

Curriculum Development for Social Inclusion
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Experiences from Sweden

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The National Agency for Education – The Swedish name of **Skolverket** is the national body responsible for follow-up activity, evaluation, development and supervision of the school system in Sweden. Its mission is to help ensure the development of Swedish schools such that the reality of everyday schooling is kept in line with the objectives of national educational policy. In addition, the Agency is expected to draw up syllabuses and grade criteria, issue educational directives and approve independent schools.

"Schools have an important duty to make students aware of the fundamental values on which Swedish society is built: the sanctity of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal value of all irrespective of gender, race, religion or social background, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable."

From 'Education For All', an information booklet from the Swedish National Agency for Education

1. Defining Social Inclusion - What is meant by social inclusion?

The definition of "social inclusion" we in Sweden apply with regard to the field of education is "A school for everyone". What this entails in concrete terms is that we have laws which guarantee that all children and young people living in Sweden have access to school education free of charge, irrespective of where they live or which ethnic or other minority or majority group they belong to. These laws also apply to children and young people who are seeking asylum in Sweden while they are waiting for an answer from the authorities as to whether or not they may stay in Sweden.

The municipal authorities are required in law to make places in the following forms of education available to children and young people:

1 year in a pre-school class (age 6 years). This is a year of preparation for school. Parents may choose whether or not they wish their children to attend a pre-school class; most children do attend.

9 years compulsory education at comprehensive school (age 7-16). Most children start in the first class at the age of seven. Attendance at school is compulsory, and municipal authorities are required to ensure that all children of compulsory school age go to their lessons. The one exception to this rule is provided by children whose families are seeking asylum in Sweden: these children are guaranteed a place at school, but they may choose not to attend (although the vast majority of children in this situation do in fact attend school).

3 years upper secondary school (age 17-20). All young people are guaranteed a place to study within the framework of the integrated upper secondary school. In order to qualify for a place on one of the 17 "National Study Programmes" students must have gained at least a "Pass" grade in Swedish/ Swedish as a Second Language, Mathematics and English on completing year 9 at compulsory school. Students who do not attain this level are guaranteed a place on the "Individual Study Programme", which enables them to complement their comprehensive school education, acquire basic proficiency in Swedish, take individual courses from different national study programmes, and if they so wish to combine their studies with practical work experience. After completing compulsory comprehensive school, 97 per cent of all young people elect to begin a course of study at upper secondary level; however, some of them discontinue their studies without acquiring any upper-secondary level qualifications.

Sweden has a strong tradition of adult education provision. Every municipality provides education for adults at both comprehensive-school and upper-secondary level. Those who for different reasons have not completed their school education while at school age are entitled to follow courses of this kind within the framework of the National Adult Education Programme free of charge.

The ideological foundation for "*A school for everyone*" is provided by the idea that all children and young people have the right to attend an integrated school at both the basic levels of education (the pre-school class and comprehensive school) and at upper secondary level where they can choose academically or vocationally oriented study programmes. All the political parties in the Swedish parliament backed the decision taken in 1962 to introduce an integrated nine-year comprehensive school which replaced the previous system with parallel forms of school education. In 1972 the academically oriented upper secondary schools were merged with certain kinds of vocational training college to form a system of integrated upper secondary education. Since 1994 all upper secondary study programmes have been three years in duration. Fifteen of the seventeen national study programmes are primarily intended to prepare students for working life, including the Industrial, the Arts, and the Health Care programmes, whereas the Social Science and Natural Science programmes prepare students for further studies. All students, irrespective of the programme they have selected, study an "A" course in eight core subjects (Swedish/Swedish as a Second language, English, Mathematics, Natural Science, Civics, the Arts, Physical Education and Health, and Religious Knowledge). All national programmes offer students the necessary qualifications for further study in higher education.

