Policy ideals for a reformed education

How police students value new and enduring content in a time of change

Kirsi Kohlström
Department of Education, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

Oscar Rantatalo
Centre for Police Education, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

Staffan Karp
Department of Education, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden, and

Mojgan Padyab
Department of Social Work, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how subgroups within a cohort of Swedish police students value different types of curricula content (i.e. new competencies versus enduring ones) in the context of the currently transforming landscape of basic police training.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on a Swedish national survey ($N = 369$), the study examined variations in how students value new versus enduring police curricula content based on sociodemographic factors. Specifically, factors such as student age and gender and the institutional arrangements of education were tested using an independent t test.

Findings – The study identified differences in values based on gender. Female students valued competencies such as communication, flexibility, diversity and decisiveness as more important in an educational setting than did males. Fewer differences were found in relation to institutional arrangement, and in-house students valued flexibility and communication skill as more important for educational curricula compared to university-based students. No differences were found in relation to age.

Originality/value – This study adds knowledge to the question of how changes in occupational education policy develop in practice. More specifically, the study explored how students in educational programmes value new versus enduring competencies and whether differences can be identified based on sociodemographic factors. These questions are important because they expose sociodemographic conditions that influence how students value policy-driven skills versus enduring ones.

Keywords Gender, Skills, Vocational education, Competencies, Police education, Police student

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Currently, numerous vocations are experiencing profound reorientations, wherein an emphasis on technical and operative skills is increasingly complemented by a demand for generic competencies and capacities, such as critical thinking, problem solving, reflection and theoretical knowledge (Beckett and Hager, 2013). Shifts such as these can be located within a broad contemporary discourse of professional and vocational education in a 'learning society' characterised by endemic transformations (Field and Lynch, 2015; Nikolou-Walker and Meaklim, 2007). For instance, European educational policy has highlighted the importance of vocational educational institutions fostering lifelong learners who are ready to handle complexity and volatile task environments through generic competencies.

These transformations are highly present within the context of policing and police education. As with other vocational education and training programmes, police education has undergone conceptual shifts from an emphasis on specific *training*, in which operational skills take centre stage towards an emphasis on *education* that incorporates an increased amount of theory and scientific knowledge (Marenin, 2004; Paterson, 2011; Jaschke, 2010; Jaschke and Neidhardt, 2007). This approach is visible in educational curricula with request addressing additional generic competencies. Cox (2011) and Lauritz and Hansson (2013) put forth the notion that concurrent societal changes have driven these educational reorientations, including transforming demographics, increased societal diversity and changing public demands for service delivery.

From a research perspective, ongoing transformations towards an increased emphasis on a generic curriculum in the police training context provide ample opportunities to examine how different groups of students value and appraise changes in curricula and institutional arrangements of education. Arguably, a formal curriculum that diverges from students' expectations of occupational practice may run the risk of being disapproved and undermined and may consequently lead to "training decay" (Chan, 2001) or so-called "reform without change" (Hafferty, 1998). In the context of the police, this tendency has been demonstrated in research that has shown how a formal curriculum, promoted and endorsed at a policy level, may be effectively hindered if it is at odds with the informal or hidden curriculum of police training, i.e. the expectations students internalise before and during education with regards to what "real" or "core" policing entails (Ford, 2003; Granér, 2004). Obviously, these expectations may deviate considerably from the realities of the day-to-day work of a police officer (Moskos, 2009), but they may nonetheless serve to undermine certain aspects of the formal curriculum (Chan, 2001).

With this background, we suggest that policing entails an interesting context for studying how different groups of students in training value and appraise ongoing transformations of formal curricula. The study thus adds knowledge to the overarching question of how students undergoing police training experience policy development and curriculum reform for generic competencies in occupational education (Hafferty, 1998). Using quantitative analysis, we examined how subgroups within a cohort of Swedish police students value and appraise different types of police competencies (i.e. new content versus enduring content) in light of current transformations of the occupation. We furthermore use this examination as the basis for a discussion in this paper about some common assumptions relating to change and change resistance in vocational and occupational training.

