"Separating the Wheat from the Chaff" – Failures in the Practice based Parts of Swedish Teacher Education

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Abstract. The present case study is part of a larger project where the overall ambition is to understand how an organization, through its way of arguing for the failures in student teaching, at the same time constitutes what is accepted as sufficient teacher quality. The article examines the students short comings from the supervisors and teacher educators perspectives. The analysis shows that the indicators of failure include passivity and rigidity, lack of posture, social timing and self-awareness. The indicators can be categorized into two groups of failures, "those that are of too light weight" and "those carrying some weight". Critical for the categorization was the time for the discovery of the short comings as well as the assessors' experiences of hope for development. The result is then set in relation to the on-going discussion in Sweden about the possibility of introducing an aptitude test before admission to teacher education.

Keywords: Student teaching, failures, aptitude tests, teacher education, teacher competence.

Introduction

The expression "to separate the wheat from the chaff" is taken from the Bible and the description of how in ancient times people used a winnowing fork to separate the valuable grains of wheat from husks and straws, by throwing the grain up in the air. The heavy grains of wheat then fell to the ground, while everything that was not heavy enough flew away in the wind. In that context, the separation of what is valuable has a physical quality; the wind decides which is which. But is it possible to use the same method to determine value when deciding quality among teacher candidates; who is suitable and who does not (yet) have enough weight to end up among the grains?

Questions of adequacy, about what qualities are necessary for a teacher, are brought to the fore in teacher education. Partly it deals with the fact that the education (like all other) should have a supportive function where progressive,

formative assessments are made in order to support students' development towards necessary and adequate teacher quality. But teacher education also must address the examining function, where summative assessments are made in order to determine whether sufficient quality has been achieved at a certain time.

Knowledge development and research about the supportive function of teacher education have been rather amply described in scientific contexts over the years (see e.g. Sikula et al. 1996, Association of Teacher Educators 2008, Clandinin & Husu, 2017). Research about the summative function, however, is scarcer (see e.g. Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). In the project "Let the right one out! – teacher training and induction as gate keepers to the teaching profession" we have chosen to explore this relatively unknown territory in order to study some of the questions mentioned above from the perspective of how the lower boundary for acceptable teacher knowledge is drawn during teacher education and the initial time as a professional. The leading questions deal with what indicators are used to argue for a failure, the procedures surrounding a failure and how many students are ultimately failed.

In recent years, the Swedish teacher education has been criticized for not being able to "separate the wheat from the chaff" i.e. for lacking the ability to examine, assess and separate students who are not suitable for the profession. Both leading politicians, the media, trade unions and the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education seem to agree that "many risk slipping through education without necessary knowledge" (DN, 2006). As one of several measures, the government therefore appointed an investigation about the possibility of introducing an aptitude test for students who apply for teacher education. The aim of such test is to weed out the "obviously unsuitable" candidates (Björklund, 2011) from the teaching profession. The government's press release further states: "The tests are to measure educational ability, not opinions or behaviour". This immediately generates questions. How can "educational ability" be separated from "opinions" and "behaviour"? What qualities are included in the desirable "suitability"?

In this section we try to relate actual examples of failures in placement studies during teacher training to the question of the introduction of aptitude tests. Is it possible, with support from these examples, to discover options to detect teacher students that will not be able to achieve sufficient teacher quality after completed teacher education already before they start their education? Can shortcomings be discovered already "from the start", as the Minister of Education argued when the mission to launch an investigation about aptitude tests was made public?

I have met quite a lot of teacher educators and principals who can say: 'This person should never have been accepted; we knew it from the start.' But there was no instrument to discourage or separate (Björklund,2011).

The starting point of the study is nine cases of failures during placement studies in teacher training (which was the total number of failures at the chosen university during one semester). The descriptions are based on interviews with the students' day-to-day supervisors during placement studies, the teachers from the university (hereinafter referred to as teacher educators) who visited the students in order to assess their teacher competence as, those responsible for the entire placement studies course, as well as the administrative staff at the university responsible for handling the failures. We have also studied the documents created in connection with so-called "counselling out" (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008) or "dissuasive dialogues" i.e. talks with students who have received a fail grade. There is, however, one perspective that we have avoided consistently and consciously: the students'. Our study is not about individuals or their failures, but deals with how the concept "insufficient teacher quality" is constructed through arguments in relation to practical actions and how a training mission is handled by an organisation.

