

EPASI Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

a programme of observation, analysis and innovation supported by the European Commission's department of Education & Culture, SOCRATES programme 2.1.2



Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Country Report: Sweden

This report was written by Nanny Hartsmar



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

School of Teacher Education
Malmö University, Sweden

November 2008

The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

The project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Each report within the overall project is the responsibility of the named authors.

The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
- Panepistimio Patron ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ (Greece)
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Educational policies – The Swedish school for all

This report deals with the development of policies for the Swedish school for all. The presentation gives examples of how, in an increasingly complex society, the views on why, for whom and how education is important changes. The starting point is the development of the Folk school, which despite of its designation, in the early days was a school for the few and on conditions which were, to say the least, unequal, and led to the struggle for an inclusion of all groups in the educational system.

From faith, Lutheran moral and patriotism – a short retrospect

In 1842, Sweden founded the Elementary school, Folk School. Every municipality and parish had to found a school. Consequently, at its origin the Folk School was a local concern. There were so called “standard plans” and “guidelines” but no national curricula as of today. Not until 1919 there was an educational plan for the country.

Two conflicting opinions regarding the purpose of the Folk School were expressed in the early days of its implementation. According to one position, held by liberals, the school should be a “citizen school” for all children. In the late nineteenth century, this position was supported by groups with a socialistic view on society, mainly political groups and union members within the labour movement. In opposition to this, the conservatives meant that the main task for the Folk School should be taking care of working class children and preparing for confirmation and the Holy Communion (Isling 1988). Sandin (2002) illustrates the earlier romanticised view upon childhood, amongst people belonging to the upper classes in society. Children were seen to be in “a state of undestroyable genuineness”. However, this didn’t seem to apply to children from the lower classes. Their more free and uncontrollable upbringing were subjected to criticism and said to bring on immorality, criminality and poverty. There was a special need for controlling these children in schools. In many rural areas however, parents and children, in these early days of the Folk School, tried to avoid the school. The children were needed elsewhere, working to help supporting the families. This was considered a moral problem and negotiations between authorities and parents took place.

Teachers were seen as “extended arms of the church” and supposed to foster Christian beliefs and patriotism. The methods imitated for a long time examinations based on the Lutheran catechism with its “house examinations”. It is of interest to mention that the house examinations contributed to a well established ability to read, long before the establishment of a formal education as in the Folk School, among the Swedish population. With the canon law of 1686, parents and patrons were imposed the task to teach children and servants to read. Reading became a demand for preparation for confirmation and the Holy Communion. It was also, more or less, associated with having the banns published or having a commission of trust. The frequent use of the Lutheran Catechism made it the most distributed textbook of all time (Hartman 2005:27).

The debate about the early Folk School as being a citizen school or a school for “catechisation” took place at a national level and, as Isling (1988:535) points out, ended with a compromise, a catechism school with a minimum for the great majority of children (the poor those of female sex or those of that time diagnosed as educationally subnormal) *and* a citizen school for boys from wealthy families.

Towards a school for all

Making schools accessible and equally good for everyone was during the first part of the twentieth century a political and national reform work. Yet, we need to question to which extent these are schools *for all*. During the 1970s educational policies were mainly discussed from a social class perspective. From the 1980s and into the 1990s, the class perspective was replaced and a gender perspective came into focus. A more and more diverse society has led to an ethnicity perspective being adopted as well¹. In a way, one might say that it was easier to define which groups were either privileged or disadvantaged in the early Folk school compared to the school system of today, since the policy stated in the first “standard plans” and “guidelines” was, that those with learning disabilities, the poor or women didn’t need as much education as those who by birth were already predestined to hold for example official positions.

A school for all – the comprehensive school

The introduction of the comprehensive school and the first curricula in 1962 marked a turn of the tide from the old system with full schooling for a few and mini courses for the underprivileged. The school system was intended to become a *school for all* children and young people. There was a strong belief in the possibilities of creating school improvements by means of central, national decisions and the comprehensive school was meant to be homogeneous and non-segregating. A national board for school issues, Skolöverstyrelsen, was created (today The Swedish National Agency for Education). However, though centrally planned programmes were sent out to all schools, in order to improve education, schools continued to obtain different results. As a result of this, researchers began to take an interest in structural, organisational and internal characteristics of schools (Giddens 1984, 1991; Lieberman 1998; Tallberg-Broman *et al.* 2002). Structures that permeate institutions in society and lead to a structural discrimination of some groups of people are discussed hereafter.

Isling (1988:31), states that Swedish school reforms from the 1940s to the 1980s have been characterised by a functionalistic and idealistic view. Goals in the Education Act and curricula were supposed to be implemented as long as necessary resources like adequate school organisation; educated teachers; good premises; good textbooks and teaching aids were provided. Discrepancies between aims and reality have been seen to be due to the fact that the resources at some point have to be strengthened. Teachers have been viewed in an idealistic way. If they were only made to know what was the right thing to do and willing to do so, everything would turn out just fine, as Isling commented. This functionalistic and idealistic view on education contrasts with a structural and materialistic interpretation of the role of schools as institutions locked in into these structures by Bourdieu (1974) and (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In the industrial society, schools were seen to reproduce class differences by sorting and qualifying for different competencies and at the same time mediating values that strengthen and justify the socio-economic order.

The struggle for children and their rights were in the long run engaging local and national authorities. The welfare of all children became a central area for social policy. The modern welfare system is built on negotiations between politicians, parents and experts about the meaning of childhood and the state no longer has the monopoly. The debate about the “letter diagnoses” (MBD, DAMP, etc. – see details further) and the responsibility of the local authorities concerning bullying in schools can serve as examples of such discussions. Children and young people are more and

¹ For further reading on political and national reform work, see eg Isling (1988); Tallberg Broman *et al.* (2002); Hartman (2005).

more expected to be part of these discussions through participation in for example boards in their schools.

The struggle for a school for all over the last 40 years has, however, not meant that segregation has been successfully combated. Hartman (2005:69-71) discusses how school reforms up till the 1990s were based on pedagogical arguments, research and investigations. During the last decades a neo-liberal way of thinking came to the fore. The “doctrine of freedom” was above all the most important. Parents and children were to choose the “best school” with “the best pedagogy” and “the best teachers”. Schools were now supposed to compete for the children by profiling themselves in colourful leaflets.

Dovemark (2004) shows in her thesis *Ansvar-flexibilitet-valfrihet*, (“Responsibility-flexibility-freedom of choice”) that freedom of choice and flexibility haven’t led to a major change of enhanced possibilities for better chances in life. Since “responsibility” is closely connected to how the individual takes charge of his/her own learning, a new kind of social selection and reproduction is the result. Successful students often choose to work individually at home where they can get help and support. They tend to see learning as a project for one’s own benefit regarding future jobs, while only a smaller number of students accentuate the importance of taking a responsibility for each other and learning to cooperate.

Over the last forty years the educational rhetoric on the inclusion of all in the Swedish educational system has been considerable. The key signatures have been democracy, equality and equity. In concrete education reality it has most of the time meant more resources for one or another group defined as disadvantaged. For instance, in the latest Budget bill for 2008, there is a special government grant directed to local authorities for “Reading-writing-calculating”. The government grant is 15.5 million € for 2008, 26 million € for 2009 and 52 million € for 2010². The aim of the grant is to stimulate the work with the pupils’ basic skills. The grant is voluntary and in order to benefit from it, local authorities have to follow stipulations made by the government.

In order to reach the same level of reading, writing, understanding mathematics, etc. additional resources have been used in order to help students with difficulties. Being underprivileged has often been equivalent to “not having the ability to” and most often means qualities like: not being able to pronounce Swedish in the correct way, not having the ability to read, spell, etc. Giving more resources to those who “can not” has in turn created a debate on whether it is fair or not, also giving resources to the “very capable” and “study motivated” students. The rest of the children or students, those in “the middle”, don’t ever seem to come into the fore. They are probably meant to be coping anyhow.

Interestingly, in the political educational discourse, when “educational disadvantage” and “not being able to” is discussed, it is mainly in relation to formal abilities (“basic skills”). This is also the case with the Budget bill grant for 2008. At the website of the Ministry of Education it is said that many students unfortunately leave the compulsory school without a pass in Swedish and Mathematics and that good basic skills are of decisive importance for all other education coming *after* having developed the basic skills. The concentration on basic formal skills and leaving the *what* and *why* questions behind may be seen as a didactic retrogression. This in its turn is in several ways contradictory to the aims formulated in the national curriculum and the syllabi.

² Exchange rate 2008-02-04: 9.6

The Swedish education system of today³

The Swedish school went through two major reforms at the beginning of the 1990s. The first change was the municipalisation in January 1991 (government bill 1988/89:41). The signification of this was that the local authorities took a great part of the responsibility for the school, a responsibility earlier held by the state. The decision also meant a change from management by rules and resources to management by goals and results. The municipalities are responsible for distributing resources to schools organising education. The work is to be followed up in annual Quality reports. The education sector in the Budget bill for 2008 suggested a budgetary allocation of 4.8 billion € This is equivalent to 6 percent of the state budget.

