

Reorganising Teacher Education in Sweden: Paradoxes of ‘diversity’

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In most contemporary states, citizens have views on, and opinions about, formal education, since the average citizen has knowledge about, and direct or indirect experience of, formal schooling. Education has become the concern of all, and in this public scrutiny the faults of society are commonly laid at its door. With ‘better’ or ‘more suitable’ education, many argue, unemployment, drug abuse, lack of social cohesion and a myriad of other social, political and economic problems and ills could be solved. Before elections, promises to make education ‘better’ (typically to enhance national development) are commonly used by politicians to appeal to the public at large. Education, including teacher-training education, can thus be studied and analysed as a field with strong symbolic value, and a field where political competitors express their views. Educational reforms can also be understood as a symbolic battlefield, where both social conflicts and social cooperation can be traced and discerned.

In this essay I shall discuss the most recent reform in teacher-training education in Sweden which was launched in 2001.¹ This reform can be characterised as one of ‘unity’ and ‘diversity’ and as a highly contemporary effort by the state to mould and shape future citizens.² In a country like Sweden where everybody attends school for a great many years (‘life-long learning’), a reform in teacher education highlights a direction for the future. Today a slogan like ‘freedom of choice’ in the educational field reflects new ideals for the so-called post-industrial society, where the labour force and the citizens must be ‘flexible’. The reform of teacher education in 2001 stressed the need to support the development of ‘professional’ teachers who would be able to handle the

¹ This essay is based on material collected for a multidisciplinary research project called *Teacher-training in ‘diverse’ Sweden – A comparative study of class, gender and ethnicity*. In the project analyses of documents and other texts are combined with ethnographic fieldwork. The project – running from 2005 to 2007 – is financed by the Educational Committee of the Swedish Research Council.

² The 100-page proposition (Prop. 1999/2000: 135) – *A renewed teacher education* – was handed over from the Ministry of Education to the Swedish Parliament in May 2000 and the reform was rushed through and implemented in 2001.

complex and largely unknown demands in tomorrow's schools. The reform opened up a great deal of variety and difference in the courses offered by the teacher-training colleges, yet stressed the 'unity' of the teaching profession.

This reform, I shall argue, throws light on a variety of paradoxical and even contradictory issues facing education in contemporary Sweden. Education is supposed to be both 'similar' and 'different'. Each teacher-training college, for example, should be similar, that is, comparable, to all the others, yet it should develop its own specific profile(s) by stressing that it differs from the other colleges. Each teacher-training college should contribute to the unity of society, while at the same time taking the diversity of its students and the diversity of schoolchildren into account. Each college should compete with the other colleges by being 'better' and attracting more applicants. By enhancing a healthy competition, the educational level nationally will supposedly increase. By scrutinising the tension between ideas of 'similarities' and 'differences', as ideals of 'diversity' and 'unity', it is possible to unravel these educational paradoxes and contradictions. I shall argue that, although there are seemingly 'more choices' for students at teacher training colleges, and although 'diversity' is lauded, the new reform creates more 'sameness', instead.

Before turning to the teacher-training reform of 2001 and my own empirical material, the history of Swedish teacher-training institutions will be briefly discussed to put the latest reform in context. The perceived shift in Swedish society from cultural homogeneity to cultural heterogeneity, and the official lauding of diversity and multiculturalism, will also be brought out. This perceived shift has, of course, educational implications. Also the debates of gender equality and education will be discussed.

Swedish teacher-training history at a glance

In 1842 a law was passed by the Swedish Parliament, making it mandatory for all parishes to establish elementary schools for the children, and obliging all children to attend these schools (cf. Gök's and Tan's contributions in this volume for comparison with Turkish educational development). Reading abilities, however, were already well established.³ More than 150 years earlier, parents and patrons became responsible – by law – for the literacy of their children, servants and employees. Literacy was defined solely in terms of the Holy Scriptures and the ability to read and answer questions concerning the official Swedish Lutheran faith (see Hartman Appendix 2, this volume). Boys and girls could not take their first communion and could not, in effect, be regarded as adult enough to marry, without this 'religious' literacy. The vast majority of the Swedish population achieved literacy without access to formal education. Formal education, by contrast, was slow to take root. It took more than a hundred years, from the law of 1842, to make the six years of elementary school mandatory in practice for all Swedish children (Hartman 2005: 41). But the law signalled the beginning of the national educational system and the beginning of a new teaching profession. Shortly after the law was passed, teacher-training institutions were established. The development and evolution

³ This section leans heavily on Hartman (2005).

of these institutions was initially not very impressive. To begin with, teachers were trained for less than a year and the quality of that training left much to be desired (ibid.: 97). Once the prerequisites for entry were increased, and once the Swedish state – rather than the Church and the local communities – became engaged, the quality improved. The teaching-training colleges slowly emerged as the institutions where ‘progressive’ and ‘modern’ educational ideas were disseminated to the students, the future teachers of Sweden.

