larsson, 2009) in the Swedish police education context.

### 5.2.1 *Ethical considerations*

The participating police educators were treated in line with the research ethics in social science research. This means consent, anonymity and the use of the empirical data were explained and considered in this article (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). Moreover, the benefits of participation in the interviews very much outweighed the potential harm of attending the interview sessions (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 443).

## 6 Findings

In this study, the findings were thematised on the basis of the given analysis model described in 4.2. The themes were constructed to present shared conceptions amongst police teachers, police supervisors and FTOs. Moreover, the selection of quotes and comments in this section was intended to work as the foundation for a discussion from a professional learning point of view.

### 6.1 *Change of perspective – personal development*

I think that you easily get into a perfunctory state of mind out there; you solve your tasks in the most appropriate and fastest way, sort of. Later [In the role of

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a police teacher] when you get to look over this mission once more, it strikes you what a multifaceted and difficult task the police mission really is. And what enormous pressure this fact puts on the one who is supposed to convey all of this. (Police teacher, PT)

This quote exposes a glimpse of how the police educator task created a helicopter vision regarding the educator role as well as the police role overall. What is strikingly mutual between the different groups of educators is the conception of the education task as personal development. In the encounter with the police student, the police probationer as well as colleagues in courses and in the field, educators develop new perspectives on themselves as police officers and on police work in general. They also assemble new tools for solving ordinary police cases:

I think I have become a person who values theoretical knowledge at a higher level. Not at the expense of practical judgment, but more like seeing the interaction between practical and theoretical knowledge and to see the possibilities with it. ... As if I were a carpenter, I have only used the hammer before. But now, I have found a lot of other tools as well. (PT)

The PSC contained several activities with reflections and discussions with the other participants, which seem to be important in professional development:

... we have sort of been forced into thinking what I believe is important in the police occupation, and what I think about myself as a police officer. (PS)

Several of the police supervisors also expressed in the interviews as well as in the course evaluations that one important outcome of the PSC is personal development:

What I have learned about myself (PS)

The FTO was expected to ride (or sit) with the probationer and was to facilitate adequate field training in acute police work, crime investigations and traffic assignments. He or she was a part of the learning process at the side of the probationer, clearly providing the FTO an opportunity to explore his or her strengths and weaknesses as an experienced police officer:

Taking on a probationer is a learning process, because you need to dust off your old law book in order explain the basis of judgement to them [probationers]. (FTO)

The quotes in this theme show that the educator task has had a major impact on how the police educators see themselves as professionals. The whole data set clearly shows that personal and professional development is a major consequence of the meaning-making in educating new police officers.

### 6.2 *Individual and collective meaning-making*

When comparing the interview data, a picture of how a learning and meaning-making process took place from both an individual and a collective perspective emerged. By taking on a reflexive approach, the police educators developed themselves as individuals and as police officers in a supposedly reciprocal relation with the supervisor and the probationer:

... well, you have got an opportunity to develop yourself and reflect on your own work and on how you act in different situations. It is kind of like you get to put your own values at stake, with help from the probationer ... getting supervised yourself simultaneously. That it's how I perceive it, anyway. (PS)

Furthermore, in the absence of pedagogical training, the police teachers empowered their learning processes by talking with other teachers, supervisors and colleagues:

I got it by discussing with other teachers. I mean since I wondered so very much about how I was going to relate [to the educator task], I tried to absorb everything I could, just by talking to others and being there when they taught and watching and I would take in whatever I could ... (PT)

However, one of the FTOs presented a situation in which collective meaning-making could be a downward spiral with a heritage of ignorant pedagogy. This seemed to be due to poor preparation and the bad selection of FTOs in the context of strong socialization:

... if somebody who is not secure in his role tries to teach somebody who is not particularly secure in his role, tries to teach a new probationer who is not particularly secure in the role, you know it gets a bit stiff, as though you don't see the whole picture of police work. (FTO)

All in all, taking the opportunity to reflect upon oneself and interact with others could in some cases compensate for the lack of educator training (in FTOs) or complete existing educator training (in police supervisors). Many of the informants also described how the educator task, and the effects of this task, made them more professional police officers in general and in some cases better human beings.

