

Application for position as Professor of Education at Aarhus University, Department of Education, Campus Aarhus

Applicant:

Associate Professor, Ph.D.

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I hereby apply for the vacant position as professor of education at the Department of Education, Campus Aarhus, advertised at the website of Aarhus University, the 3d of July 2014.

I graduated from Aarhus University in 1993, majoring in political science and with a minor degree in philosophy. I did my Ph.D. at Aalborg University in 2000-2003 at the Department of Learning (today: Department of Learning and Philosophy).

In two intermediate periods from 1994-2000 and again from 2003-2008 I was a full-time teacher at the Peter Sabroe College in Aarhus (today a part of University College VIA). The college educates professional bachelors in social pedagogy/social education.

From 2008-14 I have worked as an associate professor in Philosophy of Education at the Department of Education, University of Aarhus, as a member of the research programme Education and Philosophy. From 2010 to today I have formally been employed at Campus Aarhus.

Thus, for four years I have been an integral part of the academic and social environment in which the professorship is going to operate, that is, the expanding interdisciplinary group of educational researchers in Aarhus. It is, therefore, easy for me to work closely with the local management and with the very dedicated academic staff to develop both research and educational activities at Campus Aarhus and at the department at large. With my scientific and public work, I hope also to bring the scientific community in Aarhus near to both national and European discussions about education and Bildung in a way that increases everyone's scientific commitment and critical interest in the various educational disciplines and in society at large. Of course, I expect to learn a lot myself from this process.

The remainder of the application is structured according to the template specified in the university's application guide:

1. Research qualifications as they relate to the requirements detailed in the advertisement for the position, including a research plan for coming years.

The entire aim of my research is to restore a modern concept of Bildung, both in theory and practice.

This aim rests on three pillars: First, a philosophical-sociological study of the concept of education as such, including a thorough analysis of the content and the uniqueness of the concepts of learning, Bildung and teaching. In my work, I draw on the entire educational tradition from Greek antiquity, on the philosophy of Enlightenment and on American pragmatism to the very latest efforts displayed for instance in the educational thinking of Gert Biesta, Jan Masschelein, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière. This work also involves discussions of important aspects of the social sciences, for example the theories of Ove Kaj Pedersen, Jean Francois Lyotard, Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe and political thought in general. Second, I rest my research on cultural studies, attempting to formulate educational insights based on both recent and older Danish philosophy and literature, involving thinkers such as Grundtvig, Kierkegaard, the Heretica-poets and many others. Finally, my work rests on an empirical-political pillar where I examine how education and pedagogy is conceptualized and used in practical-political contexts. I call it a study of the language games of education - inspired by the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The overall aim is to find and consolidate a concept of education that is modern and solid in all relevant practical, empirical and normative aspects.

In fact this work was initiated already with my thesis in 1993, *Science and Values – From Value Relativism to a Post-empirical Concept of Value*, supervised by sociologist Jørn Loftager. Ten years later, in 2003, I wrote my PhD dissertation, *Learning and Evaluation in Recent Educational Theory* - which was supervised by Professor in Sociology, Erik Laursen, and Professor in psychology Peer Mylov (see Other information to consider, 2e). In 2005, the dissertation was slightly revised and published as, *Learning Something in a World without Banister - a Critical Analysis of Modern Theories of Learning* (upload a). In the book, I argued for a pedagogical synthesis of learning and assessment processes and for the importance of a strong connection between learning and its content.

Subsequently, I have published three large and widely acclaimed monographs. In 2010, I published the book *Education in Tension – A Pedagogy of Reminding, Outspokenness and Attentiveness*, which is a comprehensive study of the concept of education as such, arguing for both educational tradition and critique (upload b). The work was continued in 2013 in less theoretical forms in a third book, *The Crisis in Danish Education* (upload c), a kind of creative explosion on my part where all kind of educational issues are discussed. At the moment, I am finishing a fourth monograph, *The Two Worlds of Education*, accepted for publication at Aarhus University Press in 2015. In the book,

I analyze the relationship between Danish educational policy and the theory of “the competitive state” in light of both Danish and European philosophy and educational theory (upload d, in progress).