Background
From entrance exams to dissuasive dialogues - selection of students in Swedish teacher education
A person with documented study ability and necessary prior knowledge is eligible for higher education in Sweden. This eligibility is usually expressed in terms of range and level of a certain completed upper secondary school education and the principle is based on the assumption that the grades from the lower educational level are a guarantee for a certain level of knowledge. Herein also lays an assumption that upper secondary school studies, in a more general way, prepare the student for higher education. The two traditional selective instruments, an upper secondary school diploma or the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test, are presumed to prognosticate study ability as well as overall suitability for further studies. Both therefore focus primarily on "scholastic" or intellectual aspects. For educations where "talent" or "aptitude" can be regarded as an additional requirement for eligibility (this has for example applied to artistic educations) an alternative admission procedure can be carried out through specific tests. The underlying argument is that this "talent/aptitude" cannot be developed through education, but must exist already from the start. In these instances, teachers who teach at the programmes in question most often assess students' aptitude, and it may be regarded as an initial examination. The instruments used to make such a selection differ. They may be samples, knowledge tests or pure personality tests.

The latter type of admission tests goes far back in the history of selection for teacher education. Practically anyone who had completed the older grade school, with an approved/complete school-leaving certificate was eligible for the 19th century elementary and junior school teacher seminars (Sjöberg, 2006). However, an important step towards being accepted was that one – from the 1880s – also passed the examinations of each seminar. The aim was naturally – then and now–to be able to separate "the wheat from the chaff", to make an assessment of who were "suitable". Initial demands were being of the right age (16-26 years) and not being burdened by physical defects.

From the end of the1800s and up until 1948, tests were designed to test "maturity and aptitude" as well as knowledge and skills in a number of subjects. In the early 1950s, most seminars introduced a specific aptitude test, consisting of three parts. The first consisted of writing an essay, which should reflect the applicant's personality. The second was a test in oral presentation, where the applicant's "general maturity" and suitability for the education and profession could be assessed. The test was also designed to show whether the person in question was burdened with "flaws or peculiarities" that made her/him unsuitable as a teacher. In the third part, the applicant was put in an educational situation to independently activate/lead a group of children. The aim was to investigate whether the applicant had the ability to communicate with children. Sjöberg (2006) further describes how the aptitude tests changed in connection with the seminar charter issued in 1958.

The new test also consisted of three parts. The first two consisted of oral presentations of a narrative and descriptive nature. The third part contained a 20-minute-interview, a biographical self-declaration.
In conclusion, one can state that the entrance exams during the first 100 years tried to sort out suitable teacher candidates, who should be "mature", "healthy", and "have an appealing personality" to be able to handle an educational context.

During the 1960s, the discussion of suitability begins to be heavily questioned. Searching for qualities of the good teacher was no longer seen as fruitful or possible (Sjöberg, 2006). In SOU 1965 –the report by experts on teacher education – it is claimed that the selection must change from positive to negative. Instead of trying to "select the more suitable, one should try to find a way to weed out the less suitable".

Separation with blunt tools
In connection to the university reform of 1977 and the introduction of central admission, the entrance exams were finally removed. The responsibility of assessing the student's professional suitability and quality was transferred to the teacher education. During studies, particularly during practical placement studies, the teacher educators were expected to be able to assess these things, as well as having the tools to stop unsuitable and incompetent candidates from being certified. But this would prove difficult. On both the national and the international arena, researchers (e.g. Raths & Lyman, 2003; Goodwin & Oyler, 2008) state that although teacher educators claim that the short comings in students' academic and practical knowledge are relatively easy to detect, there are also some hard troubles to handle. Formulated criteria and barriers that are put in place tend to be open to interpretation, vague and local, at the same time as treatment is further obscured by weak performances which are increasingly connected to students' diagnosed learning difficulties. In addition laws passed in order to promote equal rights for students and to counteract discrimination contributed in making the practice of failure a dilemma for involved parties (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008).

A nationally noticed article series discuss how a number of reports by students have contributed in teacher educators becoming more careful and how they now think carefully before pointing out a student's shortcomings. Decisions about possible separation turn into protracted processes, which are perceived as time-consuming and tiresome by those involved. "For one student with a problem, it could take 50-100 hours to resolve"(Goodwin & Oyler, 2008, p. 478). The process is described as a type of dissuasive dialogue ("counselling out"), i.e. the teacher educators recommend and negotiate an exit from the education by suggesting alternate exits and possibilities. In terms of the practical parts of the education, Raths and Lyman (2003) claim that the supervisors' and examiners' gradual movement from a formative assessment at the beginning of a placement studies period (with the aim of improving the quality of the student) towards a summative assessment at the end (in order to assess whether the student has achieved sufficient quality) is problematic to handle for the supervisors and hard to understand for the students. "Why was I not told until now?", "Why have you not taught me how to do it?" These offsets may be yet another reason why educators hesitate to fail students. Furthermore, studies of assessment dialogues (Hegender, 2010), when the students' supervisors in placement studies, with the teacher educators, and in some cases the students themselves talk about whether they have shown sufficient competence during placement studies or not, show that the dialogues almost entirely consist of formative, progressive and development oriented assessments – even at the end of the period and even if it is the student's last placement studies.