At many locations around Sweden this system of regulations means that all children and young people go to the same school, thus guaranteeing that children from differing backgrounds meet each other. However, in areas where there is housing segregation, this segregation is also reflected at school: what we see today is that in the socially and ethnically segregated districts of the major cities there are schools where the proportion of students from an immigrant background is close to 100%, and in medium-sized municipalities we can see schools where the proportion of students from an immigrant background, although not quite this large, is nevertheless considerable. In these areas the unemployment rate amongst the adult population is higher than average, and a large proportion of families are dependent on various kinds of social welfare benefits. The result of these factors is that these areas are characterised by marginalisation. As far as school education is concerned, this entails a need for special initiatives if the schools in these areas are to be able to prepare their students for an adult life in which they participate and take responsibility in society.

In this respect it is important to acknowledge the fact that *inclusion costs*. Both in an individual perspective and in regards to special needs related to ethnical, socio-economic and other patterns of exclusion, the Swedish government emphasises the strategic role of a discretionary system of resource distribution within the school system in order to balance – and preferably to overcome – the underlying sources of exclusion.

(The term "*from an immigrant background*" we use to designate students who have either immigrated themselves, or at least one of whose parents was born outside Sweden. The term

"immigrant" is used to refer to persons who have moved to Sweden from another country, irrespective of the reason why they have moved).

Education in Sweden is generally publicly financed and exempt from fees. Since the early 1990s there have been greater opportunities to start up what are called "independent schools" (which are also financed from public funds, but are not managed by the municipal authorities). These schools often have their own "profile", and therefore attract parents from, for example, a given ethnic, religious or language group. Thus, in their everyday school life, students attending such schools only meet children of their own age who come from a similar cultural background and share the same values as themselves. Independent schools may not charge fees, but nevertheless there are independent schools which are mainly chosen by parents with a high level of education and a relatively high income. And although independent schools with a specific "profile" are at present mainly to be found in the major cities, the growing number of this category of school nevertheless presents us with new challenges in our desire to ensure that all children and young people receive an education which prepares them for life in a society which to an ever-increasing extent is characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity.

You can find more information about the Swedish school system on our website: <http://www.skolverket.se>. All the reports produced by the Agency mentioned in this paper are also available on the site.

2. Patterns of Social Exclusion and Challenges for Education

Which social groups are most affected by various forms of discrimination and social exclusion? What are the main vulnerability factors which pose a threat to social cohesion in the Baltic region and Scandinavia? What are the challenges posed to education systems by the phenomenon of social exclusion?

The groups in Sweden which are at greatest risk of suffering social exclusion are those which can be described as being marginalised. By the term marginalised we refer here to people - of both Swedish and non-Swedish origin - who are excluded from full social, cultural, economic and political participation in society. Children from families of this kind are over-represented both in the category of children who do not reach the minimum standard set down for education at compulsory comprehensive school, and in the category of children who do not go on to upper secondary school or who start but do not complete a programme of study at upper-secondary level. It is also these children who run the greatest risk of themselves being caught in drug abuse and criminality. We can also add that it is among these groups of young people that extreme right-wing and racist organisations recruit new members.

One example of a marginalised group within Swedish society is that of immigrants who are not able to find a place in the employment market. It is a fact that all newly-arrived immigrants find it harder to gain employment than native Swedes. Many employers, despite the fact that in Swedish law it is