These initiatives have also led to two influential anthologies, *Impure Education 1+2*, both of which are edited in collaboration with Professor Lene Tanggaard and Professor Svend Brinkmann from Aalborg University. My own essays in the books are “The Decline of Danish Education” and “The Ring of Education” (upload e+f). In the books, 17 leading researchers from different academic areas discuss the relationship between education, methodology within many theoretical and practical aspects of education. Both books have been very well received in academic and professional circles.

In addition, my research has led to publication of a large number of scientific articles in Danish, Nordic and international journals (e.g. upload g) as well as conference-presentations of comprehensive papers in English, particular at NERA conferences. For instance, I was invited to a symposium “Learning/limits in Education” as the Danish representative at the NERA conference in Lillehammer in 2014. The leading international educational thinker, Gert Biesta, commented on all the papers at the symposium. My own presentation was "The Oblique Teacher" (e.g. upload h).

All these publications relate in different ways to the issues mentioned in the vacancy: there are detailed discussions of both "normatively and empirically based theories about educational practice", there are "research innovation in the field in question", there are thorough discussions of the “relationship between theory and practice” - both in general and particularly in school contexts - as well as a comprehensive production of knowledge in relation to discussions of “education (dannelse/Bildung), teaching and schools”. All the discussions are interdisciplinary in nature, involving elements of learning theory, social theory, philosophy, psychology, theology and literature, and they are all situated within a dynamic and tireless interaction between educational theory, pedagogical practice and educational policy.

Both the theoretical and the empirical elements interact in accordance with the pedagogical view, I have developed in my monographs and articles; namely the idea that theory and practice are characterized by a tension: Some think that theory can be applied to practice. Rather, in my view, theory electrifies practice by opposing it, enabling practice to become a practice proper, whereby the theory becomes theory proper. Ideally, theory and practice, simultaneously, both forget each other and is dependent on one another. Thus, the relationship between theory and practice is not,

speaking on the level of a professorship, a matter of use, but a reflective tension. The most "practice-related research" as the vacancy talks about, can therefore in some contexts be the most "distant to practice" and vice versa. Finally, such a tension is a sign of cultural and educational synthesis, which is the object of educational research proper. This is, in my opinion, the nature and essence of our discipline and I see it as the most important task of a modern professor to qualify this reflection everywhere in the scientific and practical circles of society.

Thus, the combination of pedagogy, philosophy and social sciences, which is also demanded explicitly in the vacancy, is a fundamental part of my professional background and work.

My research relates closely to the professional field - a relationship that is asked for as well. I have, for example, analyzed the theoretical basis for teacher education reforms and I have generally been close to both teachers and social pedagogues and their respective educational programmes in many different ways. This is partly due to my own background as a University College teacher, and I still have close links to this world. Among other things, I am part of the national assessment-team (censorkorps) for the education of pedagogues; I am a diligent speaker around the professional aspect of society, and is in contact with many people from the University Colleges who are interested in research-based questions.

I have also done classical empirical work (classroom observation, interviews, statistics etc.): First, in a one-year period as a research assistant at Aalborg University, where I worked within a research team, making a survey of Danish adult educational center's (VUC's) attempt to enhance the qualitative interaction between low-skilled on-the-spot training and O/A- level programs to promote learning and motivation. Also, in addition to several courses in general theories of science, I have during my training in political science passed three in-depth courses on scientific methodology/statistics. Finally, I helped PhD Torben K. Jensen with his important qualitative research about the lifeworld of politicians (see Other information to consider, 2f). In general, I work hard to be well informed in empirical question. In this way, the practical and the empirical elements go together and is an integral part of my professional interests.