By the few previous studies, made within this field, one can consequently state that the separating function of teacher education is a complex practice, where tools are crude and blunt and where participants try to create meaning from some conflicting signals. It is possibly in the light of aptitude testing, that some of the selection criteria for admission to teacher education may be about to be reintroduced. A reintroduction of alternate selection tools for teacher education; hence, actualizes the question of how such a tool can be made "sharp", as well as the question of what is actually meant by teacher aptitude, how this can be identified, defined and specified. Just as important is the discussion of what qualities may be discovered "from the beginning" and what may be developed through training.

Quantity of failures

If the number of studies into what indicates a failure in the practical parts of teacher education is fairly small, the scope of studies measuring the number of failed students is nearly non-existent. However, a recently conducted Swedish study (Gardesten and Hegender, 2015) indicates two results. One is that it is problematic to produce information about the actual number of failed students in placement studies (this is also the case in earlier international studies – see e.g. Sudzina, 1993; Raths & Lyman, 2003). The other is that the Swedish average of failed student teachers in placement studies is said to be 2.9%. However, results show that there are relatively large variations between the 19 teacher educations, out of total 25 in Sweden that participated in the study. Results range from 0 to 9%, with an average of 1%. Similarly, 30-year-old studies of the teacher

education in the USA (Johnson & Yates, 1982) in essence show parallel result, i.e. that 20% of all inspected teacher education institutions pass all students, 15% fail approximately one percent of the students and the rest fail less than 1%. A later study (Knudson & Turley, 2000) finds that 10% of student teachers risk failure. However, about ¾ of these rectify their short comings enough to pass the practical parts of the education and are able to complete the programme.

If we look outside teacher education, we find a comprehensive American study (Olkin & Gaughen, 1991) of students in comparable clinical master programmes (studies to become a psychologist, therapist, etc.) Results show that the programmes detect approximately 3% problem students (an average of 3.3%) each year, but very few of these are actually separated from the programmes. Just as in teacher education, they instead use dissuasive dialogues and the majority of students, who are perceived as having problems in the placement studies of their programmes, choose to discontinue their studies. Brear and Dorrian's (2010) study about the education to counsellor show that educators estimate the number of unsuitable students to be about three per class (12%) and further claim that half of these complete their education after all. The rest discontinue their studies on their own initiative.

Gardesten and Hegender (2015) have also asked whether teacher education, during placement studies, fails fewer students than other similar academic vocational programmes. A smaller study was, therefore, conducted on the nursing programme and the programme for social work at one university. The results from this study show that the studied nursing programme accounts for 1% failed students, while the programme for social work accounts for 0.7%. These two programmes thus fail fewer students than what is done on average in teacher education.

Methodology
As earlier mentioned, the present case study (Yin, 2006) is part of a larger project where the overall ambition is to understand how an organization, through its way of arguing around indicators and through the processes created and recreated, generates meaning and constitutes what is accepted as sufficient teacher quality. The focus of the article is, however, focused on a more limited issue: What indicators are described as crucial for the decision to fail teacher students in the internship practice? The analysis of the empirical examples will then be discussed in relation to the opportunities to determine, already before entering the teacher education, which of the students that will not be able to achieve sufficient teacher quality. During one semester, we followed up all students that were failed during the practice placement at one university organizing teacher education. The cases were taken from all orientations within teacher education, from programmes educating teacher candidates for pre-school to upper secondary school, and the students were at different stages in their studies. We interviewed the local supervisors (in the results referred to as "supervisors"), visiting university teachers (in the results referred to as "examiners") as well as those responsible for the entire placement studies (in the results referred to as "course coordinators"). All interviews were recorded. All

documentation surrounding these cases was also collected. After completed data collection, the cases were anonymized. Only age, gender and final results were assigned to each case and kept as data in the analysis. In the presentation of quotations, we have randomly changed pronouns and school forms. We have also pieced together statements and removed specific traits with the intention that none of the students should be identifiable.

The methodological ambition of the study is explorative and descriptive, with the aim of providing research in the field of narrative examples. The research process has been characterized by analytical induction (Hartman, 1998) in which the following moments - planning, collection and analysis - have been conducted linearly and sequentially and guided by the relationship between the initial question (What indicates insufficient teacher quality?) and the problem that concerns what an aptitude test can measure ("educational ability, opinions or behaviour"). Coding and interpretation have been conducted in a process that characterizes a so-called constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through repeated readings of the stories and through comparisons between five researchers' individual coding and interpretations, key indicators of failures were identified. Based on comparisons between these categories, the relevant characteristics of these were generated.

Although the cases are few and the results, in a traditional positivistic scientific perspective, hardly are generalizable we believe that the findings still can contribute to an accumulated knowledge base in the area. "Case studies can be part of a growing pool of data with multiple case studies contributing to greater generalizability" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, in the absence of research findings in the relevant field, findings are also related to previous studies in a slightly broader field: summative assessment of skills in vocational education in human services.