The future teachers entering the training institutions were initially a varied lot, but, generally speaking, these institutions have provided an important avenue for social mobility in Sweden. For poor but talented or ambitious young men (and later women), teaching became a respectable profession with social influence. The teaching of pupils in the lower elementary classes opened up opportunities for a new, and particularly female, profession (Salzman 1993). As education expanded, so did teacher-training institutions. With reforms also in secondary education and its ensuing expansion, a variety of professional and educational conflicts became apparent. The professional skills of teachers trained for the elementary and mandatory levels were based on a comprehensive and less academic view of the pupils, while teachers for the non-mandatory stages relied on their specific disciplinary academic merits. The teachers in the elementary and mandatory schools were initially more successful in carving out a united and specific professional niche (cf. Florin and Johansson 1993: 155). But the secondary ‘academic’ schoolteachers were for a long time successful in barring women from teaching at the higher levels. The tide could not be stopped, however, only delayed.

In 1977, about 130 years after the first teacher-training institutions were established in Sweden, they all became part of the university system.⁴ By then a reformed system based on nine compulsory years of schooling had been functioning for almost two decades. The comprehensive school did away with a variety of ‘streams’ and made way for an enormous expansion of secondary and university education in Sweden. This was heralded as the last thrust against the old class-based education (cf. Hartman, Appendix 2). But although all teacher-training institutions became part of the university structure, teacher training still varied tremendously depending on the level one aimed to teach. A decade later, in 1988, a new teacher-education reform was launched to remove the lingering division (and differences in professional status) between teachers focusing on the young or the older pupils (cf. Hartman 2005: 153 ff). Teacher training aimed to create teachers with an ability to work with other teachers and to share a number of professional and educational concerns. By the very nature of educational systems, teacher-training reforms take time to show results and to have an impact. The teachers trained after the reform of 1988 would for a long time be a minority in the Swedish schools. Yet, as noted by Hartman (ibid.: 154), another reform was launched well before the impact of the earlier ones could be assessed.

⁴ Through the reform in 1977 not only teacher-training colleges but also other professional/vocational colleges dominated by female students, like nursing and occupational therapy, became part of the university system and thus their training became based on academic principles of ‘critical thinking’ and ‘knowledge’ rather than mainly on ‘well-tryed experience’.

Swedish educational history points to the importance of change in the training of future teachers as a crucial instrument to change schools. Major educational reforms have made education mandatory and increasingly prolonged. They have also opened education to all citizens, regardless of gender and class. These reforms have been intimately connected to visions of societal reform. The teacher-training reform of 2001, however, breaks this pattern. This reform has been instigated, one can claim, in order to adapt future teachers (and their pupils) to changes which have already taken place in society (cf. Calander 2004: 120-121, Hartman 2005: 156). The rhetoric of the latest Swedish reform echoes reforms and changes found also in many other European countries (cf. Hargreaves 1994, Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004). The instigators of these reforms claim that citizens need to be educated to become 'flexible' (see Carlson, this volume) to meet the demands of the 'new' world. They must accept ideas of life-long learning linked to changes brought about through globalisation and increased diversity in society (Carlson 2004: 163).

'Sweden is a multicultural society'

In 1996 a Swedish state-commissioned report officially declared the country to be a multicultural society. According to this report, the shift from a monocultural and homogenous to a diverse and multicultural society was caused by increased international movement of people and ideas, and mainly by the significant number of immigrants, or citizens with at least one parent born in another country. The aim of the report was to put forward new policies towards immigrants. Although some members of Parliament had reservations about its conclusions, the report – Sweden, the Future and Diversity – was generally regarded as heralding the new political consensus on immigrants in Sweden.

In the 19th century Sweden was a poor country from which people emigrated, but from the second half of the 20th century it became a country of immigration. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s Swedish industries were in desperate need of workers. Most were recruited from neighbouring countries, especially Finland, but there were campaigns also in Greece, the former Yugoslavia and Turkey. Labour migration was unregulated until 1968; anybody who found a job could stay in the country. The Swedish authorities presumed that the majority of the foreign workers would return to their countries of origin after a few years in Sweden. Language training, for example, mainly took place with a focus on the working life (see Carlson, this volume). There was considerable outward as well as inward migration, indicating fluidity in the workforce. Gradually, however, it became apparent that many labour migrants had become permanent residents in Sweden. Family members joined them and settled in Sweden and the presence of 'foreigners' took on a more permanent feature. The Swedish authorities, political parties and trade unions began to ponder on the role and position of immigrants.

