



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

Akademiska avhandlingar vid Pedagogiska institutionen, Umeå universitet nr  
140

# Professionellt förhållningssätt som utbildningsuppdrag

Pedagogiska praktiker i läkar-, socionom- och  
polisutbildning

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## Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för  
avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i  
NBET.A.101, fredag den 12 juni 2026 kl. 10:00.

Länk för att delta via Zoom: <https://umu.zoom.us/j/67765641211>

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent:

Docent, Katina Thelin, Uppsala universitet

**Organisation**

Umeå universitet  
Pedagogiska institutionen

**Dokumenttyp**

Doktorsavhandling

**Publiceringsdatum**

22 maj 2026

**Författare**

Maria Liljeholm Bång

**Titel**

Professionellt förhållningssätt som utbildningsuppdrag: Pedagogiska praktiker i läkar-, socionom- och polisutbildning

**Sammanfattning**

Based on four articles, this compilation thesis examines how professionalism is understood, taught, and assessed within higher education programmes preparing students for “people professions”. Focusing on medical, social work, and police education, the study addresses a central challenge in professional education: the complexity and ambiguity surrounding what it means to act professionally, and how such capabilities can be meaningfully developed through educational practice. The thesis is grounded in the observation that professions such as the medical profession, social work, and police work are characterized by morally charged, relational work with significant societal responsibility. These professions operate within a “social contract” with society, requiring practitioners not only to possess specialized knowledge and skills but also to demonstrate ethical judgment, empathy, and situational sensitivity in complex and often unpredictable contexts. Consequently, higher education has increasingly emphasized the development of students’ professionalism alongside disciplinary knowledge. However, this emphasis introduces pedagogical challenges, as professionalism is a multifaceted and contested concept that resists clear definition and standardized assessment.

Adopting a practice-theoretical perspective, particularly the theory of practice architectures (TPA), the thesis conceptualizes teaching and assessment as socially situated practices shaped by cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. This framework enables an analysis of how educational practices both enable and constrain the development of professionalism. Empirically, the study is designed as a comparative multiple-case study across three educational programmes. Data were collected through document analysis, interviews, observations, and stimulated recall. The analysis focuses on three research questions: (1) what ideas of professionalism are expressed by actors within educational practices; (2) how teaching and assessment of professionalism are enacted; and (3) what arrangements condition these practices.

The overall findings show that, despite differences in educational traditions, programme structures, and professional mandates, there is a high degree of similarity in how professionalism is understood across the programmes studied. Professionalism is characterised by two interrelated dimensions: an interpersonal dimension, encompassing self-awareness, empathy, and relational competence; and a contextual dimension, involving role awareness, ethical responsibility, and situational judgement. This conceptual plurality influences both teaching and assessment. Educational activities often emphasize reflection and simulation, aiming to bridge theoretical knowledge and practical judgment. At the same time, the study identifies tensions between teaching and assessment practices, where what is valued in teaching is not always what is formally assessed. Furthermore, the results highlight that teaching and assessing professionalism are resource-intensive and highly dependent on contextual conditions, including institutional structures, time constraints, and disciplinary traditions. The analysis demonstrates how these conditions shape what becomes possible in educational practice, sometimes limiting opportunities for deeper learning.

The thesis contributes theoretically by advancing a practice-theoretical understanding of professional education and by demonstrating the analytical value of TPA for studying teaching and assessment as intertwined practices. Empirically, it provides comparative insights into how professionalism is enacted and negotiated across different professional fields. Practically, the findings highlight the need for greater alignment between curricular intentions, teaching activities, and assessment practices, as well as for increased cross-professional dialogue in the development of professional education.

**Nyckelord:** professional education, professionalism, teaching, assessment, practice architectures

**Språk**

Svenska

**ISBN**

978-91-6850-005-8 (print)  
978-91-6850-006-5 (pdf)

**ISSN**

0281-6768

**Antal sidor**

133 + 4 delarbeten/papers