By comparisons between indicators in the different cases, we have formed categories and produced relevant themes. The aim is not to portray the individual students, but to create a synthesis of lessons to be drawn from the different cases, in order to develop knowledge about the question of the study: Is it possible, from these examples, to say something about the possibility of determining already before the start of teacher training which students will not achieve sufficient teacher quality?

Results
"Those who are too light weight" and "Those carrying some weight"
During the time period in question, nine cases of failures were reported at the university where the study was conducted. Failures were defined as cases where students' course marks had been reported as failed. There is much indication that there may be more cases of students who have not yet passed (Gardesten & Hegender, 2015), but that these are in different ways "hidden". The students may not be marked at all before being given a chance to repeat their placement studies or being given a chance to "catch up" on certain uncompleted parts. Of the nine cases studied, there are seven women and two men. Six out of the nine are between ages 20-25, while the other three are over 30 years old. Recent

studies in the area are rare. However, some older studies (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993; Sudzina et. al., 1997) show that men are over represented in cases of failure, as are older students. The latter group tends to "hang on" to the education longer, despite setbacks. The range of our selection does not let us draw any conclusions about whether gender or age is connected to failure in placement studies.

Fairly soon, we were able to establish that the majority of cases (eight) fall into two categories, which we have chosen to call *those who are too light weight* (four cases) and *those carrying some weight* (four cases)[1]. In the group we have chosen to call *those who are too light weight,* informant's state that teacher students lack what is described as the "necessary" weight, the fundamental aptitude perceived necessary in order to become a teacher/preschool teacher. Further education seems to play no key role here:

> Interviewer: What would you say about the chances of these two… making it during their next repeated placement studies?
>
> Examiner: I find it hard to believe that one of them… Eh… Will make it… Actually…

Even though the informants do not mention the word "hopeless" and tone down their statements to the best of their abilities, it is clear that they have little hope that the students will be able to develop necessary qualities and competencies during their education:

> Interviewer: Does she stand a chance?
>
> Supervisor: (Long silence… Inhales) Eh… (Sighs) Well… (Laughs)

The category *those carrying some weight* also consists of four cases. Although these students show lacking knowledge, resulting in failure, informants claim that they still display a trace of heart, a certain degree of aptitude and a possibility of acquiring necessary competence/ sufficient qualities within the frame of teacher education:

> Examiner: However, I can see that this is a boy who... faces the children and is curious about the children. So it... It is not about him being unable to become a good preschool teacher in the future.

They state that there "is hope":

> Interviewer: But she can improve… You think that if she is allowed to proceed… Then… She will become a decent teacher?
>
> Supervisor: Yes, if she improves…

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[1] the ninth case was failed due to illness

Interviewer: Yes, but there is hope?

Supervisor: Yes, what makes me believe she can do it, is that she sees it herself.

In a follow-up of the eight cases, six months later, we discovered that all students we had placed in the category *those who are too light weight* had also dropped out of the education, either after a dissuasive dialogue, of their own accord, or after yet another failure when repeating their placement studies. In the group *those carrying some weight* however, we have reports that one of the students have repeated his/her placement studies and passed with distinction. One student is currently repeating his/her placement studies (there are no signals of perceived problems). The other two have both chosen to pause their education. No one in this group has thus, six months later, chosen to drop out permanently.

But what separates the two categories then? During the analysis we have found a number of more or less obvious differences. It turns out that the biggest one is the point in time when the short comings are discovered.

When short comings are detected
They are off to a bad start. The student does not get in touch, despite the fact that the placement studies period is approaching. The supervisor decides to initiate the contact herself. It turns out that the student, "Anna" – in spite of having problems during earlier placement studies (where she failed and has, therefore, been forced to repeat her placement studies) – has set off on a trip and will be unable to start her placement studies at the appointed time. The supervisor recounts:

> The first impression wasn't great, since I just a few days earlier learnt from our coordinator at the school that I was to supervise this student. And that wasn't really a problem. I'm pretty used to it being like that. But then, well I guess it was on Friday, and the student was starting Monday. I guess I kind of wondered why the student hadn't gotten in touch. It ought to be in the student's own interest, one would think, perhaps. So then I thought that I would give her a call and so I did. And it wasn't the student who answered, but her dad. And he said that the student was away. Okay, but will the student be home by Monday when our placement studies start? No, she won't. No, then it will be very hard, I said, to do placement studies for me. And then he became very stressed, the dad, and said that he would be in touch again. And then I guess he called back a few hours later and said that they would have to reschedule flights and how expensive that would be, etc. But then I said that if it's in the student's best interest to become a teacher, she ought to turn up. He said he would check… Then he called back a few days later and said that… That she could catch an earlier flight but that she wouldn't be able to participate during the first week anyway…

The first meeting between the student and the supervisor turns out to be crucial:

> Supervisor: And then she came… She looked kind of scared when she came, very, very insecure. And I thought: Oh dear, how is this going to go?