The second change was introduced in 1992 with the so called “free choice of school”. A family’s address no longer directs their children to the nearest school. Applications for the opening of independent schools are approved by The Swedish National Agency for Education and they are financed per student by the municipalities. During the school year 2006/07, 8 percent of all students (79,000 in total) in compulsory education went to independent schools (Skolverket 2007).

Lindbom and Almgren (2007) have studied the effects of the free choice of school and discussed whether it has increased the segregation or not. It is difficult to give an unambiguous picture of how school segregation has increased over time since definitions and ways of measuring vary. Almgren (2006), Lindbom and Almgren (2007:93) points out a probable causal connection: socio-economic and /or ethnic segregation *causes* school segregation. Their study shows that housing segregation is a more important explanation for school segregation than the possibility of having a free choice of school.

Overall national goals

The Swedish Parliament and Government set out the overall national goals in:

- The Education Act
- Curricula
 - Curriculum for the Pre-school, Lpfö 98
 - Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-school Class and the Leisure time Centre, Lpo 94
 - Curriculum for the Non-compulsory School System, Lpf 94
- Course syllabi for compulsory school etc.
- Program goals for upper secondary school.

The *Education Act* (1985:1100, chapter 1, “General Provisions”, Statutes 1-10)⁴ states what kind of education is provided by the state and that children and young persons irrespective of gender, geographic residence, social and financial circumstances and special needs shall have equal access to education in the national school system.

S. 1. The state provides education for children and young persons in the form of pre-school classes, compulsory comprehensive and upper secondary school and certain equivalent forms of school that is special schools principally for pupils with impaired hearing/vision and speech disabilities, schools for the mentally disabled and Sami schools. Pre-school class, compulsory basic, upper secondary school, special school principally for pupils with impaired hearing/vision and speech disabilities, schools for the mentally disabled and Sami school constitute the national school system for children and young

³ For an overview: visit an interactive map at <http://skolnet.skolverket.se/polopoly/utbsys-eng/>

⁴ *The Education Act*. <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/574/a/21538>, 2008-02-10

persons. There are also special types of education for those who as a consequence of illness cannot take part in the schoolwork within the national school system. The state also provides educational activities in the form of pre-school activities and welfare for schoolchildren. Only the provisions of Ch. 2 of the Act apply to these activities. Law (1997:1212).

S. 2. All children and young persons shall irrespective of gender, geographic residence and social and financial circumstances have equal access to education in the national school system for children and young persons. The education shall be of equal standard within each type of school, wherever in the country it is provided. /.../ Particular attention shall be paid to pupils who need special support. School activities shall be structured in accordance with fundamental democratic values. /.../ Law (1999:886).

S. 3. Apart from the types of schools provided by the state, there may be schools provided by private physical or legal persons (independent schools)⁵.

S. 4 Municipalities are the entities responsible for pre-school class and compulsory comprehensive school. Municipalities and county councils are the entities responsible for upper secondary school. Law (1997:1212).

S. 5 Schools for the mentally disabled exist for children and young persons who cannot attend compulsory comprehensive and upper secondary school because of mental disability. The municipalities are the entities responsible for schools for the mentally disabled. /.../ Law (1996:566).

S. 6 Special schools principally for pupils with impaired hearing/vision and speech disabilities exist for children who because of impaired hearing or deafness cannot attend compulsory comprehensive school or the equivalent section of School for mentally disabled. The state is the entity responsible for special schools principally for pupils with impaired hearing/vision and speech disabilities.

S. 7 Sami school is an alternative to compulsory comprehensive school, and the state is the entity responsible for it.

S. 8 the State provides education for adults in the form of adult education, adult education for the mentally disabled and Swedish for immigrants. Law (1993:800).

S. 9 the national adult education system shall give adults an opportunity, in accordance with their individual wishes, to supplement their education. Primarily those who have received the least education shall here be given an opportunity to strengthen their position in working life and in cultural and political life. The education shall be equivalent within each type of school wherever in the country it is provided.

S. 10 Municipalities and county councils are the entities responsible for adult education. The municipalities are the entities responsible for adult education for the mentally disabled and Swedish for immigrants.

On the first of April 2006 a new act, *Barn-och elevskyddslagen*, 2006:67 (“Child and student protection law”)⁶ against discrimination of children and students gained legal force. The purpose of the law is to prevent violating treatment. The individual child or student may claim damages by the entities responsible if they have been subjected to violating treatment and the school has done nothing or too little to prevent it. It is either the Child and Student Representative or the Discrimination Ombudsman who represent the individual child or student in a legal process. The following definitions of discrimination were made:

- Direct discrimination: unfair treatment because of gender, ethnicity, religion or other belief, sexual disposition or disability.

⁵ Independent schools, “Friskolor”. <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/374/a/1206>, 2008-02-10

⁶ *Barn- och elevskyddslagen*, 2006:67 (“Child and student protection law”). <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/1910/a/9976>, 2008-02-10

- Indirect discrimination: when the application of a seemingly neutral regulation has a discriminating effect.
- Harassment: behaviour that violates a person's dignity because of gender, ethnicity, religion or other belief, sexual disposition or disability.
- Other violating treatment: behaviour that, without being defined as harassment, violates a child's or a student's dignity, eg violence, threats and exclusion.

Fundamental values

The curricula in force for the compulsory school and pre-school, Lpo 94 and Lpf 94, differ from earlier documents by being explicit on fundamental values that shall be established in children and students. These values are emphasised as non-negotiable values and not allowed to refuse. The fundamental values formulated in the curricula are corresponding with the later "Child and student protection law" (see above).

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 shall represent and impart. ... It shall also actively resist any tendency towards bullying or persecution. Xenophobia and intolerance must be actively confronted with knowledge, open discussion and effective measures.

It is also clearly stated that cultural diversity is to be respected. However, it is not discussed exactly *what* is meant by this and *what* it is that everyone shall respect. Runfors (2006) problematises the fact that nobody really knows how to unite the non-negotiable values with the respect for cultural diversity. Cultural diversity, says Runfors, seems to be implicitly understood as something people bring as some kind of luggage. Also Bringlöv (1996) points out the contradictory message and states that since "culture" refers to an already existing and not challenging system of values and norms, fostering for cultural diversity becomes subordinate to fundamental values. The fact that fundamental values is in contrast to diversity becomes very clear when reading the quotation below in *Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre Lpo 94*.

The school should be permeated by concern for the individual, consideration and generosity. In a deeper sense education and upbringing involve developing and passing on our cultural heritage – values, traditions, language, knowledge – from one generation to the next. The school should support families in their responsibility for the children's upbringing and development. As a result there must be close co-operation between the school and home⁷.

The National Agency for Education

The Swedish National Agency for Education is the central administrative authority for the Swedish public school system including children, young people and adults, pre-school activities and child care for school children. The agency works out and takes decisions on course syllabi and grading criteria and is assigned to evaluate, follow up and supervise the public school system. Overviews of the school system are made every three years in order to form a basis for Parliament and Government for revising or drawing up of new development plans. The National Agency for Education also has a supervisory role.⁸

⁷ *Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre Lpo 94*. www.skolverket.se Lpo 94, link to English version, p 5

⁸ For further reading see: <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/353>.

An overview of the Swedish education system

Pre-school

The pre-school is provided by the municipalities to children aged from one year and up. Since 1998 the pre-school has its own curricula. The pre-school has three types of activities for children who have not yet started in pre-school class or compulsory school: pre-school, family day-care homes⁹ and open pre-school¹⁰.

School-childcare

School-child care is intended for school-children between six and twelve years of age. In all, approximately 76 percent of 6-9 year olds take part in school-childcare. It has three kinds of activities: family day-care homes, leisure time centres¹¹ and open leisure-time centres¹².

Pre-school class

The municipalities have to offer children a place in a pre-school class from the autumn term they become six years old and until they are to begin in school. The pre-school class has the same curriculum as the compulsory school and the leisure time centres. Today 95 percent of all six years old are in pre-school classes. There is no fee.

Compulsory school

The *Compulsory school* (Grundskolan) is a nine year school for all. The *Sami school* (Sameskolan)¹³, the *Special school* (Specialskolan)¹⁴ and Education for pupils with learning disabilities. The education is free of charge. Normally parents don't pay for textbooks, health service, school meals and school transport.

Most of the hearing impaired and almost all pupils with impaired vision and physically disabled pupils have their education in the compulsory school. Deaf pupils, pupils with a severe hearing impairment and pupils with learning disabilities go to the special school. The special school is extended over ten years. Pupils with learning disabilities go either to the *Compulsory education for children with learning disabilities* (Särskolan) or to the *Education for children with severe learning disabilities* (Träningskolan)¹⁵.

Reduced course of studies

When it appears to be impossible to offer some education suitable for the situation and condition of all students, a school can offer what is called reduced course of studies. It means either a reduced

⁹ A family childminder takes care of children who are between 1 and 12 years old in his or her own home. Most are between 1 and 5 years of age.

¹⁰ For children who are not registered at a pre-school and in company with a parent or another adult.

¹¹ Leisure time centres offer pedagogical group activities for school children up to the age of 12 and are a complement to the school. The leisure-time centre also enables parents to work or study.

¹² Open leisure-time centres are for children aged 10-12 who do not need the care and guidance provided by leisure-time centres or family day-care homes. They also serve as a supplement for schoolchildren who go to family day-care homes. The children are not registered.