The first major state-commissioned report on the topic was delivered in 1974. Immigration had become a permanent feature of Swedish society, according to the report, and Sweden should ensure that migrants had the same basic rights to welfare as natives, and also that migrants could settle permanently and become

Swedish citizens. Simultaneously the report stressed the rights of the migrants to 'retain their cultural identity' (Narrowe 1998: 30), thus making return migration possible. The right to education in the so-called 'home languages' was a central feature of the new policies towards migrants (see Lindberg, this volume). This programme was met with a great deal of controversy (see Narrowe 1998), and it was largely dismantled in the 1990s. But its importance as both a symbol and a producer of multilingual and multicultural contemporary Sweden cannot be underestimated. The programme was tied to the rights of 'migrant children' to develop language and cultural skills linked to their 'home' countries in ordinary Swedish schools. This programme also created an awareness of opportunities for migrants to become teachers in Swedish schools.

At the turn of the century about 10 per cent of Sweden's citizens and permanent residents had been born outside the country, and about 20 per cent had at least one parent who had been born in another country.⁵ The geographic roots of people who have migrated to Sweden since the 1950s are extremely diverse but the general trend is clear. In the decades of intensive labour migration people came primarily from the Nordic countries (mainly Finland), southern Europe and Turkey. From the 1970s when labour migration became restricted, the Nordic group continued to grow due to the free labour market between the Nordic countries. Since the 1980s the share of people from Asia has steadily grown, and most have come from the Middle East as asylum seekers. Although the asylum policies in Sweden, as in the European Union in general, have become much more restrictive in the past decade, there is considerable immigration through family unification. Swedish schools continue to receive children who have a mother tongue other than Swedish. In the suburbs around cities like Malmö, Göteborg and Stockholm there are schools where there are more than 50 different languages spoken in the homes of the pupils. Although there is an official lauding of this linguistic richness, it is also seen by many teachers, parents, pupils and politicians as a pedagogical problem in a number of schools (see Lindberg, this volume). Poor results and a high drop-out rate in the 'multicultural' suburbs is a hot topic of discussion in the media. 'Multiculturalism' in schools is quite often blamed as causing social exclusion and failing to promote integration.

In the parliamentary proposition to launch the teacher-training reform of 2001, the 'new multicultural' Sweden is a given fact. The text simply states that (the Swedish) society has become 'increasingly multicultural which leads to an increased demand for understanding and respect for different cultural identities. More people move across national borders. An increasing number of Swedes will, during a period in their lives, live in another country, and at the same time more persons in Sweden are born abroad or have parents who are' (Prop. 2000: 6). Future teachers have to be trained to function and work in multicultural educational institutions (*ibid.*: 9).⁶ Multiculturalism and diversity are thus variously lauded, contested or simply taken for granted.

⁵ The official definition of a 'migrant' in Sweden is a person who, born in another country, has moved to Sweden, or a person born in Sweden with both parents born outside the country. 'Ethnic' or 'national' affiliation is not allowed in official Swedish statistics (see also discussion in the Introduction to this volume).

⁶ My translation of the original text.

‘Gender equality is a crucial aspect of Swedish society’

Equality between women and men has become one of the most important goals of Swedish public life. It is an arena of Swedish political culture where we find total consensus in public statements (Rabo 1997: 107).⁷ The very Swedish concept of *jämställdhet* – equality between the sexes – is part of the larger and more general idea and ideal of redressing economic and social inequalities based on class; *jämlikhet*. Since the 1990s, however, one can say that the ideal of gender equality has become more important than redressing social and economic inequalities. Up to now men and women have not been equal enough, according to the vast majority of Swedish politicians. Men earn more money and have more power and influence in politics and in private companies. They are better cared for in hospitals and in the social services, and still in many ways constitute the ‘normal’ citizen. Education, it is believed, is an important instrument for teaching and spreading *jämställdhet*. Schools are thus obliged to counteract traditional gender roles and teacher-education colleges are obliged to instruct their students in gender equality. But how is gender equality perceived (see Holm and Öhrn, and Carlson, this volume)? What is a ‘traditional’ gender role in the early 21st century, and how are gender equality and education discussed?