Already here, before the student has entered the educational practice, a first assessment is made:

> Interviewer: Did you have any hope that it would work out?
>
> Supervisor: Eh… (Long pause) It's a shame to say that I felt it wasn't going to work out, but I noticed early on that it would be a very steep uphill climb. Maybe I stick my neck out a bit, because you assess their behaviour and those things anyway, but it was her whole stature when she entered the classroom that made me feel that it would be a struggle.

Another one of the Supervisors describes how a student, long before the placement studies period is about to start, gives off signals that raise doubts:

> Supervisor: Well, it was already when she… They were out doing observations before their placement studies and already then I felt that this… Eh… Will be interesting… So…I felt she had such strange opinions. She would express them in the teachers' lounge. At that time she didn't know what position her colleagues had, who the headmaster was or who was… And then she just said: it was me and a few others… *(Here the supervisor describes how the student openly recounts very private things, our remark.)* Then I started to think: What is this? To say this among people you don't know and have no idea what positions they are in.

Regarding *those who are too light weight,* we can see a clear pattern where the supervisor contacts the university early on to express his/her doubts:

> Course coordinator/examiner: Regarding X the supervisor contacted us very early on… and said that… Well, what did she write? Well, that she had doubts and… There was a student who was insecure and she needed to… well… more or less… sort of "carry her". Like this (illustrates) all the time… In the beginning.

When asking university representatives we realise that *those who are too light weight* have also displayed short comings in the theoretical courses preceding the placement studies:

> Examiner: I find it hard to believe that he… eh… will make it… Actually…He's had huge problems in all study courses too… And then… He's taken breaks from his studies to try to catch up on things and this subject of course; he has taken the exams many times… Just to…

He had… He was allowed to continue by grace the first weeks of autumn, because he didn't have enough credits. And then when he finally got them… Well… Then he was able to continue.

Two out of the four have also failed previous placement studies periods. The new failure comes as no surprise:

Examiner: And the fact of the matter is that I have met this girl in theory. So I already had an image of her as a student. And she's a little... Eh... Well, you know..."Now I'm doing this, and now I'm doing that", a bit bouncy and erratic. And this type of student, who... She struggles on and gets her assignments back, but she keeps going and in the end they pass. Even though they may not be the best…But she's on the right side of the limit. Eh … But anyway, I had an image of her before as being somewhat... eh, immature. And that's the thing, if we've met them in other courses, we don't meet the students like… Like it's the first time...

In a study of nursing students, Duffy (2003) shows that the supervisors in the clinical parts of the education spot lack of competence very early on. They quickly see if the student has shortcomings in communicative and relational competencies. Many supervisors also mention that they fairly soon discover a lack of interest or absence of professional boundaries, and that many of the (nursing) students who failed in the clinical parts of the education have a story, i.e. have had problems passing previous theoretical courses.

Those who are too light weight stand out immediately, while those who are later described as *those carrying some weight* on the contrary often give a positive first impression:

Interviewer: Do you recall when your student came … the first impression?

Supervisor: I thought she was happy and open and we were going to the forest and she said that she liked outdoor activities very much. I think she studied some orienteering… I thought she was good and she looked very much forward to being with us…

It takes some time to detect the flaws:

Interviewer: Do you recall meeting the student for the first time or the first day?

Supervisor (1): Yes, she came out to visit and said hello and we decided what time we should meet on the first day. And it was great. I got a really good first impression!

Supervisor (2): Yes, exactly. The first impression was great. Then things didn't quite go according to that first impression.

Interviewer: When did you start having doubts? After how long, approximately?

Supervisor (1): Eh, maybe the second day?! Like, we need to go in and have some serious discussions. What do I expect? What expectations does she have? So we did that very early on.

Interviewer: You had supervising talks quite early on then?
Supervisor (1): Yes.

Interviewer: Do you recall what it was you had doubts about in her professional proficiency?

Supervisor (1): Eh, I think I had doubts about, about... The actual meetings, the actual outreach, or the regard for the children weren't what I expected them to be. Or the interest… Or how to say.

The supervisors do not discover the shortcomings of these students until they are put in a pedagogical context:

Interviewer: The first impressions gave no signals of problems?

Supervisor: No, but the first lesson, however (mild laughter), considering its content.

When a supervisor signals to the education that there is a risk that a student *carrying some weight* will fail, representatives for the education often become more surprised:

Examiner:… but then I had two passed assignments from her, I mean I had assignments that they were to hand in and she had done that... So I was very surprised when I hadn't heard anything…

These students have apparently handled the theoretical courses in a way that does not give any reasons to suspect that they will fail in their placement studies:

Examiner: I was surprised that… It's easy to think that a good student will do well in placement studies. The student is good at forming relationships in class, but of course it's another thing to relate to the children. I wouldn't have guessed that this student's supervisor would call.