My research plan for the next three years is to continue the examination of the uniqueness of and relationship between educational theory, pedagogical practice, philosophy and social sciences, paying attention to both old and recent texts and events in order to re-establish a normative dimension, *Bildung*, in Danish and European educational research and policy. I usually agree to all

textual or social invitations that can qualify, or wish to discuss, this intention. This overall project has its own rhythm; it cannot, strictly speaking, follow a pre-established plan and it will probably take up the rest of my life. Having said that, there are a number of themes which I expect will be particularly important in the next three years:

- To develop - based on philosophical and social scientific readings - a modern concept of Bildung that can contribute to the normative and practical quality of schooling and teaching.
- To study the discursive genealogy of Danish and perhaps European educational policy; ie. a study and a deconstruction of language game movements in recent decades and perhaps centuries.
- To study the conceptual and empirical relationship between theory and practice in Danish and European educational tradition.
- To intensify my international involvement in educational research and debate, and to make this involvement inspire and stimulate activities and discussions at the Department of Education, especially Campus Aarhus.

I expect that this work will lead to a "doktordisputats" in education before 2020.

2. An account of the applicant's experience of research administration (for example, research management and organizing research seminars and conferences)

In the past four years, I have been the main force in organizing biannual research-seminars for the research-programme Education and Philosophy. The seminars have been an important part of the inner drive of the programme.

Furthermore, I have in 2011, in collaboration with sociologist Jørn Bjerre from Campus Aarhus, organized a one-day seminar at the Department of Education, Campus Aarhus, with the participation of Professor Carl-Anders Säfström from Sweden and Professor Michael Young from United Kingdom. The seminar was open for the public, and its topic was simply: "What are schools for?" from, respectively, a sociological and philosophical point of view. Subsequently, Säfström and Young participated in a successful research seminar for the research group at Campus Aarhus.

I have been the driving force in the organization and the implementation of a seminar on "Impure Education" in 2010 and in the editing of both the subsequent publications, *Impure Education 1+2*.

The seminar was attended by some of the researchers who later contributed to the first anthology, including associate professor Hans Hauge (Arhus University), Professor Lene Tanggaard (Aalborg University), Svend Brinkmann (Aalborg University) and associate professor David Bugge (Aarhus University).

Although I was in charge of these initiatives, I made sure that they were established as part of a collective effort where everyone participated and contributed equally. This is, in my view, the core of research management; namely putting professionalism to work in specific contexts in interaction with other participants and contributors. Research management is a mix of engagement, arguments, openness and responsiveness.

Finally, I am member of the board of network 17, Philosophy of Education, in NERA and part of permanent team of reviewers for the Springer-journal *Studies in Philosophy and Education*.

3. An account of the applicant's teaching qualifications and any experience of organizing degree programmes and directing degree programmes or courses

Since 1993 I have taught in many different contexts and at various levels. When I was a University College teacher I taught social educators/pedagogues in the three subjects *Pedagogy and Communication, Organization and Management* and *Social Sciences* and in a variety of project-based courses, for example *Social Pedagogy and Organization* and *Theory of Science and Methods of Research*. Normally, the work was organized in teams where teachers and students had great pedagogical and administrative freedom as well as responsibility in all aspects of teaching. I was also chair of the teacher-colloquium, and for several years I was part of the school's advisory board for the dean. In the final year of my employment, I was part of the school board as representative for the teachers (se Teaching Portfolio and Other information to consider 2c+d).

Every winter, from 1996 to 2009, I taught in Maastricht on an EU-funded MA in Comparative European Social Studies. Especially, I collaborated with associate professor Svein Tuastad from Stavanger on all aspects of teaching and assessment on the module *Political Philosophy and European Welfare*. I also took part in the general development of the MA under the leadership of Professor Nol Reverda (se Teaching Portfolio and Other information to consider 2a).

As a Ph.D. student in Aalborg I taught, supervised and assessed for three years on the topics of learning and evaluation at a MA in Learning Processes (see Teaching Portfolio and Other information to consider 2b).