The contemporary Swedish educational system is gender-integrated. There are no schools catering only for girls or boys. This has not always been the case. In the 1960s a mandatory and unified nine-year school system was established. Before then pupils were separated at an earlier age according to gender and ‘class’ (see discussion above). Girls who wanted education beyond the primary level went to girls’ schools where they were taught, among other things, ‘womanly’ subjects. Those who wanted to have a secondary school examination certificate, which made entry into university possible, had to enter a *läroverk* (lycée). Boys who continued past the primary level started in the *läroverk* much earlier. This educational system reflected an ideology in which most children were not thought to be in need of much education, and where most girls were not thought to need pre-academic education. The reform in the 1960s changed all that, and this decade marks the beginning of mass education at all levels and the great expansion for women in higher education. But although there is no formal gender segregation in Swedish schools, researchers have stressed that gender segregation and gender differences are expressed in a variety of ways. In secondary school we often find a *de facto* gender segregation because girls and boys choose different school programmes. In the mandatory school the education may differ drastically from the girls’ and boys’ perspectives, although they share the same classrooms and the same teachers, simply because there is more of an emphasis on and concern about gender and education than a few decades ago (cf. Öhrn 2000).

Until the mid-1990s, researchers typically analysed girls in schools mainly as victims of oppression. Research often stressed that girls were not seen or heard and that boys dominated the classroom. This perceived *de facto* male domination was seen as detrimental for girls’ and young women’s educational and career choices, with repercussions all the way to higher education. In such

⁷ The arguments in this section are more fully developed in Rabo (1997).

a perspective, women constituted an ‘untapped potential’ (SOU 1996: 29: 279). But although research showed that girls in schools received less attention and care, their grades have become better than those of the boys. Women have climbed the educational ladder and have recently become ‘overrepresented’ as undergraduates in most programmes at university. The same trend is found worldwide. To understand the relative success of girls in Swedish schools and women in Swedish higher education, an analysis of gender must be combined with an analysis of power, some researchers stress. The subordination and obedience of the girls make them diligent and quiet (Bergqvist 1995, Jakobsson 2000). Class is also an important variable. Girls from the middle class have climbed the educational ladder. The needs of working-class girls are seldom paid attention to in schools. Furthermore, they are often regarded as truants (Öhrn 1993, Ambjörnsson 2004, see also Holm and Öhrn, this volume).

There is an interesting paradox concerning gender and education in contemporary Sweden. On the one hand, *jämställdhet* is still perceived in terms of redressing the balance in favour of women, and educational programmes of gender equality aim to increase the participation and ‘voice’ of girls and women. On the other hand, there is a public debate about the new and increasing educational gap between boys and girls, when women dominate all higher educational programmes except engineering. In Sweden no one voices the opinion that girls do ‘well’ at the expense of boys. In March and April 2006 in a series of articles in *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the largest Swedish dailies, the educational shortcomings of the new ‘weaker sex’ were debated. Martin Ingvar, a neurological researcher, insisted that schools disadvantage boys because their puberty occurs later than that of girls (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 30 March 2006).⁸ Most other experts interviewed for the series, however, stressed that ideas of masculinity have changed and that cultural and social factors play an enormous role in how boys are made into boys. It is interesting to note the new ambiguities surrounding ‘differences’ between girls and boys in education. A few decades ago concepts like fairness, opportunities and justness were used to tackle educational inequalities between girls and boys. Now, echoing debates of more than a hundred years ago, there is once again an interest in the difference between boys and girls in school. Such differences are surprisingly often talked about in terms of ‘essences’. These might be due to ‘biology’ or ‘upbringing’. And there are many educationalists who claim that, to overcome these differences and to help both girls and boys, we need to separate them in schools.⁹

In Sweden, women are seldom directly blamed for the ‘problematic male’, but there is an outspoken concern about the lack of male teachers. Today the teaching profession is dominated by women and is clearly seen as a female profession. Teachers’ unions and teacher-training colleges express anxiety about this. The unions worry that the status and salary level will fall when the profession is seen as ‘female’. A parliamentary report in 1994 (Ds 1994: 98)

⁸ The grading system and the organisation of the school should take the ‘immaturity’ of boys into consideration, according to Ingvar. He does not, however, explain why boys did better in earlier decades. Perhaps the brains of the boys have evolved or devolved?

⁹ For a discussion of how gender separation in Syrian schools is talked about as favourable especially for the grades of girls see Rabo (1992).

concerning gender equality in schools noted that teachers are important role models and Swedish schools need more male teachers. Girls ‘need to see that men can work in female fields, and boys lack male teachers with whom they can identify’ (ibid.: 34). It is interesting to note that this report so clearly identifies the teaching profession as a ‘female’ one! Not least, boys with a ‘migrant background’ are thought to be in need of male role models, according to the report. There is an unwritten but clear perception that these boys have special problems in handling female teachers, because they are believed to have ‘patriarchal’ values making them unable to ‘obey’ Swedish female teachers.¹⁰ A great many teacher-training colleges have had special (and often costly) projects to encourage men to become teachers. But although these projects may be successful and highly regarded by the participants, they have not changed the sex ratio among students in the colleges to any great extent (Jonsson 2006).¹¹