¹³ The Sami School corresponds to the first 6 years of compulsory school. The education has a Sami orientation but which otherwise corresponds to schooling up to and including year 6 of regular compulsory school.

¹⁴ Special school is primarily for pupils with impaired hearing.

¹⁵ Träningskolan: Less theoretical education than in Särskolan.

time table or a work placement in combination with some school subjects. A student with a reduced course of studies will not get a complete marking but may still be offered a place in the upper secondary school. (See Project SE136: [Parental Involvement in an urban school](#)).

Action programme

If a student is in need of special support, the school head must ensure that an action programme is set up. This can be done at any time during the school year and has to be done even if the parents oppose such measures. The aim is to change the conditions for the student's schoolwork. The student's needs and how the school plans to meet them, follow up and evaluate have to be made clear. The measures taken shall relate to the curriculum and syllabi and be of both short term and long term. The National Agency of Education have often drawn attention to the fact that schools take measures on an individual basis, but are lacking in performing systematic processes. Both students and parents shall be given an opportunity to continuously take part in and give their points of view on the support.

Individual development plan

The individual development plan is supposed to be drawn up in connection with the personal development dialogue held once a term in a meeting with the teacher, student and student's parent or guardian. The development plan shall show what can be done in order to support the student's learning - and social development and is to be revised when necessary (Skolverkets Allmänna råd 2008).

Upper Secondary School

98 percent of the students in compulsory education continue their education in upper secondary school. Upper secondary schools (Gymnasium) are free and non-compulsory. It consists of 17 national programmes, specially designed programmes and individual programmes. Each programme lasts for three years. Students with learning disabilities go to Upper secondary for individuals with learning disabilities (Gymnasiesärskola)¹⁶.

Folk high schools

Folk high schools (Folhögskola) are independent adult education colleges. The schools freely decide and design the teaching¹⁷.

Advanced vocational education (KY)

Advanced vocational post-upper secondary education training courses are an alternative to other higher education. The courses are designed in consultation with employers. About a third of the training consists of a workplace experience known as Learning in Work. Most courses represent 80 credit points (2 years)¹⁸.

Adult education

There are many types of publicly funded adult education in Sweden, with a number of different

¹⁶ Fewer national programmes and more vocationally-oriented. 4 years.

¹⁷ Information on the range of courses is available at the folk high schools' joint website administered by the Folk High Schools Information Service at <http://www.folkhogskola.nu>

¹⁸ Website for the Agency of Advanced Vocational Education and Training: <http://www.ky.se/engelskainfo.html>

principals. There is municipal basic adult education, upper secondary adult education, national or municipal, post-secondary training courses, employability courses, staff training or in-house training for those in work, education for individuals with learning disabilities and Swedish for Immigrants (Sfi). Out with this there are supplementary training courses which are government-funded.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for supervision and evaluation of higher education institutions and subjects and programmes. Along with being responsible for central statistics concerning higher education, the National Agency for Higher Education also provides the Parliament and Government with reviews and analysis of the higher education institutions¹⁹.

Universities and university colleges

In Sweden, universities and university colleges are with a few exceptions authorities under direct jurisdiction of the government. Since 1 July 2007, new regulations (the Higher Education Act 1992:1434 and the Higher Education Ordinance 1993:100) are applied on higher courses and programmes on three levels: basic level, advanced level and graduate level. The length of a course or programme is counted in higher education credits, where one week's full-time study is equivalent to 1.5 higher education credit. The government has suggested investing 25 million € on higher quality in higher education during 2008²⁰.

Seven themes describing educational disadvantages

In the following educational disadvantage will be described and discussed in relation to the Swedish "en skola för alla" (school for all) and seven themes: ethnic minorities, socio-economic, religious minorities, linguistic minorities, disabilities, indigenous minorities and gender. Projects and cases aiming at strengthening disadvantaged groups are reported in 20 separate project descriptions and four case studies. For a summary of projects and case studies, see Appendix 1 and for an overview see Appendix 2. However, we haven't been able to find any projects explicitly aiming at supporting religious minorities suffering from educational disadvantages. For an overview of project descriptions and a theme chart see Appendix 1. The projects are chosen in order to reflect national, regional and local initiatives. A common problem is that many projects described have not been evaluated. According to The National Agency of School Improvement this is due to the fact that evaluations are seldom budgeted.

A school for all – Ethnic minorities

The Swedish law defined the ethnic background in relation to the fact "that someone belongs to a group of persons who have the same national or ethnic extraction, race or colour of the skin" (SFS nr 2003:307).

¹⁹ Website for the National Agency for Higher Education: www.hogskoleverket.se

²⁰ For an overview over number of children and students in the educational system 2005-2006 and preliminary costs for the financial year 2006 see Budgetproposition 2007/08:1, Regeringskansliet, Utgiftsområde 16 (Cost area 16). www.regeringskansliet.se, 2008-02-10

Sweden has had an increasing immigration since the 1960s. In the late twentieth century, there was a major change in structural societal conditions. This resulted in increased segregation. Today, for example, the city of Malmö (in the south) has schools with classes with a great variety of languages, except for Swedish. It has become a challenge to teach more and more children with very limited, or none at all, experience in speaking Swedish.

From the 1960s to the beginning of 2000 there has been a shifting in the view of and the way of speaking of “immigrants” or “people with a foreign background”. Bunar (2001) shows that the state regards schools as an important tool for an integration policy.

In the first State Official Report (SOU 1966:55), children from other countries were mentioned in connection with being “adapted” to Sweden. A government bill 1968:67 admitted supplementary education for children from some minorities (Borevi 2002:96). Swedish education was emphasised²¹.

From the mid 1980s and into the beginning of the 1990s, cuts in the budget led to the Home Language teaching (now Mother Tongue) no longer being compulsory for children born in another country (from 1985). Gruber (2001) shows how “immigrant children” were talked about as an homogenous group with *a foreign culture* in contrast with the Swedish one. In 2000 it was established that the term “immigrant” should only be used in connection with people arriving from another country and settling down in Sweden (DS 2000:43, p 9-10). The reason for this shift was that the concept “immigrant” became more and more associated with discrimination and exclusion (Lahdenperää 1997).

Jönsson (1988) and Löfgren (1993) published studies about how students with backgrounds other than Swedish had low results in school tests. Very seldom, factors like the importance of how schools and teachers met the needs of those children had been discussed. Language skills (Swedish) were pointed out as the most important factor for success. Alm (2000) also discusses skills in Swedish, but emphasises social conditions such as the students’ backgrounds and how they are treated in school as important for a more correct explanation of educational disadvantage. Runfors (1996) shows that teachers try to be “neutral” and “fair” and therefore have a tendency to minimise cultural diversity. With a recruitment of teachers from diverse backgrounds the picture might become different. Bouakaz (2007) takes a critical and participatory action research approach when studying what hinders Arabic parents’ involvement in an urban school (see project SE136: [Parental involvement in an urban school](#)).

Recent research and assessments have pointed out to the “underachievement” of pupils in segregated/diversity areas where too many pupils do not achieve the educational goals in the national curricula. The number of pupils that achieve the national goals varies from 32 to 98 percent. (Skolverket 2006: Dnr 53-2006:962). One of the main problems pointed out has to do with language problems. Another central problem is that the majority of people belonging to ethnic minority groups live in segregated areas where only a few people have Swedish as their mother tongue. According to the Swedish government the overall educational goals aims to strengthen in the long-term the possibilities for municipalities and schools to promote equal educational conditions and to fulfil the educational goals of all pupils, disregarding their ethnic background.

²¹ See also the section on linguistic minorities.

A school for all – socio-economic minorities

The *Social Report 2006* (Biterman)²² is prepared by the national Board of Health and Welfare under commission of the Swedish government. The report shows a polarisation of general welfare and despite the fact that the larger group of the population now has better living conditions than during the crisis in the 1990s, 6-7 percent of the population still see no improvement.

A new and alarming situation regarding children and young people in families getting social assistance is reported. Social assistance appears to be a “risk marker for adverse development for the children in the future” (p 5). Children and young people with mentally ill parents, those placed in foster homes or in residential care and the ones with foreign backgrounds are more likely to face particular difficulties, such as not continuing in the education system above the compulsory school, becoming parents during their teenage years or abusing alcohol and drugs.

The statistics show that poverty in families with children has declined from 15 percent in 1997 to approximately 7 percent in 2003. Many countries comparable with Sweden have a higher percentage of poor families. This seems to be due to the fact that, along with the social insurance systems for those who are not fully employed, it is possible to manage with a low wage.

Today, a majority of the individuals or families suffering from poverty are found amongst immigrants and about one child out of four who experience poverty is of foreign background and with one or both parents born abroad. The situation is most difficult for immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. For those groups unemployment is four times higher than for those born in Sweden and only 30 percent were self sufficient in 2002. The fact that a successful and long education is no guarantee for young persons with a foreign background or adopted from other countries to get a job especially discriminates young people who “don’t look Swedish”, has attracted more attention in the media over the last years.