prohibited to discriminate against immigrants, will give a job to a Swedish applicant rather than one with an immigrant background. How successful newly-arrived immigrants are at establishing themselves in the employment market also depends on the prevailing economic climate. When, in the 1960s and early 1970s, Sweden was in need of labour in the industrial sector, Swedish companies went out to countries such as Finland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey and persuaded above all "skilled workers" to move to Sweden. Of course, even then there were people in the native Swedish population who felt uncertain about "the foreigners", but it was relatively easy for school staff, for example, to explain to native Swedish pupils the reasons behind the presence of these new groups in Swedish society. However, in an economic situation where newly-arrived immigrants are in fact competing with native Swedes for the available jobs it is not as straightforward. This uncertainty is not only visible among industrial workers or those without qualifications; it is just as prevalent among representatives of occupations which require a relatively high level of education and training. Suddenly the dividing lines between Us and Them seem very clear! In the early 1990s Sweden experienced an economic slump and at the same time accepted relatively large groups of immigrants, primarily Somalians, Yugoslavians and Kurds from Iraq, and our experience shows that those immigrants who do not succeed in gaining a foothold in the employment market relatively soon after arriving in Sweden are at risk of ending up in a situation characterised by more or less permanent passivity and dependence on welfare benefits. All too often this then leads to other problems such as drug abuse, family difficulties, and sometimes even active criminality. Among immigrants who have not had the opportunity to build up long-term contacts within Swedish society there is a breeding ground in which suspicion may grow vis-à-vis the society which has marginalised them. This suspicion may lead to a rejection of the values which provide the foundation, the common ground, on which Swedish society is built. When adults have these kinds of problems, there is always a spill-over with regard to their children's school education and since immigrant families frequently do not have social networks which can help them in times of crisis, the children of immigrants with social problems are even more vulnerable.

One particular group in Swedish society which has been subjected to long-term discrimination and marginalisation is the Roma. The Romany population in Sweden consists of Roma who have come to the country at different times and from different countries. The Roma are now recognised as an official national minority in Sweden, and as a result an awareness is developing within the Romany population that they themselves need to take initiatives to ensure that they can become better able to earn their own livelihood, at the same time as they are endeavouring to find new ways of preserving their own culture. However, many schools still experience difficulties in making sure that Romany students complete their education, at both compulsory and upper-secondary level.

The Saami (Lappish) population in northern Sweden has also suffered long-term discrimination, although this has been expressed in partially different ways than in the case of the Roma. The main form of discrimination to which

the Saami have been exposed has been attempted assimilation. The result of which is that there are now large groups of Saami who are no longer fluent speakers of their mother tongue. However like the Roma the Saami, together with the Tornedal community in northern Sweden (who speak a dialect of Finnish), native Finnish-speakers and the Jewish community, are now also recognised as an official national minority, and as part of this status the Swedish state has committed itself to working to provide these communities with greater opportunities to use their respective mother tongues in various contexts in society.

3. Educational Responses

What are the various experiences of educational reform in general, and of reform of curriculum content in particular, in responding to these challenges? How are life skills contextualised and what place do they occupy in educational strategies to promote social inclusion? How do these appear in curriculum frameworks and in various curriculum areas?

Basic Values in the National Curricula

In Sweden the state governs education through a series of statutes, government orders, curricula and syllabuses. These contain aims and guidelines for all aspects of education. The curriculum for compulsory school education starts with a section on the fundamental values and tasks of school. The quotations here are from the "Curriculum for Compulsory School, the Pre-School Class and After-School Recreation Centres", a document known as Lpo 94. There are similar passages in the "Curriculum for Nursery Education", Lpfö 98, as well as in the "Curriculum for Non-Compulsory [i.e. upper-secondary level] School Education", Lpf 94.

Fundamental values

Democracy forms the basis of the national school system. The Education Act (1985:1100) stipulates that all school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values and that each and everyone working in school should encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as for the environment we all share (Section 1, Subsection 2).

School has the important task of inculcating in pupils those fundamental values on which our society is based. 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 school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility.

Education in school shall be non-denominational.

It is a duty of school to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals, and from that basis to actively participate in social life by giving of their best in a spirit of responsible freedom.

Understanding and compassion for others

Concern for the welfare and development of the individual should characterise all school activity. Schools must also actively resist any tendency towards bullying or persecution. Xenophobia and intolerance must be actively confronted with knowledge, open discussion and effective measures. The internationalisation of Swedish society and increasing cross-border mobility place great demands on people's ability to live together and appreciate the values that are to be found in cultural diversity. School is a social and cultural meeting place with both the opportunity and the responsibility to foster this ability among all who work there.

The other headings in this first section of the curriculum are: Objectivity and Open Approaches, An Education of Equal Value, Rights and Obligations, The Duties of School, and Good Environment for Development and Learning. Section Two is entitled

"Goals and Guidelines" and embraces the following: Norms and Values, Knowledge, Responsibility and Influence of Pupils, School and Home, Transition and Co-Operation, School and Society, Assessment and Grades, and Responsibility of Head Teachers.