According to the parliamentary proposition of 2000 for the new teacher-training education, each college should provide a gender perspective and all students should develop an awareness about and knowledge of the importance of gender equality for their future profession (Prop 1999/2000: 135: 68-69). The teacher-training education must utilise a ‘gender theoretical perspective’ and the practical training in schools should also be taken into account, helping the student to develop a unified view of how ‘the gender system is expressed in schools and in classrooms and in all parts of the pedagogical process’ (ibid.: 70). Talk about gender is a very serious business in Swedish public life, as stated above, but the intersection between education and gender is highly unclear in this talk. Should we say that higher education is now a female tradition, because women now constitute the majority of all students in colleges and universities, and now graduate at a higher rate than men and more frequently continue as postgraduates (Björnsson 2005: 3-15)? It seems that ‘difference’ rather than ‘similarity’ between girls and boys and women and men shapes teacher training today.

The 2001 teacher-training reform

When the first steps towards a unified and mandatory education were taken in Sweden, about 150 years ago, the country was very poor and the population was mainly rural. Sweden was an officially mono-linguistic and mono-religious country. Minorities like the Sami and the Finns were supposed to become good (Lutheran) Swedes. There was a well-functioning central power which allowed little room for the cultivation of regional specificities. Unity, rather than diversity, was hailed and educational reforms were both a mechanism for and an expression of this. During the course of the 20th century

¹⁰ In this context a ‘migrant boy’ is typically perceived to have ‘roots’ in the Middle East or Turkey, and because of this finds it difficult to obey a female teacher. No one espousing such views in Sweden has ever bothered to study – or explain – how female teachers in the Middle East or Turkey manage to work with male pupils without disciplinary problems.

¹¹ Jonsson discusses critically the gendered foundation of such a project in the Stockholm School of Education, where unemployed men were singled out and given an ‘all-male’ introductory year to encourage them to apply to the ordinary teacher-training programme.

Sweden became one of the richest countries in the world, with, among other things, massive spending on public education and increased welfare spread to cover most citizens. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, this model is crumbling. The welfare state has come under ideological and economic attack from within and outside the country. Ideals of unity have created too much educational uniformity, critics have said. Can ideals of diversity be seen as a response to this critique?

The new teacher-training reform of 2001 (Prop.1999/2000: 135) was launched in Sweden only a few months after the Swedish Parliament had passed a Bill – which was implemented in the 26 universities and colleges which train students to become teachers – doing away with the diversity in initial or early specialisation among students. Now there is only one named ‘degree’ for teachers, compared with eight different teacher ‘degrees’ before the reform. One reason stated for this reform was to foster and develop a common professional teacher identity. Teachers specialising in various subjects and for different school levels were thought to be unable to communicate fully for common tasks in school. In the future there is a great need for flexible teachers, able to integrate different perspectives, it was said. Now, after the reform, students who want a teaching career apply to a college or university with a teacher-training programme, and only later – often through the choices of courses they take – decide what kind of teacher they want to become.

Yet there is an enormous diversity from another point of view. Sweden has gone from a centralised and rather uniform system of higher education (and schooling as well) to a decentralised and diverse one. This diversity has been enhanced and cultivated by the authorities. It can be seen as part of a general shift from an ideology lauding ‘sameness’ and ‘similarity’ (and solidarity, one might add) to an ideology of ‘choice’ and ‘empowerment’ and a lauding of ‘diversity’ and ‘competition’. Now teacher-training education looks very different from one college, or university, to another, and every future teacher may take a mix of courses which is unique for that very student. Future teachers will furthermore be faced with an enormous diversity of schools in their future labour market. Schools are no longer under the direct authority of the state, and money for schools is directed through a price-tag for each pupil. Schools today compete to get pupils to enrol, just like universities and colleges are supposed to compete for teacher-training students. ‘Public’/local council schools now compete with a plethora of so-called ‘free schools’, to attract pupils (or rather their parents) by stressing a variety of ‘profiles’.¹² Church and state have been separated since a few years ago, but there are ‘free schools’ with Christian, Islamic or Jewish religious profiles. The schools with an Islamic profile typically stress that their schools help to integrate Muslim children into Swedish society. Yet, despite all this diversity and all these differences, every pupil should receive the best possible help and support for her/his specific needs. The pupil should be treated as a unique learner. There are, however, limits to how ‘diverse’ diversity can be, and limits to how freely pupils and parents can make their choices (cf. Apple 2005, Raduntz 2005).

¹² The so-called ‘free schools’ in Sweden are not run by local councils but they are publicly financed. See Kjellman (2001) for a critical analysis of ‘free’ choice of schools.

