



Book Reviews

Dissertations

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Från likvärdighet till marknad: En studie av offentligt och privat inflytande över skolans styrning i svensk utbildningspolitik 1969–1999

[From equity to markets: A study of public and private influence on school governance in Swedish education policy 1969–1999]

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This thesis is one of a number of studies in recent years that have focused on the education reforms of the 1980s and 1990s and the profound break they have represented within education politics. It has provided us with a deeper understanding of the policies and political characteristics of this shift, which has been one from centralized control, public influence and aims of equality, towards private influence, individual responsibility, decentralization, deregulation and marketization (see also the thesis by Dovemark, 2004). It was an honour to be invited to act as faculty opponent at the public defence of the thesis and a pleasure to be able to accept this invitation. The same applies with regards to the present review of the thesis.

The thesis takes its theoretical points of departure from Critical Realism and Neo-Marxism. Together with structural and post-structural curriculum theory they have provided a foundation for interpreting and developing an understanding for how relationships between society and the education system are constituted by and constitutive of educational political decisions and educational policies. Interactions between economic, political and ideological struc-

tures are important here and are understood in relation to formations of dominant state ideology and as expressions of a balance of power. Education policies are reflections of this dominant ideology. They change in relation to changes in the balance of power.

Six constitutive dominant education ideologies have been identified by the author of the thesis for the post-war era. They are products of the analysis of policy expressions. However, they are also put to use in the thesis as well. Three ideologies are associated with the first three decades of the post-war period and the social democratic era of collectivism, comprehensivism and equality in education and three are associated with the burgeoning neoliberal era from the 1980s, which was characterised by enhanced policies of individualism, effectivity and privatization. The ideologies correspond firstly with an *organism perspective* on education, with reproduction of society as the main goal, an *equivalent perspective*, and an *equality perspective* with a political ambition of attaining greater equality in society as the main goal. These three ideologies have been identified from the first three post-war decades. Relating to the later developments, a *parental perspective* with parental influence as the main goal, a *market perspective* with efficiency, school choice and the introduction of private schools as the main goals, and a *client perspective*, with increasing influence for clients as the main goal are identified. The identification of the six ideologies forms the response to the first research question in the thesis, namely, which ideological perspectives can be identified in education policy documents during the 1900s?

Subsequent to their identification the six ideologies are then turned back on recent policies to form the main analytical instrument in a thorough examination of official inquiry reports, government depart-

ment reports, government bills, and acts of parliament. This analysis was divided into three steps corresponding to three further research questions. These questions are: Which problems are dominant in education policy documents between 1969 and 1999? Which of the six ideological perspectives can be identified in education policy documents 1969–1999 and how does the impact of these perspectives change? What are the implications of these changes for public and private influence on school governance? Particular attention is given to the evidence for and against public and private influence on school governance.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the main goal of Swedish education policy was identified as aiming toward an integrated public school system under national government control, within which social class was expressed as intended to have less of an impact on education access and results. In the 1970s, an integrated public school system had been established but social inequities in schools were still being reproduced. Social reproduction prevailed and became the main frame of reference and was seen to require a rigorous government response, including targeted measures for disadvantaged pupils. These measures were seen to be ineffective however, with this then leading to an increasing scepticism regarding state governance and its attempts and possibilities to equalize the school system. Subsequently, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, increased interest in and successive demands for greater decentralization and increasing individual influence and responsibility in education began to emerge and the dominant view in education policy changed regarding the ability of the government to solve problems in the school system. Two different reform proposals were developed. These were the reform proposal for market governance and the reform proposal for client influence. In the 1990s they became the dominant view and a national expression of a globally promoted solution to what was broadly accepted (politically and in common sense) as the problem of inefficiency, inflexibility and centralization

of welfare solutions in education and the public sector. A centralized school system was described as too inflexible in a world characterized by constant social change and globalization.

The main result identified in the thesis is thus that there has been a profound transformation in Swedish education policy, from a dominance of public influence, with aims for strong state control and national equivalence, to a dominance of private influence and individual choice. This applies according to the thesis moreover, even though the equality perspective also continued to have some influence. Between them was a transitional period, where educational policies were characterized both by goals of public and private influence at the same time. During this period the equivalence perspective was increasingly challenged by client- and market perspectives, but the demands for client influence and marketization did not have sufficient strength to produce a complete change of education policy. This period has been described as one of habituation for the individualization, and privatization of education implied by market reforms in the third period, after which there is a dominance of private influence on the school system (also Beach 2010). During the first half of the 1990s there is an emphasis on a deregulated market. During the second half of the 1990s the emphasis is on regulated market governance, through state governance by results.

At the close of the thesis, and in conclusion, the shift in policy that has been identified from the results is discussed in relation to economic, political and ideological developments and a hypothesis is constructed that the reform of the education sector can be explained as the result of a combination of previously constructed factors. They comprise an economic crisis that undermined the support for the public sector, a national and global rightward shift in politics, and a weakening of the labour movement and its possibilities for resistance. These developments became vertically active forces that aided the ascendancy of market oriented policies and the infusion of neoliberal ideas.