Segregation and social problems in Swedish metropolitan areas were debated during the 1990s. In 1997/98 the Swedish Riksdag passed the Swedish Government’s Proposition 1997/98:165, which stated guidelines for “a metropolitan policy for the 21st century”. In 1998 the Swedish parliament came to a decision about “Storstadsatsningen” (The Swedish Metropolitan Policy). The over all aim was to give financial support to the most vulnerable areas in the biggest cities in Sweden in order to lessen segregation, to stimulate economical growth and to improve living conditions for people living in social vulnerable suburbs in the biggest cities. The initiated projects should be carried out in cooperation with local institutions²³.

The final selection of which cities or neighbourhoods are to be included has been made in the local development agreements. The socially disadvantaged metropolitan areas covered are restricted to seven municipalities: Botkyrka, Göteborg, Haninge, Huddinge, Malmö, Stockholm and Södertälje²⁴. The total financial support during 1999–2001 was 182 million € (Proposition 1997/98:165.)²⁵ Socio-economic minorities in the respective municipalities include ethnic Swedes and the various minority groups dealt with in the present report (See projects SE120: [Dialogue municipalities](#), SE122: [Idea schools](#), SE128: [Metropolitan policy](#), and [Case Study 1](#)).

²² For a summary or separate chapters download at: <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/Publicerat/2008/9877/2008-111-1.htm>, 2008-02-10

²³ <http://www.storstad.gov.se/english/index.htm>, 2008-02-10

²⁴ [Botkyrka](#), [Göteborg](#), [Haninge](#), [Huddinge](#), [Malmö](#), [Stockholm](#), [Södertälje](#), 2008-02-10

²⁵ [Utveckling och rättvisa en politik för storstaden på 2000-talet](#) (Development and justice, a policy for the Metropolis of the 21st Century. Our translation) 2008-02-10

At the School of Teacher Education, Malmö University, the Nightingale project is designed to promote integration and social- and ethnic diversity. The fundamental idea with The Nightingale is that its activities shall be of mutual use for everyone involved. Another ambition is that networks will be created between the participating children, their families, their schools, the students and the university (See project SE126: [The Nightingale](#)).

In two reports, the Swedish National Agency for Education shows the educational results from the districts that were involved in “The Swedish Metropolitan Policy” (Skolverket 2006:2591; Skolverket 2006). The educational level and educational results are lower in these districts compared with the general level in Sweden and there are big differences between the different districts. The overall result is however that the involved districts follow the same trend as the rest of the nation. The results for pupils with a foreign background in the involved districts are poorer compared with earlier investigations irrespective of if they were born in Sweden or not. Parszyk (1999) reports that students with foreign backgrounds feel discriminated by the way they are taught and how school is organised. The continuation of the metropolitan policy has also been influenced, primarily on the national level, by the Swedish government’s commitment to fight poverty and social exclusion in the framework of the Lisbon process (Socialdepartementet 2005; 2007).

During the last two decades, migration has changed. More migrants from the eastern parts of Europe and outside Europe came to Sweden. Several reports (eg Lange 1997; National Agency of Education 2002, 2004; Swedish Save the Children Federation 2002) show how the new migrants were viewed as non-white and met with fear, hostility and racist treatment. Lange (1997) reports that 34 percent of young people, totally or partly, agree with the opinion that non-Europeans should return to their home countries.

In 2004 it was decided to start an investigation on power, integration and structural discrimination. The commission was to identify and chart mechanisms behind institutional discrimination due to ethnical and religious belonging. In 2006, the report *Utbildningens dilemma. Rapport av Utredningen om makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering. Demokratiska ideal och andrafierande praxis*²⁶ was published (SOU 2006:40). The report shows the dilemma between on one hand the democratic commission and aims for inclusion and on the other hand practices. Knowledge about “reality” is historically and culturally contextual. It is an a priori system of knowledge which brings in conceptions and stereotypes of “us” and the “others”.

A school for all – Religious minorities

In January 2000, the Swedish Church was separated from the state. In Sweden, popular movements form an important part of society. The significance of such movements is apparent to the extent that the state gives a certain level of financial support to popular movements that are to the benefit of everyone. One category of popular movements is the category of religious communities. Religious communities that are not related to the Swedish church are regarded as religious minorities.

SST is a Swedish Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities²⁷. It is an authority serving under the Ministry of Culture. SST distributes the governmental financial support to religious communities. The government decides which religious communities are entitled to financial support. One condition for financial support is that the communities are conducive to maintaining and strengthening the fundamental values of the Swedish society and that they are solid and vigorous. The financial support to religious communities is regulated in two laws (SFS 1998:1953, SFS 1999:932) and one regulation (SFS 1999:974).

²⁶ Sawyer, Lena & Kamali, Masoud (Eds.). The Educational Dilemma. Report on power, integration and structural discrimination. Democratic ideals and the praxis of otherness. (Our translation.)

²⁷ Swedish Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities SST, <http://www.sst.a.se>, 2008-02-10

It is difficult to estimate the number of believers and people belonging to different religious communities in Sweden today, since the answer can't be found in official Swedish statistics. There are many different reasons for that. Sensitive personal information like religious or political views is not allowed to be gathered. *Personuppgiftslagen*/law concerning personal information (1998:204) does not allow this. Already, in 1930, Sweden ceased to register immigrants' religion. According to the legislators, the respect for human integrity precedes eventual needs of documentation of societal trends, etc. According to the SST statistics (2003), it is estimated that there are almost 800,000 members in congregations/religious communities not belonging to the Swedish church.

If only looking at religion *per se*, this survey can not establish religious minorities in Sweden as educational disadvantaged due to their religion. However, most religious minorities in Sweden today are to be found among ethnic and linguistic minority groups. In contacts with the National Agency for School Improvement, it has been pointed out that some religious independent schools might have applied for opening their own school because they felt disadvantaged. However, this is not in any way shown in the applications. Therefore, when trying to establish whether children from religious minorities are educationally disadvantaged, it has to be discussed in connection with ethnical and linguistic backgrounds.

According to statistics²⁸, there are 72 confessional independent schools in Sweden. Sixty-six are compulsory schools of which 54 are Christian, 9 Muslim and 3 Jewish. Six are upper secondary, all Christian. Ajagán-Lester (2001) points out that, students from minority groups often are regarded as "students in need of special support" and by that are excluded from the "normal". In order not to be regarded as foreign, minority groups choose to start independent schools that give parents better possibilities to feel involved²⁹.

A new debate concerning religious independent schools has flushed up in Sweden this year, to a great extent dependent on the approval of an independent school under management of the Plymouth Brothers³⁰. Some politicians now want to make it more difficult to get admission to open religious independent schools. On one hand, Sweden is following international commitments such as the European Council Convention on Human Rights about the possibility of running denominational schools. On the other hand, it is sometimes seen as a dilemma that some denominational schools are suspected not to follow the fundamental values stated in the Education Act and in the curriculum. Religious education as all other education must be carried out according to demands on objectivity, showing openness towards diverse conceptions and give opportunities for personal standpoints. Some would argue that this is impossible and hypocrisy, since the two principals are not possible to fuse.

A school for all – linguistic minorities

'Home language' is defined as the language spoken in the pupils' homes if it is different from the main language in society. The term 'home language' was used in Swedish schools between 1968-1996 when the government decided that the term 'mother tongue' should be used instead in order to emphasise the importance of teaching³¹. *Mother tongue* teaching has been a controversial issue from when it was introduced in Swedish schools.

²⁸ Fristående grundskolor med konfessionell profil/Confessional compulsory schools.

<http://www.skolverket.se/content/1/c4/95/93/konfessionella800.jpg>, 2008-02-10

²⁹ Also see Jenny Berglund & Göran Larsson (Ed.) 2007. *Religiösa friskolor i Sverige*.

³⁰ The Plymouth Brethren (Brothers) are a fundamentalist Protestant Christian evangelical movement that was founded in Dublin in the late 1820s, 2008-02-10

³¹ Utbildningsutskottets betänkande 1996/97:UbU12 Hemspråk (Report from the Educational Committee) <http://riksdagen.se/webbnav/index.aspx?nid=3322&rm=1996/97&bet=UbU12#bres>, 2008-02-10

Recent research shows, however, that it facilitates to learn *Swedish as second language* if bilingual pupils are allowed to maintain and develop their mother tongue skills (Cummins 1996; Hyltenstam 1996; Axelsson 2003; Norrby and Håkansson 2007).

In Swedish childcare and schools today, over 100 different first languages are spoken. In the curriculum for Swedish pre-schools, Lpfö 94, the right of multilingual children to develop all of their languages is stressed. The pre-school must provide opportunities and make individual plans for children whose first language is not Swedish in order for them to develop both their mother tongue and Swedish.

In compulsory school, first language instruction may be given as a student option, language option, school option, in or outside the regular timetable. When at the upper secondary level, students may choose to study their first language as an individual option, a language option, or as an augmented course. If students want to take their mother tongue in upper secondary school must first have studied it and got a grade from year 9 of compulsory school, or equivalent.

Students whose first language is not Swedish may study Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) as a subject with its own course syllabus. SSL can be studied in both compulsory and upper secondary school. The aim of SSL studies is both to help develop colloquial skills and an ability to study all school subjects in Swedish. SSL and Swedish as first language are of equal value when students apply higher education courses or other post secondary study.