In the following sections, we contextualise our empirical study by highlighting three broad developments that follow in the wake of a changing field of professional education in general and within police education in particular. This contextual description is followed by our research questions.

Police education in flux

Three current developments relating to occupational training within the police landscape are shifts in police education curricula because of the need for new types of police competencies, shifts in the institutional arrangements of vocational educational training (VET) education and shifts in the groups of students who undergo police education.

With regards to changes in training needs and police education curricula, police education has traditionally had a strong tendency towards *practical*, proficiency-geared training. For instance, enduring subjects in police training include self-defence, coercive control, crime control, law and investigation. In addition to being oriented towards practice, police education has traditionally been geared towards institutional socialisation and to the transforming of recruits into police officers who are *decisive* and capable of acting in their roles as street-level representatives of the state (Conti, 2011). Although these orientations still constitute the backbone of police education, a lot of new content is being incorporated into police education syllabi.

In this regard, police officers need to be familiar with a range of social-science subjects, such as social justice, social cohesion, human rights and political and ideological transformations, in modern societies (Roberg and Bonn, 2004). In short, police education is increasingly including theory and focusing on refining students' knowledge of socio-politically, culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse contexts. Allan (2013) argues that this shift is necessary because of increasing global migration with subsequent societal diversity. Thus, we have concluded that an important current focus of police education is to foster *flexible* police officers who have the ability to understand and make sense of *diversity* issues. In the same way that flexibility and diversity are highlighted as important facets of contemporary police education, research has indicated the importance of preparing future generations of police officers with *communication* training to manage police-citizen relationships and to meet the varying demands of the public (Davies and Kelly, 2014). Birzer and Tannehill (2001) emphasise how communication skills are one of the most important tools for police officers in conflict resolution, in which the police often find themselves in a mediating role. In summary, we can conclude that enduring areas of police education programmes in many countries are currently complemented by new subject areas that have been created because of the perceived need to provide upcoming generations of police officers with generic competencies and a "conceptual apparatus" adjusted for increasingly complex task environments (Marenin, 2004; Paterson, 2011).

In addition to changes in educational skills training, shifts in police education discourse because of the institutional arrangements of many vocational and professional education programmes can be identified. In this regard, police education shows similarities to, for instance, the recent development of nursing as an academic field (White and Heslop, 2012) because police educational policy currently strongly advocates moving education closer to that found in higher education (HE) institutions. These moves are achieved through arrangements such as the establishment of police universities (Paterson, 2011) or university-based police programmes structured as commissioned education at universities (Jaschke, 2010; Shipton, 2011; Wimshurst and Ransley, 2007). In general, the tendency to move vocational and professional education closer to universities has been examined within the scholarly discussion (dependent on the chosen perspective) as either a trend related to the "vocationalisation" of HE institutions (Powell *et al.*, 2012) or, conversely, as a trend related to the "academisation" of professional education (Ek *et al.*, 2011). In either case, researchers have discussed the consequences of these trends in terms of increased convergence and fluidity amongst different types of adult educational systems.

In line with the changes presented above, police education has also experienced changes with regards to the student groups being admitted into the programmes. In their scientific discussion

of this topic, Finnegan *et al.* (2014) discuss the admission of "non-traditional" student groups into HE. Within the context of police education, basic police training, which has traditionally been an almost exclusively male-oriented domain, now increasingly appeals to both female and male students. However, although the increasing numbers of female police students indicate the existence of an increasingly open professional community, studies have shown that policing is highly gendered and is characterised by hegemonic cultural masculinity (Chan *et al.*, 2010; Metcalfe and Dick, 2002; Prokos and Padavic, 2002). Thus, gender can be a factor that affects the experiences and perceptions of police education. In addition to gender, age can be a potentially important background factor that could affect the way in which students value new versus enduring police educational content. For instance, previous research has shown that age influences ethical standpoints amongst recruits and police officers' behaviours in daily practice (Alpert *et al.*, 2004; Phillips, 2015).