However in addition, and importantly, the thesis also argues that overcoming the resistance among the school bureaucracy and teacher unions for the successful decentralization of schools and education to municipalities in 1989 was of critical importance, as it cleared the pathway for a radical transformation of the Swedish school system later on, that was both contrary to equity in the school system and the aims expressed for the formulated need for decentralization in the first instance. The power and ability of pro-market governments to eliminate opposition is significant here. Sidestepping and undermining the recommendations against marketization as a solution for the problems of efficiency in the public sector is among the tactics that have been used.

Commentary

When commenting on the thesis, the first thing I want to say is that I found it to be an interesting and compelling read that is based on an extensive and thorough critical and analytical reading of over forty years' worth of key political texts in the education field, including every major commissioned report in the comprehensive school sector, or of relevance to that sector. There is little criticism of the thesis for in this sense, except perhaps to say that it may have been too extensive in its broad coverage to be able to attain analytical depth in relation to some major issues. To say so would however be at least partly unfair. The thesis makes a strong critical analysis and draws well supported conclusions, but these could have been bolder I think. For instance, if I had written this thesis, and I would have been proud to do so, I might have chosen a title like 'Globalising Capitalism, its Agents and the Problem of Education and Class Inequality', to which I would have added part of Börjeson's present title as an under-title; specifically 'Private Influence in the Policy Transformation from Equity to Market Choice'. The full final title would then have been: 'Globalising Capitalism, its Agents and the Problem of Education and Class Inequality: Private Influence and the Policy Transformation from Equity to Market Choice'.

This title I feel would have thoroughly well encapsulated the thesis content and its main claims and findings, but it would also have allowed for two more things. First a more focused analysis on the more specific social class interests involved in the policy transformations that are considered, together with a clarification of who promoted the transformations and how. Secondly, it also introduces a very important global perspective. This is important in my view. The thesis concerns the restructuring of education and its effects in Sweden, one of the Nordic countries that are constantly internationally upheld as iconic in terms of education justice and equity, and that is being used at present to launch anti-democratic education reforms from in other countries – based on the exporting and global marketing of a school concept that is itself a product of importing and refracting neoliberal principles into and in the former and extensive comprehensive education system in the first place. Interestingly then, Swedish education is being used as a model for the globalisation of equitable privatisation after, as the thesis also makes clear, (a) the ambition for equity has been turned over and (b) despite these ambitions never having been proven to have been very successful (see also Berhanu 2016a; 2016b; Salokangas, Chapman and Beach 2016)

The breadth of the analysis in terms of the historical scope of the policy evaluation is perhaps what troubles me most. This is however an odd thing to say perhaps. But my feeling is that due to the extensive scope of the national political text analysis the thesis didn't have space to attend in analytical detail to important international convergences and consistencies. An example of this is that although the thesis alludes to similar policies of conversion to the ones described; and in similar relatively short time periods; in countries like England and Wales, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Finland, it is unable to examine what these developments have led to, and how these developments may also be reflected in the Swedish situation. The education systems in the named countries have been restructured

with the help of similar policies to those that have been identified as operating in Sweden by the thesis, to *private-economically productive* systems that are increasingly reflecting a dominance of and commitment towards capitalist interests, with noticeably negative effects on equality and particularly the education standards of the poor.

I would have liked to have seen more about international developments such as these, particularly as the thesis also illustrates that exactly such consequences (and warnings about them) were denied, disguised, avoided and evaded by market proponents, despite them also having even been highlighted and discussed in significant inquiry commission reports; such as those of the Democracy Commission in the late 1980s. What could have also been added is that it is with the help of this evasion and denial that welfare services, such as education, which were established on the basis of previous agreements between Capital and Labour and from common goods accrued through taxation finance have been transformed. What could also have been added then is that these agreements were rapidly broken by capitalist enterprises with help from right leaning (or just fearful) governments, as a means of turning the former common and consensus model of education into a source for the generation of new entrepreneurial values, private interests and corporate profit. I would have liked to have seen a little more made of this point.

Particularly the point about this conversion having been made possible by the complicity of an elected state government is a very important one I think. What it identifies is that this government has thus contributed not to the protection of any sense of common interest in education, but rather clearly and distinctly to its exploitation in private economic interests. As the thesis also points out the case to be, this means in fact that this elected government has thus become a key intermediary in the conversion of public assets to private capital, by which means, neoliberal restructuring has also then become a *de facto* new bureaucratic archetype for redesigning the (welfare) state

and social welfare as a finance-driven form of economic governance and reform that preys on and feeds off public developments and common wealth.

