

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Sweden case study report 2 Developing a School Curriculum for Gender Equality

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Developing a School Curriculum for Gender Equality

In the curriculum (Lpo94) for the Swedish compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre, issues concerning equality and gender are frequently stressed:

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school should represent and impart. (p 3)

The teacher should:

/.../

- ensure that all students, independently of social background and regardless of gender, ethnic belonging, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability, have true influence over the work methods, work structures, and educational content, and ensure that this influence increases as they grow in age and maturity,
- work so that boys and girls have equally great influence and participation over their education (p14)

However, investigations carried out by The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement indicate that equality and gender was not a prioritised area in schools and communities¹.

Gender pedagogue education

In the budget proposition for 2002², funds were allocated for educating resource persons (gender pedagogues) within the field of equality and gender. There is no information concerning whether this decision was influenced by the investigations by The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement mentioned above. The main purpose with the course was to create a more gender equal situation in Swedish schools. The educated resource persons were supposed to work with gender equality issues in the pedagogical practice in order to increase the quality and goal fulfilment within the field of education. The aim was that there should be one educated gender pedagogue in every Swedish community at the end of 2004³.

The Swedish National Agency for Education was commissioned by the Swedish Government to engage the Universities in Gothenburg and Umea to deliver this provision⁴. The participating universities designed a course syllabus in cooperation with The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement. Information about the course was sent to all Swedish communities on two occasions every term. Also, other authorities that deal with educational issues have been informed. The course has also been advertised in specialist press, daily press and on the web.

Since the start, in 2003, the number of persons that have shown interest in the course has increased continuously. By way of introduction the interest for the education was relatively low, but during the later part of the education almost all of the offered places in the educational programmes were filled. Many communities with educated gender pedagogues have applied to register more persons to the course.⁵

The University of Gothenburg has delivered the course to 50 persons on six different occasions. In all 293 persons have been registered. Out of those, 130 persons have completed the course. The

¹ Björnsson (2003), Hur är det ställt? Tack ojämt!!, Analys av kommuners kvalitetsredovisningar, (2004) and Nationell skolutveckling – fem utvecklingsområden, rapport nr 2, (2004).

² Budget proposition (Government bill) 2001/02: 1D21, pp 31, 68

³ There are 290 communities in Sweden.

⁴ In Regleringsbrev (*Government appropriation directions*)2004/ 25:3 ap6 from the Swedish Government, The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement was commissioned to continue the education.

⁵ Myndigheten för skolutveckling (The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement), 2005:282

University of Umea has provided the course to 20-25 persons on 13 different occasions. In all 230 persons have been registered. Out of those, 164 persons have completed it. In total, 523 persons were registered on the course. Out of those, 294 persons sat the exam. Today, there are some qualified gender pedagogues in 138 out of 290 the Swedish communities. The duration of the course was from 2003-2006. The University of Gothenburg carried out the course as distance education with only a few “physical” meetings during one of the semesters, while the University of Umea has carried out the education with only “physical” meetings during two semesters. The course was free of charge and the communities were entitled to payments for travel costs, possible accommodation, allowances for expenses and supply teachers. Both universities have yearly accounted what kind of activities have been carried out, who has taken part in the course, what the results of the assessments are and how the funding was used.

The content of the course

Course aims: The overall course aim was to educate pedagogical resource persons who are going to work on a practical level in order to strengthen their competences in equality and gender so that they can apply them in their own community. Another aim was to develop tools for change and development in the participants’ own pedagogical work.

The participants were supposed to develop an understanding for central concepts and theories within the field of gender studies and an understanding of concepts such as democracy, tolerance and human rights. Conceptions of “femininity” and “masculinity” in different social and cultural contexts are related to power dimensions like ethnicity, class, age and sexual orientation.

A problem and process based method of working was emphasised as a tool for social change. The participants chose a problem area, plan and carried out a change-orientated work within the educational area in their own communities.