Municipalities are responsible for offering *Swedish for immigrants (SFI)* to newly arrived immigrants over the age of 16. SFI instruction provides both knowledge of the Swedish language and Swedish society. "The purpose is to provide adults with the tools to enable them to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations as citizens in Sweden"³². However, even if all pupils in Sweden with foreign backgrounds are, with some limitations, entitled to education in their mother tongue, research has pointed out a number of deficiencies concerning mother tongue education and education in Swedish as a second language. The status of the subjects is low and there is a lack of qualified teachers. The main problems are that there has been a decrease in mother tongue education over a period of ten years and that the negative attitudes towards mother tongue education in the municipalities must be changed. Children with foreign backgrounds, reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia and deaf children must be given possibilities to develop and use their languages. For the deaf, deaf-blind and people with hearing impairments, the access to information and possibilities to make oneself understood in Swedish Sign language is seen a basic condition for accessibility and participation.

The pre-schools have been given a more distinct commission to strengthen children with multicultural identities. The curriculum for the pre-school was changed in 2005 (Lpfö98) with a new goal stating that children with another mother tongue than Swedish are entitled to support in their identity development and ability to communicate in both Swedish and mother tongue. There are also big differences between conditions for how municipalities can receive newly arrived children and youth which means that the developmental needs vary a great deal. The national strategy takes its starting point in that the receiving must be equal in all municipalities.

When talking about linguistic minorities, social backgrounds should be problematised. Bernstein's theories on language and language development highlight the reasons for working class children's shortcomings at school. Bernstein emphasises how different groups make use of language and that in school this has an adverse impact on working class children since most of the teachers have a

³² C:\Documents and Settings\HemPC\Skrivbord\Education for students of non-Swedish background and recognised minorities - Skolverket.htm

middle class background. In Sweden today, Jan Anward (2001:37) advocates that rules for communication depend upon rules governing communication in the Swedish society as a whole. If one learns this way of communication it gives an advantage both in school and in the society.

Over the last year, local politicians from the Liberal party and the Moderate party in Sweden have pointed out that the inability to speak Swedish good enough is the reason why children and young people with foreign backgrounds too often are suffering from educational disadvantages. The solution is suggested to be that the pupils are only allowed to speak Swedish while in the preparatory class³³ and later on in the ordinary class-room. Arguments (reported in the Swedish newspapers, Dagens Nyheter and Sydsvenskan) like “it is a matter of course that you are to speak Swedish in Swedish schools”, “it will make it easier for the teachers to maintain discipline if they are only allowed to speak Swedish” and “only speaking Swedish in the preparatory class will make it easier to understand what is said in the ordinary class room later on” can be heard. The suggestion is that “during the first year there shall be no other teaching than Swedish”. The teacher unions strongly oppose to the suggestion since it is contrary to the law on not discriminating students on account of their ethnicity and that mother tongue is the only language they have got.

What does “during the first year there shall be no other teaching than Swedish” involve? Does it mean an isolated drill of grammar skills, spelling and pronouncing of words in order to sound as Swedish as possible? What about the subject studies? Let us imagine a fifteen year old boy arriving to Sweden from Iraq. His first acquaintance with the Swedish school will be the preparatory class. If during lessons he is forbidden to use his mother tongue he will, for obvious reasons, derive no benefit from subject studies. He will not be able to understand anything from texts and discussions about for example the second world war, personal relationship matters or the formulating and trying out of hypothesis in mathematics – all examples of “normal teaching” at the age of fifteen in the Swedish school. Consequently, the newly arrived young student would be deprived of years of improvement and knowledge development since he is compelled to speak Swedish before he is allowed to learn new things. Schools following the principle of “only speaking Swedish” and excluding the newly arrived from subject education in this way would bear the responsibility of having created unacceptable barriers.

The political suggestions reported above are in opposition to the national strategy for the teaching of newly arrived³⁴ children and young people in the compulsory and upper secondary school and equivalent forms of schools, formulated in 2006 (U2006/5104/S). In the suggestion for a national strategy The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement is pointing out that language research is emphasising the vital importance of parallel processes of using the mother tongue and the second language in order to develop knowledge *and* second language skills (p 15).

At the School of Teacher Education, Malmö University, Hartsmar and Sandström (2008; and project SE130: [Language development and technology](#)) have carried out a project aiming to stimulate the development of the second language and of knowledge in pupils in the preparatory class through conversation and cooperation in authentic problem-solving situations. This is done through the writing of authentic texts and through reading and to challenge and support the student teachers’ skills in planning and carrying out teaching within the framework of the technical subject that encourages both the development of language and of knowledge. The ambition of the project was to create authentic activities with content that was close to the children’s own experiences, taking into consideration the participants’ earlier experiences and their own questions. The authors conclude that “the project shows that true inclusion, with the democratic possibility for all pupils to

³³ Preparatory class; for the newly arrived.

³⁴ “Newly arrived” means children and young people beginning in the school system 0-3 years after the arrival in Sweden.

participate and make their voices heard, demands that they are permitted to use those voices irrespective of the language they employ” (p 78).

There are historical parallels to the demands of today of *only speaking Swedish*. Not remembering them shows an astonishing lack of historical perspectives. Two hundred years ago, until 1809, Finland was part of Sweden. By the new delimitation, one part of Tornedalen³⁵ with its Finnish speaking population became Swedish, while the rest became part of the Russian grand principality. At first schools kept teaching the children in *Meänkieli*³⁶ but in 1888 it was decided that only Swedish was allowed during lessons and breaks. Not until 1957, when the changing into Swedish was considered secured, schoolbooks in Finnish were back and the children could use their mother tongue again. The prohibition of Finnish made a profound impact on the children and many have later on given evidence of a discriminating schooling and deprivation of knowledge development.

The national strategy for the teaching of newly arrived points out the importance of staff acting in a promoting way based on an intercultural consciousness supporting the development of the newly arrived individual. It is necessary to bear in mind though whether the Swedish school system with its staff is reflecting society as a whole or not. Do for example national minorities, the socio-economically disadvantaged, ethnic minorities and disabled children and young people find their equals among the grown ups they meet on their way through pre-school and school? At what level do boys and girls meet an equivalent number of female and male pedagogues? There is a considerable difference between having an “intercultural consciousness” in theory and practicing interculturality by working for diversity amongst both students and staff.

A school for all - From patient to citizen

With the start of the Folk School, “deficiencies” and “disabilities” of the children were made visible in a new way. A certain norm and standardisation for the “good childhood” was created, against which all divergences could be measured, and a discussion of special needs began. Institutions and occupations aiming at caring for those not fitting into normality were founded. It was for example no longer enough for a doctor or even a paediatrician to examine a child. It had to be a school paediatrician. This was later on followed by school psychologists and special teachers for special needs (Sandin, *Pedagogiska Magasinet* 1/2002).

In modern society, children and youth are brought into focus in many respects. There are children at risk, young people who haven't learnt to read while in compulsory school, the “letter children” diagnosed with one or another letter combination such as MBD (Minimal Brain Damage), DAMP (Deficits in Attention, Motor control and Perception), ADHD (Attention Deficit - Hyperactive Disorder), etc. The discussion revolves around what is “best for the child”. During all of the twentieth century, standpoints have been anchored in what is assumed to be scientific knowledge.

The concepts “Children with need of special support” and “Children with special needs” were introduced in 1968 by the so called *Barnstugeutredningen*, SOU 1972:26 (“Day nursery report”). The National Board of Health and Welfare in its report *Barnomsorgen är för alla barn, Allmänna råd från Socialstyrelsen* (1991:1) changed Children *with* special needs to Children *in* special needs. By doing so, it was emphasised that the problems children might have were not always due to qualities within the child but a mark of a relation to the surrounding society. This marks a shift of perspectives meaning that everyone may be in need of support, temporary, transient or under different circumstances (Börjesson 1997). Other groups considered to be “in special needs” were defined. They were children with language and speech difficulties, learning difficulties, emotional

³⁵ The Torne River Valley

³⁶ Meänkieli means “our language” and is a variety of Finnish developed in the Torne River valley.

and/or psychosocial difficulties, children with refugee backgrounds and children at risk (Socialstyrelsen, 1997:7 p 13)³⁷.

In the middle of the 1980s a process concerning the division of responsibilities in the governing of the school sector (Ds U 1987:1) resulted in the municipalities obtaining responsibility in 1991 for the organisation of the school activities accordingly to what is decided by the Riksdag and the government. The responsibility of the state is to specify goals and guiding principles. The school is responsible for giving pupils in special needs support in order for them to fulfil the educational goals (*Ansvar för skolan* (p 3), Prop. 1990/91:18, Regeringskansliet).

In 2002, the Swedish government commissioned the Swedish National Agency for Education to fulfil the goals within the disability policy for the school sector 2002-2010. In the activity plan it is stated that the work should be carried out in cooperation with other sector authorities and the disability organisations. The Disability Ombudsman has been commissioned to support the sector authorities.