In two of the cases in this group, the visiting teachers have gotten no signals from the supervisors. The students' shortcomings are not discovered until the actual visits:

> Examiner: And he started very… It felt good in some way. That he started by taking command and was able to refer back and ask questions by saying: "Can anyone tell me about this and that…" Then I'm not quite sure what happened. Because then everything became very hard to grasp. I didn't understand what he was talking about…

Consequently, the biggest difference between the groups is *when* the students' short comings are discovered. In one of the groups – *those who are too light weight* – this seems to occur immediately; while in the group *those carrying some weight* it takes an educational situation or an encounter with children/pupils to notice the short comings. In an American study (Knudson & Turley, 2000), where they have studied factors that indicate that university teachers need to take "special action" to support students having problems during placement studies, it is noted that 70% of "risk students" in subject teacher programmes are identified within 4 weeks, while the remaining 30% are not noticed until after approximately 9 weeks. Regarding teachers for lower school levels, the numbers are even clearer. 92% of the students, who appear having problems, are identified within 4 weeks. But what indicators appear crucial in the decision to fail someone? *What* do supervisors and examiners see as shortcomings?

What is perceived as shortcomings?
A common trait for both groups is that those who have failed are described as idle and passive. They do not really seem to want to engage in activities:

> Supervisor: And then it started with her being ill. And there were a lot of strange reasons why she couldn't be there… She had buses to catch to go home… Where did she live again? She couldn't be there all day. She couldn't attend meetings… And she couldn't do that…

According to the supervisors the students show no real interest, take few initiatives and rarely want to assume any responsibility:

> Supervisor: Yes… Like in the afternoon when I wasn't there, then it had been very chaotic and he had been sitting there (laughs) and then a curtain had fallen down among them. And he was like: "Wow, a curtain fell down", but he didn't do anything (laughs)...

> Supervisor: …and then she had problems being on time as well and then you had to call her… I know she was in charge of breakfast one time and we sat waiting… Because she was getting that responsibility then to handle breakfast, but then she was late and I said: "But then you have to call us, because we were waiting, and the whole day got delayed then…"Well, she had forgotten about that.

> Supervisor: And I told her that I wanted her to… Considering she had failed her previous placement studies and because I had so few Swedish lessons, that she should take English too. Because that was in fact her second subject. And at first she didn't want to at all. But I said that she

had to. And X (*the examiner*, *our remark*) said the same. And then she did it. But it was sort of … it wasn't good. It was sort of doomed to fail.

However, what separates the supervisors' perceptions of *those carrying some weight* from *those who are too light weight* is that the latter seem to combine this passivity with a demeanour which signals lack of weight, ambiguity, uncertainty and fear. The supervisor can see this by observing students' bodies, by their "posture", their whole "demeanour". They need to be "supported". A limp handshake or avoiding eye contact can be used as examples:

> Supervisor: Eh, yes, I remember, because … Eh … Shaking hands, for instance (shakes my hand, very loose and limp grasp). Like that! Well, eh … Well, not… Not getting… And some difficulties making eye contact and… I can say that perhaps it wasn't her *proficiency*, her knowledge, but more her personality actually…

> Supervisor: His whole posture made excuses for even being there, almost. And at first I thought that maybe it was due to him feeling a little embarrassed because of the poor start and all, but it continued. He was very, very withdrawn and very sort of shy and… I mean he didn't make any efforts at all.

It is perceived that students try to "hide", for instance by not stepping forward when the examiner comes to make his/her assessments. This is immediately recognized:

> Examiner: And at that time… when she knew perfectly well that I would come… she showed a film (falls silent). For… well... How long was it (looks in papers, sighs)… For 25 minutes… 25 minutes of film… A 4-minute discussion and… some kind of introduction for about 10 minutes. And there were still so many faults in that review… Or there were so many shortcomings in… how she handled… the class and… the subject… and these … So I still had quite a few things to talk to her about.

The quotation above also points to another described flaw among *those who are too light weight*. Informants state that these students lack an ability to read social situations. They seem to lack a certain social timing. They cannot quickly grasp what is happening and adapt their performance accordingly. They express opinions that are perceived as "strange" or "misplaced":

> Supervisor: That was what I felt I had to sort out, what was… the problem or how I should put it. Both towards children and adults I feel that she… She hasn't… Sometimes it felt as if she lacked a real understanding of what it means to be an adult (*describes in detail a situation when the student expressed an opinion to a colleague, our remark*)… And it is such a thing that makes you want to vanish when she says it. She has been here for two days and knows nothing about how we work

> or how we know each other or how we can joke with one another, and we don't know her. And doesn't she think: "How will I be perceived as a person when I say this? How important do I think my work is?" And then I also felt that… Oh, you have to think about what you say, so others don't pick it up!