The course was divided in two main themes:

1. Central concepts and theories, learning organisations, interplay between body, identity, knowledge, language and power
2. Documentation and pedagogical developmental work

Evaluation

During 2005/2006 the course was evaluated by The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement. The evaluation showed that

- 90 percent of the participants say that the course has strengthened their awareness of equality and gender as a fundamental value.
- 70 percent of the participants say that the course has strengthened their competence to make connections between equality and gender and the national curriculum goals.
- 46 percent of the participants say that the course has strengthened their ability to develop more diversified methods of teaching and teaching material.
- 36 percent of the participants say that the course has made it possible for them to create contacts and networks.
- Less than 50 percent of the educated gender pedagogues have an employment that makes it possible for them to work as a resource person.
- On average the educated gender pedagogues can use 15 percent of their working time for matters that have to do with equality and gender.

- 14 organised networks for gender pedagogues have been created.

The educational goal has been reached while the ambition to have one gender pedagogue in each community has failed. The evaluation also shows that the main result is that pedagogues at an individual level have enhanced their competences, but that these competences have not been integrated into the school sector.

Evaluations carried out by the participating universities show that assumptions for the educated teachers have been very different both during and after the course. Most of them have suffered from difficult local conditions such as economy, time and legitimacy. Further on, the gender pedagogues in many communities have not got any support from capable and engaged headteachers. According to the universities there are today many educated gender pedagogues who do not have the opportunity to work actively in the local developmental work. It is usual that the gender pedagogues themselves have full responsibility for local development work concerning equality in their communities or schools. Less than half of the educated gender pedagogues have a position as a resource person. On average, the gender pedagogues can use 15 percent of their working time for issues that have to do with gender and equality. Some gender pedagogues have time limited project engagements on special projects.

Later decisions made by the Swedish government

In 2006, a new bill was legislated in Sweden, *Security, respect and responsibility*⁶.

The Act contains:

- A prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, sexual orientation and disability.

Direct discrimination:

A child or a school student must not be disadvantaged by discrimination on one of the five grounds of discrimination covered by the Act, ie, sex, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, sexual orientation and disability.

- All forms of degrading treatment are covered by the Act.
- Other degrading treatment is introduced as a new concept.
- A child and school student representative for equal treatment is set up.
- Provisions on active, goal-oriented work.
- An equal treatment plan is required.
- Duty to investigate degrading treatment.
- Easier to obtain damages for harassment and other degrading treatment between children and school students.

The organiser of the activity must ensure that each pre-school and school has an equal treatment plan for every single activity. The main purpose of the equal treatment plan is to promote equal treatment and to prevent and combat harassment and other degrading treatment. The plan must set out the measures planned. It must be reviewed and followed up every year. The plan is intended to function as a “living document” by being action-oriented and being updated continuously. Each activity is free to develop an equal treatment plan based on its own needs.

When a child or school student complains that he or she has been exposed to harassment or other degrading treatment, the organiser of the activity (or the person designated by the organiser of the activity) shall investigate the complaint and prevent further degrading treatment. This also applies to degrading treatment between children and school students.

⁶ Government bill 2005/06:38

The National Agency for Education will have special responsibility for the new Act. A child and school student representative for equal treatment have been set up in the Agency. (See: <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/1333;jsessionid=BFF4445BDE0FBA931717B8187656DFE5>)

Comments

As shown in the evaluations (see above), less than half of the educated gender pedagogues have a position as a resource person in their community. A relevant question is why communities spend sizeable amounts of money into an education that they do not use at all after it is completed. A plausible answer might be that it is regarded to be politically correct to talk about gender equality but that, at the same time, it is considered to be too expensive to let the gender pedagogues carry out activities that have to do with gender equality in practice. The cost for the course is a one-for-all cost while continuous work with gender equality requires ongoing economical resources. Long-term economical considerations seem to win.

Another thing that does not emerge from the documents available is what kind of concrete activities the gender pedagogues carry out in their schools and communities.

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