### 6.3 *A professional educator*

Another mutual phenomenon in the empirical data is the growing reflexive attitude towards themselves as police educators. Hence, to take on a critical approach was a virtue among a majority of the interviewees. In some cases, the research interview was the first time they had explicitly defined themselves as educators. In this theme, the FTOs receive more space due to their specific preconditions related to their task, and they also reveal discrepancies in their conceptions of their task.

One example is how a police teacher described his change of behaviour in the classroom, from giving answers to providing a critical and student-oriented environment:

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I'm more active and offensive in a way, I mean not like I am bouncing their questions ... It is more like me asking the questions instead of them. They are the learners and they are supposed to answer questions later on examinations, and answer questions in the role of the police. (PT)

In a similar way, a supervisor exposed a new approach as an educator, clearly separated from the role of a police officer:

The insight is that the supervisor (me) has a very important role in making the probationer feel safe and being able to perform. The role also contains assessment, the importance of assessment is crucial. (PS)

The fact that a majority of the FTOs had not received any preparation or education was revealed in the interviews. In articulating this situation, a frustrated FTO emerged:

... colleagues having probationers at the moment don't have a clue of what is being assessed. Maybe some supervisor has been in contact with some FTO, to get some kind of assessment, but I know it is lots of insufficiencies. (FTO)

The FTOs who did not receive any preparation or education before the task had great difficulty calling themselves educators or teachers:

Well, I would call myself more like a mentor. She [the FTO] is the person, the probationer knows that, 'I can always go to her'. (FTO)

Another FTO expressed the same hesitation, and when the follow-up question of "Why?" was put forward, the response was as follows:

Because I don't feel that I have an education to educate. (FTO)

However, this situation may have stimulated a dedicated FTO into a reflexive mode in which he was able to reconsider the educator role as well as the typical police officer:

... I mean police officers usually show an image of eagerness, like you want to be first and sort of catch thieves and stuff. As an FTO you are expected to take a step back, and if you have had six probationers it becomes like a personality thing, that you fall into that FTO role and take a step back. This can even occur with colleagues, when you're in a patrol car. I mean of course you don't treat them as a probationer, but still you let them take initiative in occasional situations. (FTO)

To sum up the themes in the findings section, the results showed how taking on educator roles affected the participants' conceptions of being professional police educators as well as being good police officers. The results also clearly indicate the

importance of the collective and interactive aspects of preparation (or lack of preparation) for the educator task. In the conclusive discussion section, the findings will be illuminated in the light of the theoretical perspective and adjacent research.

## 7 Conclusive discussion

Based on the presumption that learning is a meaning-making process (Dewey, 1933/1998; Mezirow, 1990) the police teachers, police supervisors and FTOs in this study showed that they try to create an understanding of and create meaning in their education task. The empirical data disclosed how police educators gained new perspectives on themselves and their occupation, in addition to insights into the role of an educator. This was facilitated as a result of the distance to the police profession that the education mission entailed, as though the student's/probationer's learning should be in focus (see Dewey, 1998, p. 36). The meaning-making process of the police educators can also be connected to the modified learning model in three phases, based on Moon (2004): (1) illuminate and understand current practice, (2) change perspective, and (3) make conscious choices and predict future practice as a professional educator.

The interviews revealed that the three different groups of Swedish police educators had disparate preconditions before their task. This becomes visible in the light of Moon's model, where the FTOs, due to their lack of education, had a longer path to phase three. Related to the implications of Campbell (2009), Tyler and McKenzie (2011, 2014), and Chan (2003), the FTOs faced a certain risk of alienation and stagnation, as though they had not been provided with the appropriate tools to fully comprehend their preconditions. However, driven by the urge to develop themselves and others, several of the FTOs found their own ways of making their task more meaningful (cf. Fielding, 1988). Undoubtedly, the FTOs have a very important task in the introduction of a new police officer and there is a need to prepare the FTOs better for their role as educators as well as to improve their preconditions for this task in general (Tyler & McKenzie, 2014).