Teacher training in a ‘diverse’ Swedish college

Teacher training, and hence also schools, are today asked to enhance both ‘similarities’ and ‘differences’. Teaching in all schools must, according to the law, rest on the so-called ‘basic values’ on which Swedish society rests. Such ideals as the equal worth of all human beings, equality between women and men, the freedom and integrity of each individual, and solidarity with people in need stress the similarity between human beings, and the right to be treated in a similar fashion, regardless of sex, age, or ethnic, religious or social background. At the same time ‘the task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby actively participate in social life by giving of their best in responsible freedom’ (Lpo 94: 5).¹³ Teacher-training institutions are thus faced with a dual task. They must train the future teachers simultaneously to respect and enhance similarities and differences. But how, when, and why are people perceived to be ‘different’ or ‘similar’ within teacher education (and thus in schools, as well as society at large)?

In the autumn of 2005 I did fieldwork among newly admitted students in one teacher-training college close to Stockholm. This college offers a great many courses, and although the teacher-training programme is said to be important, its students make up only about 400 of the around 10,000 students at the college. The college has a very determined and conscious ‘diversity’ and ‘intercultural’ profile. It has a special mandate to recruit – and thinks it recruits – from the ‘ethnically diverse’ and ‘scholarly impoverished’ suburbs south of Stockholm. The teacher-training is fairly new and started with a profile of intercultural pedagogy,¹⁴ based on an understanding and appreciation of ‘difference’. As future teachers, students are supposed to respect and enhance their pupils’ unique personalities, shaped by their ethnic backgrounds, their gender, their sexuality and – at times – their physical traits. This college also believes that the teachers they train are especially suited for, and easily find jobs in, schools in the ‘ethnically diverse’ suburbs around Stockholm.

Every year about 180 new students are admitted to the 4.5- or 5.5-year-long teacher-training programme. These days all students who apply to any teacher-training programme will be admitted, and even late-comers may be admitted in order to fill all the available places. As mentioned earlier, teaching is no longer a profession with high social esteem in Sweden and students with well below-average grades are admitted to the various teaching-training programmes. Like

¹³ The so-called ‘fundamental values’ were formulated in the curricular reform of 1994. Earlier curricula for various school levels had also included preambles of over-arching ideological importance, but the reform of 1994 linked this ideology to ‘ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism’ (Lpo 94: 5). At that time Sweden had a coalition government of the centre-right parties. Many were – and are – upset by this stated link and many educational researchers have debated the very concept of basic values in schools. For views on this debate linked to issues of ‘Swedish ethnicity’ and ethnic diversity in Sweden today, see Linde (2001).

¹⁴ It is not easy to pin down the exact meaning of this concept in a Swedish context, or in the context of this particular teaching-training college. But it has to do with an ability and willingness to confront the cultural preconceptions of oneself and others in a teaching or educational environment (see Lahdenperä 2004). For an international overview see Woodrow et al. (1997). For a critical approach to ‘culture’ in intercultural and multicultural education see Mahalingam and McCarthy (2000).

other teacher-training programmes, the one I followed is heavily dominated by women, but perhaps less so compared with other colleges. The majority of the students in this teacher-training programme have never studied at university or college before and many come straight from secondary school.¹⁵

The new reform has dramatically increased the diversity in the way the teacher-training programme can be organised, as noted above. In this college the first semester is one in which all students take exactly the same courses in the same order. All students start off with a month-long course on 'intercultural pedagogy'. There are lectures, but mainly a lot of seminars and workshops in which the students are encouraged to be active. The teachers in the programme put great effort into coaching (and coaxing) the beginners to get into the habit of studying, reading and writing. Smaller groups make up a core of 'mutual aid' students who work together in close cooperation. This is also supposed to reflect 'real life' practice, where they will work in teams with other teachers. The atmosphere in this first semester of the teacher-training programme, that I followed, was very caring and supportive. The students were gently nudged to be on time and to submit their tasks on time. They were not corrected or questioned, but were made to feel at home in the college. They were encouraged to ask questions, even during the lectures when most of the students were present.

They were furthermore trained to be 'reflective and reflexive' in their learning process and to use 'ethnographic' methods in their learning. Their personal experiences and their own way of thinking about them provided an entry into this reflexive mode. Students were encouraged to keep a 'log-book' for making notes on their observations in class and questions about the literature. This was supposed to help them reflect on their own learning experience. In this way students were encouraged to use themselves as both subjects and objects for reflection and to utilise their own experiences as a starting-point for the learning process (cf. van Zanten 2004). The ethnic or national background of the students was often highlighted by the students themselves. Students who identified themselves as ethnically Swedish were a minority. Although many students found the initial writing-tasks they were subjected to quite difficult, they said that they liked the programme. Some dropped out after a few weeks but many claimed that they liked the warm, caring atmosphere of the college and the teacher-training programme.