For the school sector, the Swedish National Agency for Education defines four responsibility areas:

- The municipalities shall manage continuous disability work
- The Swedish National Agency for Education shall continuously examine, follow up and evaluate the municipalities' work with the goals of the disability policy
- The Swedish National Agency for Education shall continuously pursue knowledge development and initiate research about the situation for people with disabilities within the school sector (For reports on research, see eg Emanuelsson *et al.* 2001)
- The Swedish National Agency for Education should pursue a continuous work with support for the municipalities in their work on the goals

Laws governing care, service and education for people with disabilities are: the Social Services Act (SoL), the Health and Medical Services Act (HSL) and the Education Act (Skoll). In addition to these laws there is the Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments Act (LSS), for individuals with extensive needs and the Special Assistance (LASS) (The National Board of Health and Welfare: Art. no 2006-114-13).

National, regional and local authorities have a shared responsibility for assuring good health and social and financial security for people with disabilities. This accountability also means promoting the individual's chances of living a life without being subject to control of others. The National Board of Health and Welfare states the allocation of responsibility as follows:

- Central government is in charge of legislation, general planning and distribution as well as social insurance
- Local authorities (municipalities) are responsible for social services, and
- Regional government (county councils) for health care
- Municipal social services and the health and medical services of county councils are governed by framework legislation which specifies the framework and objectives of activities but which also affords municipalities and county councils ample opportunity to interpret the law and shape their activities according to their own guidelines

The National Board of Health and Welfare and a number of other government bodies are accountable for matters concerning disabled people. Rights and interests of the disabled shall be protected by these bodies. In order to do so the National Board of Health and Welfare and the other government bodies involved are responsible for co-ordinating, supporting and promoting such issues in their dealings with other authorities. At present this responsibility is focused on two main

³⁷ Socialstyrelsen 1997:7. http://www.blf.net/hov/allmrad_sos.doc, 2008-02-10

areas: developing a system to describe the living conditions of disabled people, and improving the co-ordination of rehabilitation work (The National Board of Health and Welfare: Art. no 2006-114-11).

22 standard rules, aiming at ensuring participation in society and equality in conditions of life for people with disabilities, were formulated in 1993 by the UN General Assembly. In Sweden the Disability Ombudsman evaluates measures taken to realise the standard rules. In school pupils with disabilities shall be offered aids and assistance that can promote independence in their daily life.

Instead of trying to classify disabled groups, WHO has worked out a classification system which takes the starting point in what hindrances disabled people have to force in order to reach full participation in society, ICF, with the Swedish title *Klassifikation av funktionstillstånd och funktionshinder 2002*. It is pointed out that the ICF concerns all people and not only disabled people. A disability shall nowadays be seen as a dynamic interaction between health and contextual factors.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, is a national authority who coordinates government support in respect of special needs education for children, young people and adults with disabilities³⁸. Other authorities and institutes within the education sector are: Advanced Vocational Education and Training, KY³⁹, The Swedish Agency for flexible learning,⁴⁰ the National Agency for Special Educational Support, Sibus⁴¹, The Board for Rehab education, an admission board for national upper secondary schools for young people with severe disabilities, Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology/Hjälpmedelsinstitutet⁴² and The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille, TPB⁴³.

In 1998 the Disability Ombudsman issued an inquiry about accessibility to all municipalities in Sweden. The inquiry showed that almost half of the compulsory schools were not accessible for disabled pupils and/or disabled parents. The Disability ombudsman points out in a report (2000) that there are scarcities in knowledge concerning children with disabilities and criticised the weak legal security for these children.

The State Official Report, SOU 1999:21, with the title *Lindqvists nia – nio vägar att utveckla bemötandet av personer med funktionshinder*, (“Lindqvist’s nine – nine ways of developing the treatment of people with disabilities” Our translation), points out the discrepancy between visions and reality in the disability policy.

The basic values within the disability policy didn’t seem to have reached the reality in which decisions concerning the disabled were made. The investigator stresses that the school sector constituted one of the most obvious examples of this discrepancy. As a result of this, negative consequences concerning future possibilities for getting a job would be radically reduced. Using school as an example was of great importance, since it has a central role in reaching the overall aims for the disability policy.

³⁸ The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools <http://www.spsm.se/Startpage/> 2008-11-01

³⁹ Advanced Vocational Education and Training, KY <http://www.ky.se/engelskainfo.html> 2008-02-10

⁴⁰ The Swedish Agency for flexible learning http://www.cfl.se/cfl_utvecklar_larandet/toppmeny/about_cfl/ 2008-02-10

⁴¹ The National Agency for Special Educational Support, Sibus http://www.sibus.se/english/48,96.cs?cs_dirid=48 2008-02-10

⁴² Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology/Hjälpmedelsinstitutet http://www.hi.se/templates/Page_132.aspx 2008-02-10

⁴³ The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille, TPB/Talboks- och punktskriftsbiblioteket. <http://www.tpb.se/english/> 2008-02-10

Also in the national plan for the disability policy, government bill 1999/2000:79, titled *Från patient till medborgare* ("From patient to citizen"), it was ascertained that too little had happened in practice even if rights for people with disabilities had existed since the 1960s. Severe problems with accessibility and treatment were pointed out. As a result of this criticism it was decided that a disability perspective shall permeate all sectors of the society. Having a disability perspective, means that an individual with a disability is not to be seen as an object subjected to special measures, but as a citizen with the same rights and obligations as others. Accessibility and treatment are key words. Pupils must have a right to be able to access all places in school and parents with a disability shall be able to take part in parents' meetings and other school activities.

Several investigations point out the strategic role of education for the aims of the disability policy. If disabled people don't have full participation and an equal basis there will be inevitable problems in other sectors of the society. The ideals, attitudes and values, stated in curricula, must be seen in reality as well.

The modern disability policy has left the old patient, care and institutional thinking for a broadened citizenship perspective. In accordance with the laws governing care, service and education for people with disabilities, it's the people with functional impairments themselves, who are to take part in the planning and design of the action taken and the implementation of it. The individual's experiences and description of his/her difficulties and needs shall constitute the basis for what to do. A number of projects like "[Funktionshinder](#)" (project SE131), "[Foten på hjärtat](#)" (project SE132) and "[Strutsens vingar](#)" (project SE138) all take their starting point in the experiences and needs of the individual.

As Börjesson (1997:19) puts it: "Before Christianity there was no (Christian) sin, before conceptualisations like "vicious" and the "discovery" of "MBD" there were no vicious children or children *with* "MBD". Diagnoses produce their clients, rather than uncover their actual condition.

A clash between perspectives

As an example of an interesting and implacable debate, with either neuropsychiatric or sociological connotations about "letter diagnoses" like MBD, DAMP and ADHD, the one that took place in Swedish media in autumn 2000 may be mentioned. The debate was conducted by two fractions of professionals and researchers with different views on the so called "letter diagnoses". One fraction had Professor Christopher Gillberg⁴⁴, considered a leading authority on MBD⁴⁵, as spokesman. The MBD diagnosis implied that unconcentrated children had a brain damage so minimal that it could not be measured. Due to international criticism pointing at the non-provable explanations concerning brain damage, MBD as concept was abandoned. Instead, the DAMP⁴⁶ concept was introduced. Outside Sweden and Denmark the concept ADHD⁴⁷ was used. In a conference, "Bokstavs barnen" ("The Letter children") in Stockholm in 1998 professor Gillberg said that 16 percent of all children had severe or moderate disorders. In spring 1999 The National Board of Health and Welfare decided to write a document with guidelines for treatment of DAMP/ADHD.

In autumn 2000 just before the document from The National Board of Health and Welfare was to be established, the sociologist Eva Kärfve published her book *Hjärnspöken. Damp och hotet mot folkhälsan* ("Brain ghosts. Damp, and the threat against public health"). Kärfve maintained, and was supported by some school paediatricians, that the neuropsychiatric research systematically rejects or

⁴⁴ Gillberg, Christopher. <http://www.answers.com/topic/christopher-gillberg>, 2008-02-10

⁴⁵ MBD, Minimal Brain Damage, diagnose which was imported from USA in the 60s.

⁴⁶ Deficits in Attention, Motor control and Perception

⁴⁷ Attention Deficit - Hyperactive Disorder

ignore alternative explanations on children's hyperactivity and concentration problems. Kärffve also argued that international research almost never found all three disorders in attention, mobility and perception in the same child. This makes the whole construction of MBD/DAMP collapse, Kärffve said. Kärffve drew political conclusions from this and writes in an article, "En hjärnskadad generation" ("A brain damaged generation") in *Ordfront magasin* (7-8, 2000), that: In all ways the DAMP-concept fits into new socio-biological ideology connected to neo-liberalism. When disorder in the class-rooms can be explained by brain damages in the children one does not have to put any blame on society for cuts in resources. The whole debating created insecurity for parents. Who were they to believe in? If the diagnosis was wrong, what then? Were they to be blamed as parents?

Finally, Kärffve demanded to get access to professor Gillberg's empirical findings in order to analyse it herself. Gillberg handled against a court order and refused, with reference to having promised his informants secrecy. Instead the research material was destroyed.

A school for all – Indigenous minorities

The background for the minority policy is found in 1) the government bill 1998199: 143 *Nationella minoriteter i Sverige*, (National minorities in Sweden), 2) two European Council conventions – the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Minority language Convention, ratified by Sweden in 2000. In order to ratify the European Minority language Convention, it was stated in the government bill that the Swedish indigenous minorities and their languages are acknowledged and given the necessary support. This would create a basis for a national Swedish minority policy.