These outlined developments are examples of currently ongoing transformations related to policing in general and to police education in particular. Furthermore, these changes provide the opportunity to examine empirically how the uptake of change occurs in practice. Regarding police education and university affiliation, Sweden is an interesting case because the Swedish situation can currently be defined as intermediary, with two of three police training locations being affiliated with universities, whereas the third is configured as a traditional police college that the police manage in-house. This article examines variations in what students value based on sociodemographic factors, such as gender and age, and whether students' values differ based on police education's being affiliated with a university or not. These factors could potentially influence how new types of expertise and knowledge within the occupational community of the police are developed. More specifically, this paper examines the following research questions:

RQ1. How do police students value new types of content in contrast to enduring content in police education?

RQ2. To what extent do police students value whether their education contributes to the learning of new and enduring content?

RQ3. Do any differences exist between what students value with respect to institutional setting, age and gender?

Method and materials
This section begins with an outline of the empirical context of the study, followed by a description of the instrument used, the participants, the chosen variables and the analytical strategy.

Swedish police education
As alluded to in the introduction, basic police training has been increasingly influenced and affected by academic education over time. This is also the case in Sweden. Traditionally, Swedish police education has consisted solely of in-service training. This changed in 2000 and 2001, when two Swedish universities (Umeå and Växjö) were commissioned to manage basic education for police officers beyond the traditional in-house police academy located in Stockholm. Thus, at the time of this study, police training in Sweden was being performed both at universities using commission-based models and by the police themselves with the traditional police academy model. The education is structured to include five terms, of which the first four are campus-based with field training activities, and the fifth term entails fulltime in-service field training. The pedagogy aims to integrate theories along with

problem-oriented police work methods and thereby develop police students' knowledge of police practice. Police officers and other professionals are employed as teachers.

Instrument and participants
The present study included all police students in Sweden ($N = 369$) in Spring 2013 at the end of the fourth term of their education. The study was based on a police student survey collected as a part of the European research project "Recruitment, Education and Careers in the Police". The survey was developed in cooperation with the Centre for the Study of Professions at Oslo University College, and it covered items focussing on choice of education, attitudes towards knowledge and skills, job values, operational orientation, attitudes towards the police profession, political attitudes and values and background questions. In total, 320 of 369 police students completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 86 per cent.

Variables
The following section provides an explanation of the construction of the five index variables used as dependent variables. As noted in the research review, three broad notions of the new and currently prioritised areas were identified in the educational discourse surrounding police education: *communication*, *flexibility* and *diversity*. Likewise, two enduring areas of police education were identified in terms of an action-oriented education that prepared and fostered students for *decisiveness* and *practice orientation*.

In the study, the dependent variables reflected both new and enduring competencies. Three index variables were tested for the new competencies: communication, flexibility and diversity. Two index variables were tested for the enduring competencies: decisiveness and practical skills. To examine how students valued these competencies, a question from the survey asked students to rate different areas of knowledge and competencies and the extent to which they had learned this in their education. The question was formulated as follows: Below is a list of different types of knowledge and competencies. Could you, for each of them, specify: (A) to what extent this should be emphasised in the education to make you a good police officer, and (B) to what extent did you learn this in your police education? Responses were indicated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a high extent).

To construct the five index variables 13 items were used. Table I presents the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), from which all of the index variables were formed. The five index variables were linked to Parts (A) and (B). Because the questionnaire had already established the factor structure of the instrument, CFA was used to assess the construct validity. The CFA showed that all items could be loaded significantly on the predefined scales (all p values were less than 0.001). Factor loadings for Part (A) varied between 0.504 and 0.813. For Part (B), the index variables' factor loadings varied between 0.409 and 0.743.

The three independent variables applied in this study were institutional setting, age and gender. For the independent variable regarding educational setting, one variable was constructed in two categories: university affiliation (Växjö and Umeå) and in-house setting (Stockholm). Age was categorised into under and over 30 years old. Gender had two categories: male and female. A *t* test was used to compare the mean index variables between educational settings (i.e. university-based or in-house settings), age and gender.

Analysis and findings
Of the 320 participants, 301 responded to the question concerning their gender and age, whereas 19 respondents did not (6 per cent). The age distribution ranged from 22 to 43 years; 35 per cent of the respondents were female ($n = 112$) and 59 per cent were male ($n = 189$).