All Swedish teacher-training programmes include a large dose of practical training in schools during the course of the programme. The beginners I followed spent a week in a school already after their first month in college. To organise this in-school training is a daunting task for all teacher-training programmes. Because of the extreme decentralisation of the new programmes, as well as the school system, all colleges have to develop their own contact schools in order to get their students accepted for in-house training. In the Stockholm area there are an enormous number of future teachers from various colleges who need placement. The beginners were obviously quite nervous

¹⁵ There is no formal requirement in Sweden that students in the teacher-training colleges should have prior work experience or experience of other higher education.

about their first week of in-school training. They were placed rather haphazardly and seldom according to the age-group they planned to teach in the future. This first week was just a taste of school life, and the students were only supposed to make 'ethnographic' observations about interaction in the classroom and the school-yard as well as 'back-stage' among the teachers and other personnel.

I listened to a number of students discussing their 'ethnographic' findings. They had been asked to observe the interaction between girls and boys. It was striking that most of them reported that the pupils in their schools played with, talked to and associated mainly in same-sex groups. It was also striking that many students had very little positive to say about their future colleagues! Some students had been coached by 'nice, warm' teachers, but most said they had not liked the teachers very much. They took sides with the pupils in the school and compared their own grievances from their own school-days with what they saw now as budding teachers. All the students I listened to expressed faith in themselves as future teachers, but were highly critical of their schools and the way they were organised. 'I will have no or little problem in handling the pupils', they typically said. One student had applied to this college in order to become a teacher of young children, but realised, once she was admitted, that the college did not offer that particular stream. She had been placed with young teenagers during her first in-house training and claimed that she was convinced she would be able to handle that age as well.

This first course was clearly focused on training the students to become students, and to learn methods for talking and discussing in groups, for reading and analysing texts and for writing about their own observations. Later on in the term, the courses widened the perspective of the students. One course focused on the social organisation of and in schools, another on the political organisation of education. I observed these widening perspectives on pupils, school and education and also took part in other courses on more advanced terms. Yet this did not change my impressions gleaned from the very first course. First of all, 'diversity' typically stood out on its own without a discussion on 'similarities' or an analysis of how 'same' and 'different' mutually constitute each other. Differences due to ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual preferences, etc. were simply 'natural' and there, and were not discussed as formed by specific social trajectories or by discourses. There was talk of the need to respect differences but not a word about how similarities can be shaped as well.

Secondly, although this was a college lauding diversity with a profile of intercultural education, the staff expressed no consensus on the understanding of diversity or of interculturalism in practice. The staff with responsibility for the general 'pedagogical' courses were more dedicated to 'diversity' than those regarding themselves as teachers of specific disciplines. The latter, it seemed, thought that the diverse student body created the profile. They had a multicultural college by virtue of having recruited 'multicultural' students. For others it was important to liberate the 'ethnically diverse' students by giving them tools to regard themselves in a favourable light. Teacher training would be a sort of compensational education. Students were, for example, encouraged

to read ‘subaltern’ novels in which they could find objects of identification. The students should learn to be proud to identify themselves as ‘a Kurd’ or ‘a Turk’ or ‘a Syrian Orthodox’. Some dedicated staff admitted that when the diversity of all the students came to the fore it could sometimes clash! Not all students, I was told, tolerated the ‘diversity’ of others. Some students from a ‘non-Swedish’ background did not express themselves ‘correctly’ about gender equality – the Swedish way – or the equality of all, regardless of race, religion or sexual inclination. Such students would have to learn the correct expressions during the course of their training, and experienced staff said that this was an interesting and important challenge.

Thirdly, the ‘reflexive’ mode of the training made the future teachers filter all courses in the light of ‘themselves’. ‘How do you feel about...? What do you think about...?’ was a salient theme in discussions. The students were trained to look ‘within themselves’ to answer the questions. They were not given instruments to look at teaching, education and school as first and foremost a social activity shaped by a particular history. When I discussed this with some teachers in the programme they agreed, but one of them countered. ‘In teaching, teachers are their own instruments. They have to know themselves in order to be prepared to handle and understand others. They have to be firmly rooted in themselves first. That is why we start this way’. I find this comment very revealing. It underlines that teaching is regarded as first and foremost an individual endeavour in which the teacher must look inwards to find strength and sustenance. The ‘personality’ of the teacher is crucial, and the training must help future teachers to learn about themselves in order to meet and handle other personalities. Teaching is not regarded as a mainly social practice in which pupils, teachers and others together shape everyday school life. Nor is it regarded as a practice in which different actors have different interests and concerns.