The background of government judgment was that a pluralistic and genuinely democratic society should give room for minorities with another culture, religion or another mother tongue. The existence of indigenous minorities have enriched Sweden culturally but also in other respects. This gives the state a responsibility to give support and protection to national minorities.

The Sami and other people have been living in the area long before the Nordic countries were established. These groups became minorities in the states they were incorporated in. Both positive and negative effects are the results of the incorporation. At the beginning it was easy to continue to live in the same way as earlier but in course of time the minorities were increasingly involved in the surrounding society. This had given possibilities for education and societal service but also lead to that the minorities had had to forego their culture, religion and their own language.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities does not give a clear definition of the concept national minority. The fifth article states that national minorities have an identity based on religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage. In the Swedish government bill *Nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk* (1998199:143, p 31)⁴⁸ the following criteria for a national minority are added:

- A group with a pronounced kinship that in number, related to the rest of the population, has a non-dominating position in society. Above the size of the group structure and unity has to be illustrated and considered.
- Religious, linguistic, traditional and/or cultural belonging. Only one of the stated group characteristics must exist. The characteristics shown within the group must in an essential way distinguish from the ones of the majority.

⁴⁸ *Nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk* (Proposition 1998199: 143, p 31/Government bill).
<http://www.uddevalla.se/download/18.16c79d7f44eca78e37fff31726/minoritetspolitiken.pdf>, 2008-02-10

- Self-identification. The individuals as well as the group shall have a wish and an aspiration to keep their identity
- Historical or long-term bonds to Sweden

According to these criteria Sweden has five national minority groups: Finnish, Swedish-Finnish, Jewish, Meänkieli and Romani. The suggestions in the bill were approved by the Riksdag in December 1999. After the approval, the Government has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European regulations about regional and minority languages. The national aims of the minority policy can be divided into three areas:

- To give protection to the national minorities
- To strengthen their influential possibilities
- To support the historical minority languages in order to keep them alive

The aim is to find ways how to pay attention to children and adolescents belonging to national minorities, in order to make use of their experiences and knowledge.

The national minorities shall have a right to use their mother tongue in contact with authorities and courts irrespective of knowledge in the Swedish language. Above this, pre-school education and geriatric care shall be available in the minority languages within the traditional settlement areas. Measure will be taken to protect and strengthen the national minority languages, culture and history within the fields of education and cultural areas. In the Budget bill for 2008 the government wants to abolish the requirement on a minimum of five students in the municipality wanting mother tongue education in Finnish or Yiddish before teaching is arranged. Also the requirement on using Finnish or Yiddish as a daily used language eg in the family is supposed to be abolished. The rest of the national minorities have already got these rights.

The national minorities will also have an influence on different measures taken, concerning the international arena. Changes in the curriculum for the compulsory school system pre-school class and the leisure-time centre (Lpo 94) and for the upper secondary school (Lpf 94) will have to be made. It should be stated that the pupils shall be given knowledge about the minority languages and the culture, religion and history of the indigenous minorities. Education concerning the national minorities shall also be included in the syllabi of Swedish, History, Religion and Social science.

At least one folk high-school of each of the national minorities is suggested to get a long-term support as cultural centres. The needs may vary between the groups and between areas such as language, culture and religion etc.

Regarding higher education and research, the government bill states that continued development is essential. Higher education and research may contribute to an increased status for the cultural characteristics of the indigenous minorities.

However, a recently published report by the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination: *Diskriminering av nationella minoriteter inom utbildningsväsendet* (2008:2) shows severe structural discrimination and that Sweden does not live up to the intentions stated in the two European Council conventions – the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Minority language Convention, ratified by Sweden in 2000⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ Referring to: Dir 2004:54 *Makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering* (Power, Integration and Structural Discrimination)

A school for all – gender aspects

There are distinct proofs of a differentiation and gender construction from the start of the Folk School. The Folk School was for both boys and girls but on different conditions. The mild and innocent girls were with all means to be kept apart from the wild and rude boys, preferably with separate school rooms and high wooden fences when playing outdoors (Isling 1988).

In the first “Folk school Regulation” from 1842 and up till 1921 Sweden had what Isling (*ibid.*) calls a “gender clause” stating that girls needed less of the ordinary school subjects and more of household knowledge. When studying a school subject, girls’ requirements could be covered by so called mini courses. The Folk School was for the manual labour groups in society, farmers and workers. This might be seen as the first step of social dividing. As for girls, mini courses were also meant for children from poor families.

It wasn’t until 1859 that women were allowed to apply for jobs in schools run by the state. In 1860 teacher training for women began. However, during the whole nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century the secondary school was a school for boys from the upper classes. In 1915 as many as 85 percent of the students were sons of academics or businessmen and the teachers were males. In the argumentation about why women shouldn’t be allowed to teach in the Secondary school, it was said that “it takes a man to create one”. Girls from wealthy families had up till 1927 the possibility to go to private schools. After that, they could also pass the higher school examination. Separate teaching disappeared in the nineteen sixties when schools for girls were closed. Official reports preceding the introduction of the comprehensive school and the first curricula in 1962 emphasised that there was no need for separate teaching of boys and girls (Florin and Johansson 1993; Tallberg Broman *et al.* 2002).

Research demonstrates how this differentiation has developed and changed over the years. Inequalities resulting from gender have been a longstanding topic in the educational discussion in Sweden. It’s not until the last two decades of the twentieth century though, that researchers on an increasing scale begin to take an interest in gender issues concerning eg interaction, communication and identity. Studies with a focus on interaction and communication showed that teachers pay more attention to boys than to girls (Einarsson and Hultman 1984, Einarsson 1991). Earlier investigations had also shown that the educational results for boys in mathematics and science were better than those of the girls. Recent investigations, however, report that former differences between educational results for boys and girls have changed over the last 10-20 years. Research show that girls today are more successful than boys irrespective of class, in which area they live or ethnic background.⁵⁰ Tallberg-Broman *et al.* (2002) discuss the fact that many girls use school for studies aiming at the future, as a possible way to success.

Investigations initiated by The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement also indicate that equality and gender has not been a prioritised area in schools and municipalities.⁵¹ As a result of this, funds were directed for educating resource persons within the field of equality and gender in the Governmental budget for 2002. The aim was to have one educated gender pedagogue in every Swedish community at the end of 2004. In the curriculum (Lpo94, pp 3, 14) for the compulsory school system of today, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre, issues concerning equality and gender are frequently stressed.

⁵⁰ see e.g Börjesson 2005/13, *Svenska. En samtalsguide om kunskap, arbetssätt och bedömning*. Myndigheten för skolutveckling 2007

⁵¹ Börjesson, 2003 *Hur är det ställt? Tack ojämt!* and Myndigheten för skolutveckling 2004 a, 2004 b. 2007-10-20

In the proposition *En förnyad lärarutbildning* (Prop. 1999/2000:135, 68-69)⁵² a gender perspective should permeate teacher training courses in order to make students aware of how gender is expressed in daily school life and in the pedagogical work they were going to be responsible for as future teachers.

“Beneath the Surface”⁵³ is a Swedish project within the EU-programme EQUAL, aimed at combating discrimination in the workplace. A handbook, *Liv i lärarummet/Open up Your Workplace: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity* (2006 Ed. Henley) and a DVD have been produced. The publication is a result of cooperation between twelve organisations and authorities. The purpose is to initiate a discussion about the heterosexual norm and to raise the issue of sexual orientation and homophobia in school. The target groups for the project are active teachers, students in teacher training, pedagogic instructors, politicians, civil servants working in school environments and pupils.

⁵² *En förnyad lärarutbildning* (Prop. 1999/2000:135, 68-69) <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c4/26/45/df80f045.pdf> 2008-02-10

⁵³ For full presentation of *Beneath the Surface* in English see <http://www.ytan.se/?p=1892> 2008-02-10

Conclusions

Education is in the minds of everybody. Young or old, professional or not, we all have views on how it should work. Over the years Swedish governments of various political colours have in several ways put the searchlight on educational disadvantages and by legislation, changes in curricula and syllabi and with help of additional resources committed themselves to solve the problem in order to facilitate education for all groups. This report has tried to illustrate on the one hand changes that have really meant a difference and on the other hand contradictions between rhetoric and practice, ideology and economy. Seven themes: *ethnic minorities*, *socio-economic*, *religious minorities*, *linguistic minorities*, *disabilities*, *indigenous minorities* and *gender* have been described and discussed in relation to the Swedish “en skola för alla” (school for all).

In addition to this report there is a selection of twenty national, regional and local projects and four case studies showing initiatives to make things better for groups of children and young people who have been defined as educationally disadvantaged (For a summary of projects and case studies, see Appendix 1 and for an overview see Appendix 2). During the process of the especially The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement⁵⁴ has been of great help finding projects and answering all kinds of questions.

However, the lack of evaluations in even large projects with substantial funding raises question marks. The explanation given by The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement to why this is the case is that “it has not been budgeted for”. This is incomprehensible. It can hardly be in the interest of the government, the agency or the educational institutions not to know whether the inputs made had any effect or not.