Index variables and items	Part A: important content of police education		Part B: learned in police education	
	Coefficient Cronbach's α	CFA loadings ($p < 0.0001$)	Coefficient Cronbach's α	CFA loadings ($p < 0.0001$)
Communication	*0.646*		*0.523*	
Verbal		0.813		0.743
Written		0.575		0.481
Flexibility	0.677		0.601	
Critically reflect and evaluate work		0.551		0.470
Think in new ways		0.530		0.522
Cooperate with others		0.787		0.702
Diversity	*0.837*		*0.749*	
Tolerance: Appreciate other viewpoints		0.790		0.745
Make ethical judgements		0.808		0.678
Empathise with others		0.798		0.699
Decisiveness	*0.686*		*0.680*	
Work independently		0.504		0.539
Take initiative		0.749		0.729
Take responsibility and make decisions		0.727		0.672
Practical	*0.666*		*0.427*	
Occupation-specific knowledge		0.627		0.409
Practical skills		0.790		0.653

Note: CFA = confirmatory factor analysis

Table I. CFA of index variables

Generally, all items in Part (A), "important facet of police education" (Table I), received mean scores higher than 4.0 (4.12-4.49, Table II). This indicated that police students considered the competencies tested (both new and enduring) to be important pillars of contemporary police education, as the differences in the mean scores between the values of new and enduring competencies were relatively small. Students in the in-house setting viewed the skill of communication (4.38) and flexibility (4.33) as more important to police education compared to students in the academic setting (communication 4.17 and flexibility 4.15).

Variables	Communication mean (SD)	Flexibility mean (SD)	Diversity mean (SD)	Decisiveness mean (SD)	Practical mean (SD)
Institutional setting					
University ($n = 133$)	4.17 (0.73)	4.15 (0.68)	4.12 (0.73)	4.18 (0.69)	4.37 (0.77)
In-house ($n = 185$)	4.38* (0.70)	4.33* (0.64)	4.21 (0.76)	4.30 (0.63)	4.43 (0.73)
Age					
22-29 ($n = 199$)	4.26 (0.75)	4.28 (0.66)	4.13 (0.75)	4.22 (0.68)	4.38 (0.80)
30-43 ($n = 100$)	4.35 (0.69)	4.20 (0.70)	4.27 (0.77)	4.28 (0.64)	4.43 (0.66)
Gender					
Male ($n = 189$)	4.17 (0.79)	4.15 (0.74)	4.06 (0.81)	4.17 (0.68)	4.34 (0.82)
Female ($n = 112$)	4.49* (0.57)	4.41*(0.52)	4.36 (0.62)*	4.33 (0.63)*	4.48 (0.64)

Note: *$p < 0.05$

Table II. Mean scores for institutional settings, age and gender – index variables: an important facet of police education (part A)

Part (B) (Table III) examined the extent to which police students had learned new and enduring competencies in their police education. A value of less than 3.5 might have indicated that students valued learning these competencies to a lesser extent; all index score means were between 3.28 and 3.90. As indicated in Table III, one variable, decisiveness, showed a value lower than 3.5 for all of the tested mean scores. In fact, many of the mean scores were lower than 3.5, which indicated that the students did not feel that they had fully learned highly valuable competencies in their respective educational settings. As Table III indicates, the test of the mean score differences between university-affiliated police education and in-house police education showed that two index variables presented significantly different results. Students in the in-house setting valued their learning of flexibility (3.77) and diversity (3.68) more highly than did students in university-affiliated settings (flexibility 3.60 and diversity 3.46). In the examination of differences between students' sub-groups with respect to age and gender, no differences were found in relation to age, but differences were found in Parts (A) and (B) in relation to gender. In Part (A), female respondents assigned higher scores to four of the index variables: communication, flexibility, diversity and decisiveness. No significant differences were found for the fifth variable, practical skills. This showed a difference in attitudes between female and male students regarding all of the new competencies but only one of the enduring competencies (decisiveness).