In my time as a university lecturer I have, especially during the first years, taught at three different MA-programmes at Department of Education: Citizenship, Adult Education and Professional Development (master-programmes). Furthermore, I was a key person in developing a module *Evaluation of Learning Processes* in a new MA in Evaluation in 2008. Unfortunately, however, the MA didn't materialize. In the last 4 years I have focused my teaching activities on two MA-modules (kandidat-programmes). First, I have been coordinator and the main teacher and supervisor in the module *Almen Pædagogik* on the MA-programme in General Education in Aarhus and secondly, I have been strongly involved in the module *Modern Philosophy of Education* on the MA in Philosophy of Education. In all of these modules, I have both taught, supervised and assessed (see Teaching Portfolio).

At the MA in General Education, I participated in 2011 in a committee discussing a major revision of the curriculum for the program and in 2010 I attended a similar but slightly smaller committee discussing the curriculum of the MA in Philosophy of Education.

Since 2012 I have been involved in what is called UFU, a kind of mini-study board that discusses and audit the quality of the MA in Philosophy of Education, and from 2015 my colleagues in the Education and Philosophy-programme have suggested me as a member of the general Board of Studies, auditing all educational activities at the Department of Education.

According to the university's time recording system, Tempus, the many educational activities has resulted in an excess of 800 hours on January 1, 2014,

4. Any experience with teaching and supervising PhD students.

Currently, I supervise one PhD student, Jan Jaap Rothuizen, who is scheduled to finish his thesis on the relationship between narratives and personal development amongst students of social education/pedagogy in 2016. Furthermore, I am probably going to be a secondary supervisor for Ulla Nørtoft Hansen, on her future PhD work about inclusion. Both Jaap Rothuizen and Nørtoft Hansen work at the University College VIA.

I was chairman of the assessment committee related to Trond Ingvars PhD-thesis "Erfaringslæring og yrkesfaglærere – en kvalitativ studie" in 2010. The committee also included Professor of Education at the University of Oslo, Hansjorg Hohr, and Professor in educational sociology at the University of Aalborg, Palle Rasmussen.

Finally, I have taught at Aalborg University at the Institute for Learning's PhD program, lecturing on the topics "Scientific Journals" and "Dewey's Theory of Learning" back in 2003-04.

Unfortunately, there has been relatively limited scope for further work with the PhD-programme, since the research-programme Education and Philosophy, where I have hitherto been employed, has its head office at Campus Emdrup and have not had any PhD students on its own. But as a professor of Education, situated in Aarhus, I will be able work more holistically with PhD-development throughout Campus Aarhus. I am very interested to intensify my efforts in this field and to participate in discussions with all interested research students concerning the nature and the results of educational research.

5 Any experience with knowledge exchange activities

I attach great importance to the sharing of knowledge. Over the past years, I have developed a rather unique and dynamic structure of knowledge exchange that rests on five pillars:

This structure consists, first, in my scientific work, that is, of monographs and articles as I have already explained in part 1 of my application. Secondly, the knowledge exchange structure also includes a large website www.thomasaastruproemer.dk, where as much material as possible is online. On the website there is also an accompanying blog that has up to 2000 visitors a day. In the blogs, I experiment with different communicative forms, which are often preliminary studies to or practical uses of my scientific work. There are both small poems and extensive analyses of educational topics such as "knowledge" and "school-reform" and "Bildung". The third pillar is a very active and purely professionally based facebook-profile where I discuss pedagogy and education with politicians, policy makers, editors, scientific colleagues, students and professional teachers and educators from across the country. Fourth, I am an industrious participant in the national media, both on radio, television and in newspapers discussing issues of Bildung and educational policy and, fifth, I travel around the country to talk about my ideas to anyone who are

interested, including teachers, social pedagogues and theologians. Among other things, I have participated three times in the People-meeting on the island of Bornholm.

All five pillars of this emerging structure work together like a big science-based and debating muscle, from where I can always keep up with what is happening in Danish educational debates. This makes it possible for me to study the normative and scientific implications of the debates and to experiment with my ideas and get both quick and direct as well as long and considered response from all parts of society.