In the group *those carrying some weight* there are also according to informants, problems with adaptation, but here the issue is more an inability of adapting to one's own image of what characterizes professional proficiency to the one supported by supervisors and examiners. It is not about insecurity; on the contrary these students know very well how to do it all:

> Interviewer: You said something about his narrow perspective… And then you did this with your hands (illustrates). What were you thinking then?
>
> Supervisor: Well, he had a firm view of how it should be, since he's got kids at home… But there's a difference between having kids of your own and what it's like in school… So he had some problems expanding his views (laughs), if you understand what I mean.
>
> Interviewer: Did he also express then… He didn't give an insecure impression…
>
> Supervisor: No.
>
> Interviewer: …'Cause there may be a difference if one is insecure, but he was… He thought he knew?
>
> Supervisor: Yes, he was determined about that.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Supervisor: He probably thought that we… we did it wrong… That we discussed too much with the children… They should be involved indecision-making… But he was more like... "Let's do like this!"

In the same manner, Knudson & Turley (2000) find that students, who are identified as being at risk relatively late during placement studies, carry similar characteristics:

> These students tended to have an idea of what teaching was and should be before they entered the program and the classroom and were unwilling and/or unable to change that viewpoint (op. cit. 2000, p. 183)

In some international studies, it is noted that supervisors interpret students' inability to recognize their own shortcomings and unwillingness to do something about them as indicators of failure (Lawson et al. 2015). As

mentioned earlier, Duffy & Hardicre (2007) show that one of the most important signals has to do within sufficient insights into what is lacking in one's own competence and consequently difficulties in altering one's behaviour in line with received feedback. Our study also contains data that indicates that this may be regarded as crucial shortcomings for students perceived as *being too light weight*:

> Supervisor: Well… At first I don't think she understood… I really don't think so. At least it didn't feel like it… And finally I started to get annoyed… as well… when I didn't get any reaction… to what I said. And I think that I usually try to refrain from showing that I… but I became… that I was annoyed.

Several of *those carrying some weight* are however perceived by informants as relatively aware of their own shortcomings, even though they are unable to overcome them during their current placement studies:

> Supervisor: But I still thought he would do well actually, because he… After the lesson too, the first one, he could fairly quickly point out what had gone wrong. So he had plenty of self-awareness about what had gone wrong.

In conclusion, indicators for both groups have to do with perceived passivity, lacking commitment and general signs that the students are not considered "mature enough" to rise to the challenge. *Those who are too light weight* are perceived as having more apparent shortcomings in terms of behaviour, opinions, social timing and self-awareness. Similar results can be found in two international studies. Although they deal with other vocational educations within human services, the results can probably be translated to the field in question. In an Australian study, Brear and Dorrian (2010) describe what educators perceive as signs of a presumptive failure (in relation to counsellor education). The indicators that most strongly signal shortcomings are: absence of self-awareness, lacking relational competence and "intrapersonal problems", i.e. that the student shows lacking empathy, is judgemental or mentally unstable.

In a British study of the practice of failure in the nursing programme, Duffy & Hardicre (2007) describe what supervisors claim signal failure in the clinical part of the education. In line with our results, they mention inadequate insights into what is lacking in the student's own competence and consequently difficulties in altering one's behaviour according to obtained feedback, lacking interest or motivation, lacking relational skills, egocentricity, unreliability, absence, late arrivals, poor health, depression, lack of commitment, withdrawal, sadness, tiredness or lethargy.

Discussion
"Separating the wheat from the chaff" – possibilities and impossibilities
Would it have been possible to spot it from the beginning? Had an initial aptitude test been able to detect our nine cases? The answer is both yes… and

no. That some shortcomings in weight and "aptitude" are discovered very early undeniably indicates that an initial test would detect students with these shortcomings. At the same time, from the limited empirical examples providing the basis for this study, we can conclude that it is precisely "behaviour" and "opinions" that form the strongest indicators in these early assessments. These are indicators that the aptitude test proposed by the Swedish government does not intend to measure: "The tests should measure educational ability, not opinions or behaviour"(Björklund, 2011). A test aimed at measuring "educational ability" should however capture shortcomings in all our nine failed students. But data in our project, as well as similar studies, fairly distinctly show that educational situations must be arranged for that to happen. In several of the referenced studies, it takes several weeks before the shortcomings in "educational ability" are discovered. How such tests should be constructed and financed remains questionable.

Results from the study indicate that the relation between the outcome of theoretical courses and failures in placement studies could be investigated further. Our data indicates that those who are too light weight have had problems passing these courses too. However, this suggestion is contradicted by research about aptitude tests for teacher education, which claims that there is no consensus regarding the reliability of academic indicators being crucial in selecting suitable candidates (Applegate, 1987; Leshem, 2012). Through two more profound case studies, Riner & Jones (1993) for instance, study whether indicators imply that something could have been done to prevent failure, already while students took the theoretical courses of the programme. A common trait in both cases is that they deal with shy, passive girls with distinctive physical properties. It is concluded that the students' shortcomings could have been detected before their placement studies, but the article ends with a crucial and interesting question about the balance between the responsibility of the education towards its students and the responsibility towards the pupils in the classes where students are placed. It is "the right to try "versus" the right to a good education". What should be the most important in teacher education?