The analysis also demonstrated one significant gender difference in the extent to which students felt they had learned competencies, namely, that females assigned a higher mean score to flexibility (3.83) than did males, whose mean score was 3.62 (Table III).

In summary, the analysis related to *RQ1* showed that both new and enduring competencies (Table II) received mean scores higher than 4.0 (4.12-4.49), meaning that the students valued both new and enduring competencies as important in police education programmes. *RQ2* examined the extent to which students considered police education to have contributed to their learning of both new and enduring competencies. All indexes in Part (B) had lower mean scores (3.28-3.90). In fact, many of the mean scores were less than 3.5, potentially indicating that the students considered that their education had not highly contributed to their learning. This comparison demonstrated that although respondents believed it was important to emphasise all of the items in their education, they believed that they had learned these things in their respective educational settings to a lesser extent. The examination of *RQ3* indicated differences related to institutional setting and gender in

Variables	Communication learned mean (SD)	Flexibility learned mean (SD)	Diversity learned mean (SD)	Decisiveness learned mean (SD)	Practical learned mean (SD)
Institutional setting					
University (*n* = 129)	3.43 (0.86)	3.60 (0.79)	3.46 (0.76)	3.33 (0.76)	3.80 (0.75)
In-house (*n* = 185)	3.58 (0.77)	3.77* (0.78)	3.68* (0.75)	3.40 (0.76)	3.73 (0.65)
Age					
22-29 (*n* = 197)	3.75 (0.74)	3.75 (0.72)	3.57 (0.73)	3.39 (0.72)	3.69 (0.68)
30-43 (*n* = 100)	3.47 (0.81)	3.60 (0.78)	3.61 (0.83)	3.33 (0.85)	3.85 (0.69)
Gender					
Male (*n* = 189)	3.47 (0.80)	3.62 (0.76)	3.56 (0.77)	3.33 (0.79)	3.70 (0.71)
Female (*n* = 112)	3.56 (0.83)	3.83* (0.71)	3.62 (0.77)	3.42 (0.72)	3.81 (0.64)

Table III.
Mean scores for university affiliation, age and gender – index variables: learned in police education (part B)

Note: *$p < 0.05$

attitudes towards the importance of emphasising competencies in education and the extent to which the students had learned them in police education. The results from comparing the two age variables were not significant and indicated no difference between those over and under 30 years of age.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how police students value new and enduring content in formal curricula during a time of change. Using a quantitative measure, we examined whether variations could be identified in students' appraisals based on sociodemographic factors (gender and age) and educational factors (based on whether police training was university affiliated or not).

The main finding of the study was that students valued both new and enduring competencies as highly important. This finding could be seen as counterintuitive, as it could be expected that more enduring content of police training, such as practical skills, would be more highly valued than recently implemented content. This is because more enduring content might, to a greater extent, be perceived as related to police core competencies and, as such, be more firmly associated with students' popular conceptions of what "real" police work entails (Granér, 2004). However, the empirical findings of this study do not support such claims or interpretations. Rather, the study reflects broad support from police students for the implementation of new competencies in police training alongside more enduring ones. Two plausible explanations for the high support for all of the measured domains of the curriculum are that students in their early-career stages have a difficult time differentiating between competencies or that they perceive both new and enduring competencies as important. In the following, we discuss both of these interpretations:

First, the overall high support for both new and enduring police training content can be interpreted as a manifestation of the fact that students, in contrast to experienced police officers, have a difficult time differentiating and evaluating competencies related to policing, and they therefore rate all content as important. As Hafferty (1998, p.406) stated in a discussion about the occupational socialisation of medical students, the process of learning to differentiate between what is "important" and what is "not important" lies at the heart of *becoming* a professional. When these types of differentiations are empirically absent, as was the case in our empirical material, this could be an indication that more informal and "backstage" dimensions of occupational learning, wherein normative judgements about professional knowledge are central, largely taking place in later career phases or in other settings than school-based training. This is also in accordance with the finding in our study that respondents consistently rated their own learning of competencies in formal educational settings as relatively low, despite recognising and valuing the importance of both new and enduring content in police training.