Concerning the better-prepared police teachers and police supervisors, they can more easily articulate the professional and personal development that the educator task and their preparation (such as the PSC) have facilitated. However, the included data covers a ten-year period wherein a changing society has further complicated the police task. A relevant question could in this sense concern whether the police teachers in 2007 dwell in the same context as the police supervisors and FTOs. As mentioned in the introduction, the quantity of research and knowledge regarding the education of police officers has simultaneously increased over the years. Moreover, the extrinsic force of a growing process-orientated view on learning police work is more developed in recent research literature, suggesting that there is an increasing focus on resilience and ethical professionalism among police forces (Chan et al., 2003; Rantatalo & Karp, 2016). The revised Swedish police education programme introduced in 1998, with its increased focus on individual professionalism, may also have had a greater

impact on the police organization in 2014-2015. Hence, the police teachers' conceptions in 2006-2007 can more readily be identified as intrinsic drives in times of a changing view on learning to be police officers, compared to the more enlightened context of the police supervisors and the FTOs providing education in 2014-2015. This shift in the learning paradigm is also accentuated in the presented literature on supervising pedagogy, where a reflective and meta-cognitive approach may counteract professional stagnation and cynicism (Lauvås & Handal, 2001; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Tveiten, 2010). Although we do not have empirical data to prove that connection, it seems most likely that a supposedly more reflexive professional context in 2014-2015 has opened space for further meta-reflections among the police supervisors and FTOs.

### *7.1 The quest for arenas for collective reflexivity and organized counselling*

As the analysis showed, the intra-professional police educators conveyed that the opportunity to collectively reflect on police work and police education under safe conditions (cf. Ohlsson, 2013) has been central in meaning-making and professional development of police educators as well as police officers (cf. Agevall & Jenner, 2006). In this sense, these police educators may be important actors in the process of developing capable, ethical, and motivated police officers as lifelong learners in a changing society.

In the research interviews, the police supervisors and the FTOs also articulated how police officers in the field find opportunities to teach one another as craftsmen, and at the same time to defuse and debrief. This seems to spontaneously occur in the form of small talk in patrol cars, between two tasks, and in brake rooms and locker rooms (cf. Ekman, 1999; Lundin & Nulden, 2007). The conversations can be regarded as communicative arenas (cf. Fransson, 2006) where police officers can collectively create new meaning and knowledge of a performed task: How did we solve it? What alternatives did we have? How did it feel? What would have happened if...? One interviewee claimed that this process can take several days, as it is periodically interrupted by other assignments. These conversations can be considered important arenas for experiential and professional learning, and they can be reinforced by a reflexive approach amongst the new as well as the experienced police officers (Chan et al., 2003; Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004; Dewey, 1933/1998; Orland-Barak, 2006). By connecting the small-talk arenas to reflexivity and to the implications of Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003), we argue that when more arenas are provided to do just that, stagnation can be counteracted, and hence professional development can be empowered. The need to reflect is also indicated by the fact that some of the FTOs interviewees, i.e. those who had not been provided with neither information or education, claimed that the interview sessions were the first time they had had the opportunity to think about, reflect on and articulate. Connecting to the implications of Willis and Mastrofski (2016) this opportunity to reflect can also open up an interest among police officers regarding development of individual knowledge and skills.

However, it was revealed in the interviews that certain police regions in Sweden already offer professional group counselling, which is very much appreciated and there is official confirmation of this ambition (Polismyndigheten, 2014). Dewey

(1933/1998) and Moon (2004), among others, reminded us of the importance of getting the opportunity to reflect upon our experiences to create meaning and new knowledge in our occupational work, both individually and collectively. Why not use the knowledge and the drive amongst these police educators, especially the neglected FTOs, to develop and empower a complex and struggling profession? This kind of investment could prove to be of more importance than others.

## 8 Limitations

The aim of this article is to explore new ways of understanding police education issues concerning the importance of well-prepared intra-professional educators. We also believe that the given results and implications can work as a contribution to the vocational education field overall. Obviously, we do not claim to present a whole picture from this somewhat limited data, but maybe we can offer new tools and perspectives to inspire further research on professional development and education.

Therefore, we call for further studies on the police education context to explore how police educators are educated and what kind of impact increasing reflexivity among police educators may have on police forces overall.

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