You will find the full text of the Curricula on our website: <http://www.skolverket.se>

Measures addressed to all pupils/students and all adults who work at schools and nursery schools

The basis of shared values mentioned above constitutes the foundation on which the organisation and content of school education are built. The national curricula present instructions, and every individual school is expected to work to ensure that these fundamental values permeate all features of their work. At the national level the National Agency for Education has drawn up course syllabuses for the subjects taught at school, and has compiled various kinds of supplementary material which illuminate different aspects of this shared foundation of common values. For example, the parliamentary decision to accord official status as national minorities to the five minority communities mentioned above led to a revision of the syllabuses in Swedish and History. Other examples of measures which address all pupils/students and which place a focus on participation and the development of common values are presented in the following documents:

Democracy in Swedish Education – A thematic presentation of basic values.

Skolverket 2000, ISBN 91-89314-05-0

This report is a presentation and critical examination of the efforts being made in the Swedish child-care and school sector to promote a common code of fundamental democratic values. The material is based on earlier reports from the National Agency for Education on this subject, focusing on evaluation, inspection, analysis and support. The book is intended as an aid to further discussions of the opportunities, problems, skills and requirements involved in the promotion of democratic values in education.

The Living History Project: Tell Ye Your Children. A book about the Holocaust in Europe 1933-1945.

The Living History Project, <http://www.levandehistoria.org/english> and

Tell Ye Your Children, ISBN 91-630-6385-9. The book is also available in Swedish, Arabic, Turkish, Finnish, Spanish, Farsi, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.

In 1997 a study was published which showed that only about sixty per cent of young people in Sweden thought that the Holocaust had definitely happened. Sweden's prime minister, Göran Persson, says that when he read this he felt so worried and angry that the very same day he decided to do something and drew up a plan which he presented to parliament. This was the beginning of the large-scale information campaign called "Living History" and the book "Tell Ye Your Children". This book was sent out, free of charge, to every home in the country in which there were children of school age; to date over a million copies of the book have been

distributed. The book describes what human beings are capable of doing to other human beings when democratic values have been destroyed and replaced by an ideology advocating intolerance, hate and violence. The book provides a source of support for everyone who, at home or at school, wants to talk to young people about very difficult issues which involve fundamental values.

The work goes on. For 2002 the Government has given 10 million SEK to youth organisations who are going to carry out projects for combatting racism and xenophobia.

Far Away, Close at Hand. The new curricula and the concept of internationalisation. *Skolverket 1996, ISBN 91-88373-34-7*

This book looks at internationalisation as reflected and incorporated in the national curricula. Four authors explain how they would define the concept of internationalisation/intercultural education, and what they see as its consequences for schools and education. There follows a discussion of how the curricula deal with the concept and the reality of internationalisation, and there are examples of specific areas of study and other dimensions involved.

The Multicultural Park. A study of common values at school and in society.

Skolverket 1999, ISBN 91-89313-48-8

Multiculturalism is one of the most intensely debated concerns of society today. The questions we find ourselves obliged to confront include: In what ways should multiculturalism influence the content of school education? How should we interpret the concept of value community, and what organisational forms should schools adopt in a multicultural context? These questions provide the point of departure for this book, which looks at examples taken from Sweden as well as taking into account international scholarly debate.

Life skills include also skills related to communication. The school plays a critical role in providing a learning environment for children to become "good readers and writes". Teaching children to achieve this involves a number of factors covering various approaches, structure, and focus on goals combined with encouragement and a highly supportive attitude.

Good Reading and Writing Skills – For realising individual potential

Skolverket 1999, ISBN 91-89313-17-8

This book maps key ingredients of successful teaching practice and approaches as developed and used in ordinary Swedish schools.

Language room – Creative language settings

A presentation from the development project for school libraries and for schools' creative language settings, *Skolverket 2001*

The National Agency for Education has been instructed by the Government to strive to support efforts by schools and pre-schools to improve their reading and writing settings. One principal part of that task is to strengthen and enhance the teaching role of the school libraries.