Three interrelated processes of socialization, habituation and commercialization have been identified internationally in this conversion (Beach 2010). These are identifiable in the thesis but the criticism stops there in relation to most of them. The issue concentrated on instead is policy as text in a way inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis but not drawing specifically on the developments recently, within that tradition, of the specialized analysis of just specifically political texts (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2013). This focus is found in the research of people like Jane Mulderrig, in studies not dissimilar to those Börjesson has undertaken. Examples are: Mulderrig (2011); (2012), and (2015).

This critique of policy developments that was obstructed by the broad scope of the analysis is for me one of critical significance. As the thesis points out, neoliberalism is a form of governance that exhibits a clear political retreat from previously politically expressed efforts to establish social equality and democracy, in and by comprehensive public service education provision. But the way right leaning governments and their supporters (commissioned or otherwise) actually exploited (emotional, social, symbolic and material) investments in these developments was not discussed in depth, and nor was the conduct of restructuring just exactly in the wake of the formal post-eighties collapse of socialist alternatives and the disappearance of their threat to capitalist hegemony and the interests it works in. These are points I would have liked to have seen the thesis engage in. These points are that the neoliberal colonization and exploitation of the public sector institutions, with education as an example:

- Has taken place as a global phenomenon at a particular (and common) historical juncture, and this may be more than a mere historical coincidence
- Has taken place with the collusion of concrete governments and their repre-

sentatives, advisors and members: often with little political opposition even from the so-called political left

- Has been dependent on an established infrastructure of people, places, artefacts and practices that has been extensively supplied and developed by public funding that are now being increasingly 'privatized', liberalized and exploited in ways that have gained broad political support even from groups who are clearly disadvantaged by and through the processes concerned
- Is taking place just precisely at the time when the former fear of socialism by capitalists; and the threat of a socialist hegemony; has disappeared.

Having made these small criticisms, I have to acknowledge nevertheless that although the thesis isn't able to obtain leverage on these points, it does still make an important and significant contribution to critical education policy scholarship. The quality of the work is good and the production of the thesis is timely. In the current global context of education, Sweden's comprehensive education system is, as stated earlier, often understood to offer equality of access in relation to social class and gender, and inclusion to migrants, asylum seekers and recently settled new nationals and their children in an internationally remarkable way. But as Börjesson's thesis makes aptly clear, although the history of the system was one that displayed some formal ambitions of these kinds at the political level, these were both internally inconsistent and contradictory (Berhanu, 2016a), and the system has undergone extensive changes since then, from which the falling general levels of performance, increasing social class differences, threats to democratic values and equivalence between schools, and the commodification of and surplus value accumulation from the education field, that important commissions such as the Democracy Commission warned of, have all developed.

Through the production and successful defence of this thesis Mattias Börjesson adds his name to the list of critical authors addressing the influx of neoliberal forms

of governance in our national education system. However, when saying this Börjesson was also very clear that it must also be recognised that the welfare State project in the Nordic countries, including Sweden, and particularly perhaps most obviously in relation to education fields, was never fully completed and that as elsewhere, it was full of compromises, with this being as apparent in relation to education policies as elsewhere, and that this incompleteness was then also fundamentally seized upon by market proponents to support the need for change that was then propagated by right leaning governments and their agents as part of a collective political retreat from the aims of equity and inclusion. Moreover, as the thesis importantly notes, preparedness for change had already been politically inserted previously. The preparations were activated as soon as the idea of educational equity and equivalence was no-longer considered to be necessary as a means to assure a capitalist hegemony.

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Monographs

Petter Sandgren

Internatskolorna: Att fostra en elit

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In August 2013 the oldest, still active Swedish Boarding School, Lundsberg was at the forefront of Swedish national media. Behind the interest were reports of deeply humiliating forms of hazing. These incidents also form the prelude to Petter Sandgren’s study of how this form of boarding school was exported from England over the seas, within the Empire as well as outside it. The case of Sweden is devoted a particular attention. As the author shows, the export was not executed in any easily identifiable one-way direction. The formation of the originally British form of elite boarding schools in Western Europe and USA was rather the result of intricate webs of exchange between different countries. England did not only serve as an exporting country, but was also in turn inspired by other countries. Sandgren hereby not only aims to give a more comprehensive historical perspective on the phenomenon, but also to avoid the pitfalls of what Ulrich Beck has referred to as methodological nationalism. The ambition is thus primarily to complement the hitherto more common national perspective.

The material on which the author draws is extensive; apart from memoirs and letters from the initiators of the boarding schools, he draws widely on fiction, arguing that it was an essential source of inspiration when the boarding schools first started to spread. A clear indication of this is the event that he has chosen as his point of departure for the analysed expansion: the publication of Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* in 1857.

In mapping how the system spread within the British Empire and back and forth between different states outside the Empire, particularly between England, France, Germany, Switzerland and USA, Sandgren makes an important empirical contribution. The expansion, he argues, drew on two different boarding school models: the “traditional Eton-Rugby model” and the progressive “Abbotsholme/Be-