A paradox of this teacher-training programme is that, despite its intercultural profile, it probably promotes what I would call boxed-in identities. All teacher-training programmes, as discussed, have to pay attention to the so-called new, multicultural and diverse Sweden. Most programmes also have students who can be classified as ethnically non-Swedish. Research shows how such students are typically singled out and (all well-meaningly) asked about ‘their home countries’ and treated as if they have not lived in Sweden perhaps all their lives (Åberg 2006). These students are constantly made into non-Swedes. In the programme I followed ‘Swedes’ were a minority, but the result was the same. No student was singled out to represent specific countries or ‘cultures’, but all were regarded as specific representatives of some unique background or experience. This was not ‘decided upon’ by the academic staff, but the students were encouraged to regard themselves in such a light and to ‘choose’ or ‘express’ an identity. In such kinds of identity work, ‘differences’ rather than ‘similarities’ are, of course, produced and reaffirmed.

I thought it interesting that students could very quickly visualise themselves as future teachers, but that they identified very strongly with the pupils when they were having in-school training. Some of the programme’s lecturers and teachers told me that this is typical of the beginners. Since many come straight from

school, they feel closer to the pupils than to their future colleagues. Many had played truant, I was told, and did not like school, and now they were carried forward by a wish to become more caring than their own former teachers. Others had worked with children in need of special support, and had thus developed a sense of responsibility towards such pupils. Teachers in the programme said that students would start to identify more with their future colleagues later on in the programme. This idea needs to be questioned, in my view.

In 2002 Finn Calander looked at newly admitted students in three different teacher-training programmes to analyse their pedagogical ethos and views on central aspects of the teaching profession. He found that many of them had no particular opinion about, or were somewhat negative towards the drastic changes in the way schools are run in Sweden today (Calander 2004: 9). He divided these changes into four different aspects. First of all, many claim that school-leaders must learn from private companies, and it is not necessary for such leaders to be trained as teachers themselves. Secondly, schools should foster 'the new pupil' who is able to take responsibility for her/his own learning. Thirdly, there are strong tendencies for parents to be more directly involved in the running of the schools. Fourthly, education is seen as a market where parents have the right to choose freely a school for their children. Although a fair proportion of the future teachers endorsed the idea of a school-market, many, paradoxically, did not like the idea of parents' increased influence over schools. Calander stresses that the professional ethos of future teachers in Sweden is highly divergent, and concludes that the students wanted to become teachers but that they did not know why! In my view, this research shows that future Swedish teachers have very little common professional ethos. The college I studied did not provide the students with instruments to develop this, because the starting point for the teacher-training programme was the development and fostering of a unique identity in each student.

The teacher-training reform of 2001 created a number of very diverse teaching-training programmes, in the sense that all the programmes have to develop their own profiles and their unique way of putting courses and in-school training together. The student cohort is also quite diverse, in the sense that colleges are actively hoping to recruit students from a variety of backgrounds and interests. The student body in the programmes is also diverse in the sense of professional ethos and commitment. Yet, looked at from another angle, there is a surprising amount of similarity in this diversity. All these possibilities of creating diverse programmes have instead resulted in an over-arching similarity. First of all, there is similarity in how diversity is perceived. 'Diversity' is mainly a trait brought into the programmes by the students themselves. There is very little diversity in how the teaching is done in the colleges or in any kind of curricular development, 'multi-cultural' or otherwise. Many courses which could benefit from a revision due to the enormously changed world, are still taught from an amazingly 'Swedish' and traditional perspective. Post-colonial or subaltern perspectives are only the frosting on a cake which is similar to the cake of yesteryear. There is similarity in the lack of vision in the future role of formal schooling. Finally, there is similarity in how each teacher regards herself/himself as a unique instrument in teaching.

But could it be otherwise? Educational institutions can, of course, change society in many ways, but they also mirror the society of today. Education is a field with strong symbolic value, and teacher training has always been too important to be left to the devices of the profession, or to the staff in the colleges. There have always been tensions and conflicts in the teacher-training programmes concerning the organisation of the education. There have also been different views on the mix between teacher-specific knowledge and discipline-specific knowledge, and there have been conflicts and tensions between different kinds of pedagogical philosophies. These conflicts still exist, but new ideas and ideals and the organisation of similarities and differences have added new tensions. These ideas, ideals and organisation reveal that the market – in which the students, the future teachers, the pupils and the citizens at large all buy and sell their unique personalities – has become a hegemonic metaphor through which experiences of similarities and differences, unity and diversity are both expressed and exposed.

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