Although the reason for this tendency is not entirely clear, previous research on police socialisation has indicated that police recruits' learning largely occurs in occupational practice through in-service field training. Additionally, previous research has indicated that to learn policing skills, both practitioners and recruits value occupational practice more highly than they do formal education (Chan, 2001; Alain and Grégoire, 2008).

A second interpretation as to why students rated both new and enduring content as important is that they value both new and enduring competencies as legitimate. As discussed in the introduction of this paper, and as Marenin (2004) and Paterson(2011) explain, for instance, that current societal transformations have created increased complexity for the police and have, as a consequence, introduced new training needs into police education. This indicates that policy-driven changes in curricula are grounded in

actual needs identified within the occupational community. Furthermore, police training and police practice have close institutional ties with the recurrent use of field-training and practicums, with active police officers serving as instructors. With close institutional ties, students could perceive "new" additions and changes to training curricula as sanctioned and credible if they emanate from the occupational community – for instance, if active officers who serve as instructors endorse them and if police students are aware of and support this necessity.

Building on the data presented in this study, both the aforementioned explanations are plausible, and their significance may be subject to future research on students' uptake of new ideas in a time of curricula reforms in VET education.

Differences based on background factors

In addition to the question of how police students as a group value new and enduring content, the study indicated small but apparent variations in students' values in relation to institutional training settings and gender. Both of these findings warrant attention.

For instance, students undergoing police-led police education valued learning flexibility and diversity more highly than did students in a university-affiliated police education programme. They also rated flexibility as more important in education than did students in university-affiliated police education programmes. Overall, however, the findings indicated no clear tendency with regards to differences in students' values based on institutional arrangements of education. The lack of such pervasive differences challenge widely held assumptions concerning basic police training. One such assumption is that the association of VET programmes with HE institutions creates changes in how students value educational content. The findings of this study do not support such interpretations, as the differences shown in the material were more blended than could be expected if university affiliation changed the views of students undergoing education. One explanation for these results might be that although police education in Sweden occurs both on a commission basis at universities and by the police themselves in in-house settings, all types of education adhere to the same syllable and curricula. In addition, the teacher staff composition in both university-based police education and non-academic sites of education is similar. Although more research on this subject is necessary, it seems that HE affiliation does not create thorough transformations of VET programmes if changes are not made to the curricula or staff composition.

With a high number of applicants and a rigorous selection process (Annell, 2015), it is possible that many of the students have in their repertoire values and skills consistent with the educational content of the programme. This could be the case with differences in attitudes related to learning the skills of communication and flexibility. Students selected for university-affiliated programmes may differ in competence in these skills from students selected to learn in in-house settings. In addition, police students have been selected from many others, and such selection alone can lead to the feeling that they already possess a great amount of knowledge and the skills needed to perform high-quality police work (Lauritz and Karp, 2013). During the application process, Swedish police students apply for an educational programme and have the opportunity to choose where they want to attend. As the police itself manages one of the colleges, and as the college has a long tradition of educating police students, whereas the other two are affiliated with universities that have been integrated into the academic milieu and have a relatively short history as police academies, students' preferences may vary with their attitudes towards policing. Students may apply to a specific educational programme with the belief that they can support their preconceptions of what real police work should entail. This means students most likely already differ in their preconceptions from the beginning of their education.

Concerning the variations in relation to gender, the findings showed that female students valued all three new competencies as more important than did male students and that the enduring competence decisiveness, which is sometimes considered a trait that is culturally associated with male gender identity (Martin, 1999; Miller, 1999), was also valued more highly. Previous research (Gilligan, 1982) revealed that female police officers must show such "male" skills for others to accept them as competent police officers. The belief in the need to show male skills could thus explain why the women assigned to the educational programmes demonstrate decisiveness.