Would they have wanted "to see it from the beginning"? A test able to measure "educational ability", would have captured all cases of failure; but at the same time it would have sorted out those carrying some weight. In these cases, educators have hope that education will provide an opportunity to develop the missing qualities. To demand that students already before starting their education should have for instance didactic competence or claiming that relational competence cannot be developed through training in more ways than one seem to go against the very thought of education leading to development. At the same time, an American study shows that student teachers, who seem to lack teacher qualities during training, do not substantially improve in their professional lives.

Cochran-Smith et. al. (2012) have made a longitudinal study, where 15 recently graduated teachers were followed for 5 years. The analysis connects choices and

turning points in the teachers' careers to descriptions of the different teachers' competencies at continuous measuring points (for instance, classroom observations, interviews, pupil results). The teachers' observed competencies ("teaching practices") have been ranked in three groups: weak/poor practice, adequate practice and strong/very good practice. The analysis of the material shows that the competencies very seldom change over time. By way of illustration, the teachers who already during teacher education display a "weak/poor practice" do the same after 5 years. In a match of competencies and career paths researchers find that the group of teachers with a "weak/poor practice" are also most likely to end their teaching careers early. In light of this, one may perhaps argue that those carrying some weight should also be sorted out early in the process? According to the American study, they will not add any real quality to the school anyway (and according to the same study, it also seems as if they end their teaching careers relatively quickly).

Another question that must be posed in relation to the study and the problem area is whether the informants' assessments of the students have any validity. Do supervisors' statements have any predictive value? Sandholtz & Shea (2011) have studied the relation between university supervisors, assessments and student teachers' performances in a standardised "teacher test" (a video-recorded lesson segment accompanied by written reflections). The studied issues have to do with how well the supervisors' predictions meet the actual results, and within what areas we find the greatest conformity between supervisors' assessments and test results. Results show that in approximately 6% of cases (N 327) the predictions match the test results exactly, and in just over 40% they are fairly close. In cases where the university supervisors' over- or under estimate students in their assessments, underestimations are more common. It is also clear that supervisors cannot make better assessments regarding either high performance students or, as in our case, low performance students, which surprised researchers:

The most surprising differences occurred in prediction-score matching for high- and low performers. Given the commonly held view that it is easiest to identify students on either end of the continuum, we anticipated more agreement for high- and low performers (op. cit. 2011).

According to this study, the visiting teachers' assessments consequently have a fairly low prediction value. But we must not forget that they are compared to the results of a teacher test where relations cannot be seen. In the video-recorded segments we only see the student's actions –not the pupils' reactions. This circumstance leads to a new and not entirely unproblematic question: How important is the context?

In their article, Danyluk et al. (2015) conclude, just like we do, that failure in teacher programme placement studies is never an easy or one-sided matter. It involves teacher education, student, supervisors in schools and the establishment that has received the student. It is further argued that the contextual conditions are often left out of arguments in cases of failure.

Riechman (2016) shows that professional identity is constructed through interaction with the environment and in professional experience. Sudzina & Knowles (1993) similarly argue that the student's background (e.g. age, socio-economic background), the supervisor's disposition or the context of the school itself, are seldom described as decisive indicators. In their case study, however, they show that context is crucial in several cases. They write (op. cit., p.260):

Perhaps the phenomenon of student teacher "failure" can be reduced to mismatch of models among the key players and contexts, that is, between the student teacher and previous school experiences and expectations as they influence internal images of good teaching; the teacher education program; and, the cooperating teacher and school community. None of these factors singly explain "failure" but, taken in context and together they provide pictures of emerging patterns …

In a follow-up study (Sudzina et.al., 1997), researchers continue to investigate the contextual conditions - this time in the relation between supervisor and student. They find that expectations on the respective roles differ, sometimes radically. Both groups rank true mentorship as one of the factors that has the most impact on the outcome of the student's performances during placement studies, but this can only be achieved if mutual confidence has been established. They further claim that the organisation surrounding placement studies prevents the "right match" to be achieved in this respect. In our study, we can see that those carrying some weight do better when placed in a new context. One of them even passes with distinction when repeating placement studies. What consequences does this have for the discussion of aptitude tests and educational ability? Should aptitude be tested in several different contexts?

Our study of failures in teacher education and their relation to aptitude tests seems to produce considerably more questions than answers. The problem is obvious; it is hard to set up boundaries and practices that are complex. We hope, however, that more detailed descriptions of the practice of failure can give rise to new questions and shed some light on an unexplored field.

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