“A school for all” has for more than forty years been the key concept applicable for the political ambitions regarding the Swedish school. With the introduction of the comprehensive school and first curricula in 1962 there was a turn of the tide from the old system found in the early days of the Folk school in 1842 with full schooling for a few and mini courses for the underprivileged. In research analysing the outcomes we have seen a shift of perspectives from social class to gender and later also ethnic diversity.

School improvements were seen to be a result by means of central, national decisions and the comprehensive school was meant to be homogeneous and non-segregating. However, continuously differing results lead to another shift giving structural and organisational explanations to discrimination of some groups of children and young people and during the 1980’s there was a stern debate about who should have the responsibility for organising the school, the state or the municipalities. This led to political decisions about two major reforms at the beginning of the 1990’s. The first change was the municipalisation in January 1991 when local authorities took a great part of the responsibility for the school. There was also a change from management by rules and resources to management by goals and results.

In 1992 there was a second change, the so called “free choice of school” introduced by the Moderate party in the coalition government of that time. A family’s address, should no longer direct the children to the nearest school. One of the benefits was said to be less segregation when parents could choose the best school for their children. Others claimed it was going to increase segregation with only the already privileged benefiting by it. The ideology of “free choice” holds an implicit belief in that segregated areas are those with people with low or no income and/or areas with many immigrants, “the others”. Social areas with high status have seldom in the debate been referred to as

⁵⁴ The work carried out by the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement was from 1 July 2008 transferred to The Swedish National Agency for Education.

segregated. Lindbom and Almgren (2007) studied the effects of the free choice of school and discuss whether it has increased the segregation or not. Almgren (2006), Lindbom and Almgren (2007:93) points out a causal connection: Socio-economic and /or ethnic segregation *causes* school segregation. Their study shows that housing segregation is a more important explanation for school segregation than the possibility of having a free choice of school. There are no high status schools (in the eyes of ethnic Swedes) in low status areas. Within a framing of neo-liberalism and the state offering its citizens “a free choice” the individual has been given all opportunities to solve the problem himself. The state can rest its case in absolution.

The “school for all” concept holds other concepts like equal possibilities and abilities and additional resources have been used in order to help students *with* difficulties. There is a contradictory way of the definition of how to interpret “being able to” when looking at aims and goals in curriculum and syllabi compared to solutions suggested for those who “can not”. “Not having the ability to” in the political discourse most often has an emphasis on formal so called “basic skills” as if there is an uncomplicated agreement on what is meant by that. Being able to read and write and using correct spelling and grammar to the present government seem to be the only definition of language development. This has led to suggestions from local liberal and moderate politicians about not allowing “foreign” children and young people using their mother tongue while they are in school. The argumentation (reported in the Swedish newspapers Dagens Nyheter and Sydsvenskan) holds standpoints like “it is a matter of course that you are to speak Swedish in Swedish schools”, “it will make it easier for the teachers to maintain discipline if they are only allowed to speak Swedish” and “only speaking Swedish in the preparatory class will make it easier to understand what is said in the ordinary class room later on”. They are to learn Swedish first, and then they are supposed to be ready for subject studies. Suggestions like this show an astonishing ignorance of research of many years showing that knowledge development and language development are joined processes and that the Mother tongue is of vital importance for second language development, research that constitute the basis of the preparatory work *Skola för bildning* for the present curriculum.

Perhaps these suggestions also have to be seen in the light of the national language policy recently agreed on by the Swedish Parliament. The new language policy is aiming at securing the Swedish language in a time when English is becoming increasingly dominant all the way through daily life till to research.

On the opposite side of the good intentions with child welfare becoming a central area for social policy and concerning all children there are not all together pleasant effects of excessive diagnosing of what is seen as children’s shortcomings. Lack of abilities to sit still in the class room, pupils’ sometimes unrestrained ways of giving expression to what they think about school work and not doing “as they are told” are too often subjected to individual psychological explanations. Not acceptable behaviour is often explained with “he (because it’s almost always a he) has got MBD/DAMP/ADHD” etc. as if that kind of diagnose by definition is equivalent to something that “sits in the brain”. Though research over the years has presented theoretical analysis giving structural, organisational and internal characteristics of schools and explanations to why some children and young people are structurally discriminated and therefore don’t “fit in”, this doesn’t seem to have had much effect on practice. (Giddens 1984, 1991; Liberman 1998; Tallberg-Broman *et al.* 2002).

The fact that schools too often create problems for children and put them *in* difficulties seems to be too hard to digest. It is easier to psychologise. Some paediatricians have during the nineteen nineties in debates on the risk of over diagnosing given expression to a feeling of being caught in a fox trap. Reduced resources in schools, especially during the 90s, lead to bigger classes and fewer special pedagogues for children in special needs. This often created situations where a single class teacher felt insufficient when not coping with all kinds of educational and social problems. Parents

complained when their children didn't get the help they were entitled to. The result was that paediatricians "helped" schools by over diagnosing children as suffering from DAMP, ADHD etc. That was the only way of showing parents that there was help to get and giving the school extra resources. On the other hand children once given one of the letter combination diagnoses were labelled in such a negative way that they were not allowed to insure their lives.

"Fundamental values" is another key concept permeating the Swedish school. The fundamental values formulated in the curricula are corresponding with the later "Child and student protection law". It is also clearly stated that cultural diversity is to be respected. The problem experienced in practice is how to interpret and *act* the meaning of fundamental values and the respect for diversity. As Runfors (2006) points out, there is a contradictory message since "culture" has reference to an already existing and not challenging system of values and norms, fostering for *cultural diversity* becomes subordinate to *fundamental values*.

Summing up and making an overview of policies, the development of the Swedish school system and choosing relevant projects in order to illustrate good examples of how the government or regional and local authorities have tried to combat educational disadvantages have been a somewhat delicate task and there is no claim that this report is presenting a complete picture. What has been shown during the journey from the early Folk school to contemporary school is a palette of political policies supported by legislations and aiming at making things better for groups defined as educationally disadvantaged. Many decisions have indeed lead to better conditions for more children and young people. Despite of this it has to be concluded that some of the present political suggestions and policies directed to the educational area seem to suffer from an ignorance of or lack of interest in recent research results regarding educationally disadvantaged groups.

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 2008-02-10

Appendix 1: Project Summaries

Theme	Project	subsidiary themes
Minority ethnic groups	Parental Involvement in an Urban School	L
	Resurscentrum för mångfaldens skola, RMS/Centre of Diversity in Education [Case Study 1]	C L D G I L R
Socio-economic	Näktergalen/The Nightingale [Case Study 4]	E L
	Förebyggande och främjande/ Prevention and promotion	
Linguistic Minorities	Storstadssatsningen/Metropolitan policy	E L
	Dialogkommuner/Second language teaching for communities with non-native speakers [Case Study 3]	E
	Idéskolor/Idea schools	E
	Språkutveckling och teknik i förberedelseklasser/Language development and technology in preparatory classes	E
Disabilities	Modersmålsbaserad undervisning/Mother tongue based teaching	E
	Läraryftet/"The teacher lift"	D
	Tema modersmål/Theme: Mother tongue	E
	Att utveckla bedömarkompetens/Assessment competence	E L
	Foten på hjärtat/"The foot on the heart"	
	Strutsens vingar/"The wings of the ostrich"	
Indigenous Minorities	Funktionshinder/Disabilities	
	Kompetensutveckling för lärare i minoritetsspråk/ In service training for teachers in national minority languages	L
	Nationella minoriteter: Meänkieli/Indigenous minorities: Meänkieli	L
	Finlandssvenska i förskolan/Finnish-Swedish in pre-school	L
	Nationella minoriteter: Romani-chib/ Indigenous minorities: Romani chib	L
Gender	Nationella minoriteter: Samiska/ Indigenous minorities: Sami	L
	Värdegrund, jämställdhet och genus/Developing a school curriculum for gender equality [Case Study 2]	

Key: E ethnic minorities; C social class; R religious minorities; L linguistic minorities; D disability; I indigenous minorities; G gender

Appendix 2: Project overview

Project	target age range							target theme(s)				
	pre-school	primary	secondary	higher	work life	min. ethnic	social class	relig min	linguistic minor.	disability	indig. minor.	gender
Att utveckla bedömarkompetens					✓	✓			✓	✓✓		
Dialogkommuner		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓✓			
Kompetensutveckling för lärare i minoritetsspråk					✓	✓			✓		✓✓	
Foten på hjärtat		✓	✓	✓						✓✓		
Idéskolor	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓✓			
Nationella minoriteter: Meänkieli		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓✓	
Finlandssvenska i förskolan	✓					✓			✓		✓✓	
Nationella minoriteter: Romani-chib		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓✓	
Nationella minoriteter: Samiska		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓✓	
Språkutveckling och teknik i förberedelseklasser		✓	✓			✓			✓✓			
Modersmålsbaserad undervisning		✓	✓			✓			✓✓			
Näktergalen		✓	✓			✓	✓✓		✓			
Läraryftet					✓				✓✓	✓		
Förebyggande och främjande				✓	✓		✓✓					
Storstadssatsningen	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓✓		✓			
Strutsens vingar			✓							✓✓		
Tema modersmål						✓			✓✓			
Funktionshinder	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓✓		
Parental Involvement in an Urban School			✓			✓✓			✓			
Värdegrund, jämställdhet och genus												✓✓