I have not yet contributed to research reports for public stakeholders but that is not due to a lack of interest. In the future, I expect to get involved in such activities, particularly if it the country's decision makers realize that processes of Bildung should have a more prominent place in matters of policy. With my background in political science, I am well prepared for such work.

In 2010, I received the Holger-Award, given to individuals who "has been particularly outstanding in the educational landscape or promoted the quality of the public debate about schools." Moreover, I have twice received a large one-off payment from the university because of my efforts in the area of research communication and, finally, in 2011, I attended the University of Aarhus's so-called "researcher battle" where I talked about the relationship between theory and practice (see Other information to consider, 1a-c).

6. A short explanation of any leaves of absence

I have not had periods of leave as a university employee. I was on leave from the Peter Sabroe College in 2000-2003 to complete my PhD-training. Apart from that, I have only had short parental leave periods in the 1990s.

Please, contact me for any further information, see contact details in CV.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Astrup Rømer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas Aastrup Rømer

Associate Professor, PhD

List of supplementary material and uploads

1. Curriculum Vitae

2. Research Portfolio

1. Complete list of publications.

2. Eight scholarly work uploads:

- a. Rømer, T.A. (2005). *Læring i en verden uden gelænder – en kritisk diskussion af nyere læringsteori*. København: Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitets Forlag (203 pages).
- b. Rømer, T.A. (2010) *Uddannelse i spænding*, 2010, Aarhus: KLIM (230 pages).
- c. Rømer, T.A, (2013) *Krisen i dansk pædagogik*, Munkebo: Fjordager (376 pages).
- d. Rømer, T.A. (2015). *Pædagogikkens to verdener*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press (approximately 450 pages).
 - accepted for publication, two peer-reviews attached at the end.
 - the manuscript awaits for the final finish, e.g. structure of references etc.
- e. Rømer, T.A. (2011). "Dansk pædagogik i fald og bund", in Rømer, T.A, & Tanggaard, L. & Brinkmann, S. (2011). *Uren pædagogik*, Aarhus: Klim, pp. 130-159 (30 pages).
- f. Rømer, T.A. (2014). "Pædagogikkens strålering", in Rømer, T.A, & Tanggaard, L. & Brinkmann, S. (2011). *Uren pædagogik 2*, Aarhus: Klim, pp. 238-267 (30 pages).

- g. Rømer, T.A. (2013). "Thought and Action in Education" in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (pre-published online, November 2013) (18 sider).
- h. Rømer, T.A. (2014). "The Oblique Teacher", paper for symposium "Learning/limits in Education", at *Nordic Education Research Association's* conference in 2014. (15 pages).

3. Diplomas

- 1. A-levels
- 2. University diplomas in Political Science and Philosophy
- 3. Ph.D. – diploma and review

4. Teaching Portfolio

- 1. List of relevant courses taught.
- 2. Short account of my educational/didactic approach.
- 3. Two examples of course descriptions.
- 4. Two examples of student evaluations.

5. Other Information to Consider

- 1. Knowledge exchange and communication:
 - a. The Holger-Award and "research-battle.
 - b. Links to website and social media-profiles.
 - c. List of public lectures and talks and list of public discussions in English and Danish.

2. Further references/documentation:

- a. Letter of reference from Professor Nol Reverda, Zuyd University, NL.
- b. Letter of reference from Professor Palle Rasmussen, Aalborg University.
- c. Letter of reference from Director of Education, Stefan Mossalski, VIA University College.
- d. Letter of reference from Dean Jens Otto Nystrup, Holstebro Pædagogseminarium (today: VIA University College).
- e. Letter of reference from Professor Peer Mylov, Aalborg University
- f. Letter of reference from Torben K. Jensen, Aarhus University
- g. Statement concerning authorization as Lektor in the subject *Communication, Organization and Management*.

6. List of Referees and Letters of Reference

1. Referee 1 + letter of reference: Professor in Educational Theory and Policy, Gert Biesta
2. Referee 2 + letter of reference: Professor in Educational Psychology, Lene Tanggaard
3. Referee 3: Professor in Philosophy, Peter Kemp