Other important areas of study for life skills are; preventing bullying and promoting good social relationships, personal relations and health education and anti-drug education. In this field the National Agency has compiled the following reports:

It has to keep you thinking. Health work in Swedish schools: from directives to perspectives.

Skolverket 2001, ISBN 91-89314-37-9

In this publication you can find short presentations of the following three reports. The book summarises the work of the National Agency for Education in the field of education and health from 1993 to spring 2001. During these eight years much has happened which entails changes in schools' work on health: changes in perspectives, ways of working and status, as well as the development of collaboration with other organisations and authorities.

Kränk mig inte! (Don't Insult Me!)

Skolverket, 1995 (only available in Swedish).

This material on bullying and how it can be prevented was published in 1995. It consists of a summary of experiences from schools which obtained funding for projects to counter bullying. The aim is to promote the twin goals of preventing bullying and promoting good social relationships among pupils as well as between pupils and teachers.

Man vet inte var trappstegen är i livet (Where are the steps on life's ladder?)

Skolverket 2000, (only available in Swedish).

Tobacco, alcohol and drugs are considered in the wider context of school educational work. The interviews with pupils make it clear that credibility is health education's Achilles' heel.

Love! You can really feel it, you know! Talking about sexuality and personal relationships at school.

Skolverket 2000 ISBN 91-88372-99-5.

This reference material, commissioned by the government in 1993 to replace a manual from 1977, was published in Swedish in 1995. The importance of discussions led by the teacher is emphasised, and interviews with girls and boys give a clear youth perspective.

The book has been translated for use in a number of different countries, ranging from Estonia to Japan! In 1997 the World Association for Sexology awarded the book an honourable mention as "the best sexuality education programme".

Measures Addressed to Specific Groups

The Swedish language plays such a central role in Swedish society that it is impossible to participate in social life or to establish oneself in the employment market without a good level of proficiency in the Swedish language. All newly-arrived immigrants aged sixteen and above have the right to receive Swedish language tuition. This type of education is known as Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). The aim is to provide immigrants with basic skills in Swedish.

All students with a mother tongue other than Swedish can study Swedish as a Second Language throughout their time at comprehensive and upper secondary school. The subject "Swedish as a Second Language" (SSL) has its own syllabus, and is equal in value to the subject "Swedish" when students for example are applying for a place at university or college.

Students with a mother tongue other than Swedish also have the right to receive tuition in their native language as a school subject. The thinking behind this provision is the conviction that having a positive sense of being rooted in one's own culture provides a secure identity, which in turn makes it possible for students to develop their ability to empathise with the values and conditions of others.

Moreover, society stands to gain if students can acquire multilingual skills. The efforts being made by the EU and the European Council of Ministers to promote developments in the teaching of modern languages have also had a positive impact on the willingness of Swedish society to provide native-language tuition for pupils who belong to the five national minorities or come from a non-Swedish background.

On the website: <http://modersmal.skolverket.se>, which primarily addresses itself to teachers of Mother Tongue, parents and students, there is information about the regulations relating to mother tongue tuition, methodological advice and suggestions, and links to websites which teachers of the various languages have selected as being of interest to teachers and students. Work on this website began in spring 2001, and it can still be seen as a "construction site" -It is not a finished article. At present work is in progress on ten different languages (not all of which can be seen yet when visiting the site) and the intention is that the website will eventually expand to embrace 20 to 25 different languages. We have already noted that the site has had a positive effect on the status of Mother Tongue Studies as a school subject, and that it has given teachers of Mother Tongue a stronger sense of their importance.