Haarr and Morash's (2012) research demonstrates that women express different attitudes towards their roles as police officers than do male officers. Previous research on gender differences in the police training context has also indicated prevailing differences with regards to police students' career plans, as male students are more dedicated to working in police tactical units and patrols, whereas female students are more dedicated to preventive and investigative work (Bringsrud Fekjær, 2014). Additionally, female students rate intrinsic and altruistic job characteristics (i.e. inherent satisfaction or the potential to do well) more highly than do male students, who value extrinsic job characteristics (i.e. the instrumental aspects of a job, such as income) more highly than do their female counterparts (Sundström and Wolming, 2013). These are interesting findings in light of the fact that policing is an occupational field characterised by a cultural hegemonic masculinity, something that has been shown to create salient problems for female groups of police officers with regards to discrimination and exclusion from full membership of the occupational community (Chan *et al.*, 2010; Metcalfe and Dick, 2002). One common view of policing is that it requires "masculine" coded abilities, such as strength, aggression and heroism (Prokos and Padavic, 2002). Moreover, research has indicated that a common approach that female officers have used to navigate, fit in and gain cultural acceptance is to "adapt to the prevailing system of norms by identifying with stereotyped male characteristics synonymous with the role of a police officer" (Österlind and Haake, 2010, p. 5). What our study adds to these findings is that in addition to gender differences in career aspirations and motivations when it comes to choosing policing, a gender difference is also identifiable in how female and male student groups value curricula content in the training context. From a curricular reform perspective, these types of differences are important to take into consideration, as they indicate that female and male police students possibly have separate experiences that influence which competencies they see as more relevant to becoming a professional police officer.

Conclusion
This study has added knowledge to the overarching question of how policy development and curriculum reform in occupational education may be met by students undergoing training. As specified at the beginning of this study, one issue of concern was whether police students disapprove of policy-driven skills, such as communication, flexibility and diversity. The results show that all police students valued these skills as important in police education. However, female police students desired more emphasis on these skills in educational settings. Because females valued the new competencies as more important, they may promote these skills in their future work life and police practice more than male police students. Women can therefore be seen more as *agents of change* if they have the support, space and acceptance to develop policy-driven skills and use them in practical police work.

It is important to examine further the question of whether police education has contributed to the learning of both new and enduring competencies. Therefore, our analysis contributes to the knowledge of how female and male students participating in educational programmes in different institutional settings value educational content in the context of policing. However, to obtain a more detailed understanding of why differences between subgroups arise, further qualitative studies would be useful, as such designs would allow for a focus on students' lived experiences and learning expectations in police education programmes. Such studies would complement our research because they could explain why differences arise in values between female and male police students and police students at university-affiliated and in-house education environments. Future studies with multiple statistical measurements, such as regression or longitudinal analysis, can also add knowledge of other aspects that may correlate with these findings. With regards to clarifying the factors influencing these attitudes, we also suggest further research on the following matters. First, studies of workplace learning and work life could be used to complement studies targeting police academy settings. This is important because, although students lay a foundation in educational settings, early career experiences are highly formative and are characterised by a high extent of learning in police practice. Thus, we believe that career-progression research and studies comparing VET-based education with university-based training would contribute valuable knowledge on how police recruits learn the knowledge and skills associated with their occupation.

Furthermore, issues of curricula, didactical methods and teachers' practical performance in educational settings are of interest for further investigation to obtain more detailed explanations of the types of issues involved in developing the new skills required in policing. Arguably, an important group of people who have an impact on recruits' socialisation and learning is educators and educational leaders. They are responsible for supporting the learning of both new and enduring skills in educational planning issues and for ensuring that educational content includes learning activities that support learning in both areas rather than focussing only on one or the other.

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About the authors

Kirsi Kohlström is a PhD Student at Department of Education at Umeå University, Sweden. Her PhD thesis focus on competencies in policing. Kirsi Kohlström is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: kirsi.kohlstrom@umu.se

Oscar Rantatalo, PhD, is a Lecturer at the Centre for Police Education at Umeå University, Sweden. His research interests include areas such as workplace learning, education-work transitions, organizational sense-making and policing.

Staffan Karp, PhD, is an Associate Professor in Pedagogy in the Department of Education at Umeå University in Sweden. His main research interests are learning processes in police education and police practice in relation to societal change.

Mojgan Padyab, MPH, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Department of Social Work, Umeå University. Her research interests include psychometric analysis, life course epidemiology, as well as psychosocial job characteristics and health outcomes among social workers and police officers.