Initiatives for the Education of the Roma

A few years ago the government gave the Agency special instructions to support the development of education for Romany students. This work is carried out in close collaboration with representatives of the Roma, and consists of development initiatives in the following three areas:

1. Support for the development of the dialects of Romani represented in Sweden, for example by means of the work on a computerised Romani wordbase.
2. Development of educational materials in different dialects of Romani. To date the Agency has published seven sets of materials, and a further five are in the development stage. All of these materials have been conceived by representatives of the Romany community - the role of the Agency has been to provide pedagogical and financial support.
3. Competence development for Roma working in education. There is a great shortage of Roma qualified to work in education, and the work of the Agency in this respect is two-pronged: in the short term, initiatives to provide immediate assistance to those who are working in nursery and school education, and those who might be able to produce texts for use in education; and in the long term, a plan to increase the number of qualified representatives of the Romany community working in pre-school and school education.

To find out more about this work, read Appendix 1. *Teaching for Romany School Students in Sweden - a Report on the Current Situation*, published by Skolverket, April 2001. The co-ordinating officer responsible for this work is Mai Beijer.

4. Evaluation and Research:

What impact assessment and evaluation has been conducted on curriculum reform in the area of life skills? What lessons have been learnt?

Within this field, we can note that a great deal remains to be done with regard to the evaluation of how well the national curricula provide students and teachers with the support and guidance they need in their work to develop life skills. That being said, the Agency is currently conducting an analysis of how one can assess schools' work in raising students' and teachers' level of awareness of questions concerning common values, and of how to deal with conflicts which arise as a result of value conflicts. There is an account of parts of this analytical work in the above-mentioned report, "Democracy in Swedish Education".

The programme of training for head teachers

The question of how individual schools can work with the question of common values has been incorporated into the programme of training for head teachers. An evaluation of how this was received by the head teachers who followed the first such course has been carried out, and the evaluation of the second batch of head teachers to have taken the course is currently in progress. This is dealt with in "From Policy to Practice" (*Från politik till praktik, Skolverket 2001*).

The annual statistical report

The Agency's annual statistical report always looks at "students at risk" - What percentage of students are not attaining the nationally agreed educational objectives? What percentage of students on the different national study programmes at upper-secondary level are not completing their courses? What proportion of these students are from a non-Swedish background?

Development Dialogues

The Agency has also been specifically instructed by the government to provide support to those municipal authorities which need to develop their educational approach with regard to the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. This large-scale initiative is entitled "Development Dialogues"; what the dialogues entail is that teams from the Agency sit down together with representatives of the municipal authorities in question - local politicians, civil servants, school managers and teachers - and analyse what initiatives need to be taken in that particular municipality in order for all students to be able to achieve the minimum educational standards laid down at national level (which, to put it briefly, stipulate that all students, on completing comprehensive-level education, are to have attained such a level that they can be awarded at least a "Pass" grade in the core subjects of Swedish, Mathematics and English).

Reports on Mother tongue tuition

With regard to the measures concerned specifically with students whose mother tongue is a language other than Swedish, the Agency has initiated a certain amount of research and methodological development. At regular intervals the government requests analyses and proposals for measures such as changes to statutes or financial support for specific initiatives. In spring 2000 the Agency submitted a report to government looking at developments in the teaching of the national minority languages following their recognition as official national minority languages. Following the report the Agency received funding to support competence development for teachers of Finnish and Saami, and for Roma involved in education. In spring 2002 the Agency will be conducting a similar review of teaching in all the minority and immigrant languages. This review will look both at the teaching of these languages as school subjects, and at the use of the languages when teaching other subjects.

Development project together with schools in the field of social inclusion

In collaboration with the "Regional Development Centre" at the University of Malmö and fifteen or so schools situated in areas where a very high proportion of the population is from immigrant backgrounds, the Agency is conducting a project with the aim of developing means and methods for measuring success at school in other ways than the traditional assessment of academic knowledge. This is important - for it is a fact that a great deal of exciting, positive work is being carried on in schools of this kind, where the students, even though they are situated in areas characterised by a high level of marginalisation and exclusion, feel that they have a future. The point of departure for this project is a report entitled "Success in schools situated in areas characterised by a high degree of marginalisation and exclusion - a report to the government" (published by Skolverket 2001, only available in Swedish). The officer responsible for this project at the Agency is Mai Beijer.