

Education Governance in Transition: an introduction

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ABSTRACT *The purpose of this article is to present concepts and research problems dealing with education governance and social inclusion and exclusion. Education restructuring, as a recent international movement, is regarded as a combination of transitions in governing and new managerialism. Social inclusion and exclusion is conceived of as a duplet concept, mutually defining each other. The relation between new governance—deregulation, decentralisation, privatisation and steering by goals and results—and social inclusion/exclusion is conceptualised as an equity problematic and a knowledge problematic. It is argued that there is a need to understand the system of reason in order to capture the implications of education governing in transition.*

Keywords: *education restructuring; governance; social exclusion; system of reason*

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

During the last decades, the structures of educational systems in the Western welfare states have changed in several ways. This restructuring is often described in terms of decentralisation and deregulation in combination with increased school autonomy and new ways to manage schools (see for example Weiler, 1989; Darling-Hammond & Bullmaster, 1997). Another way to capture such changes is to talk about changes in governance: from steering by rules and directives to steering by goals and results (see for example Beare & Boyd, 1993; Meyer & Baker, 1996). Such shifts are intertwined with transformations in relations between the public and the private sectors, presented in terms of privatisation and marketisation as well as parental choice (Walford, 1994; Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995; Whitley *et al.*, 1998). Similar changes are occurring over the world (Pappagiannis *et al.*, 1992). The timing and focus varies

between regions, however. For instance, in the UK the construction of markets was regarded as a vital ingredient in the renewal of education in the 1980s, while we find quite similar changes in Sweden a decade later [1]. In sum, we can talk about education restructuring as ‘a world movement’ of cultural, social and political changes in our time (Daun, 1993).

These changes lead to the following reasoning and problem. Educational systems and processes are social constructions (Hacking, 1999). They are based on matrices in terms of institutions, practises and infrastructures as well as traditions, ideologies and political decisions. It is our point of departure that restructuring measures have an impact on such constructions. If so, restructuring will have implications for education—structures and cultures as well as actions—but perhaps not as described in the rhetoric of restructuring. Thus, there is an urgent need to research educational restructuring and its implications for education and the meaning and consequences in society. In order to deal with this problem we formed a research team from different parts of Europe, the USA and Australia, which received funds from the European Commission and from national sources. We designed a research project called Educational Governance and Social Integration/Exclusion (EGSIE) [2]. In what follows, we put forward questions on education restructuring as an international phenomenon realised in different local contexts with a focus on relations between educational governance and social inclusion and exclusion.

EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EXCLUSION: CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS AND THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

In their influential work Hirst & Thompson (1999) distinguish between government and governance, where government deals with the institutions of the state that control and regulate life in a community, while governance

is the control of an activity by some means that a range of desired outcomes are achieved—is however, not just the province of the state. Rather, it is a function that can be performed by a wide variety of public and private, state and non-state, national and international institutions and practises. (p. 269)

Education restructuring can be regarded as such a shift from government to (new) governance. Dale (1998) regards this shift in education governing (as a more general concept) from bureaucratic control to a set of governance relationships, where other agencies than the state are involved in different activities, as a process dependent on the changing role of the state. This in turn is due to increased globalisation and limits of state action in combination with new forms of particularism.

Such a shift in governing implies changes in school management and steering. This includes greater use of private sector management practises, explicit and measurable standards of performance and so forth. In sum we can talk about a ‘new managerialism’ in education with such keywords as leadership, professionalism, accountability and evaluation, as well as consumer choice (Chubb & Moe, 1988;

Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995). Education restructuring is here conceived of as a combination of (new) governance and new managerialism.

How about governance and social inclusion and exclusion in educational research? Here we put forward three aspects. First, education governance is widely discussed in the research literature and the same holds true for social inclusion and exclusion. However, research combining these two fields are not very frequent, according to the research reviews carried out in our research (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2000). Thus, research on governing transformations in education was in practise isolated from research on social implications of education. Second, in the work of conceptualising our research, we considered research about governance in relation to social inclusion and social integration to have some inherent difficulties. We found few conceptual discussions of governance in educational research. Governance was assumed and not theorised. It was taken as a matter of technicalities focusing on actions towards predefined ends rather than asking about the assumptions and rules of the interpretative practises embedded in policy discourses.

And third, categorisations used in definitions of social integration and exclusion also contained severe difficulties (cf. Goodwin, 1994; Silver, 1994). Thus, we began to use the concept duplet 'social inclusion/exclusion' as a way to capture the relative character of definitions of social inclusion, where inclusion is defining exclusion and vice versa.

Based on conceptual analyses of relations between governance and social inclusion/exclusion, we stated that our research had two qualitatively different problematics: an equity problematic and a knowledge problematic.

The equity problematic focuses on the means by which activities are controlled or directed to deliver an acceptable range of outcomes in accordance with some established social standards. This has been central to the politics of representation of access of individuals and groups that have been denied full participation in educational and social fields. The problem of governing in this respect is the administrative practises that limit or promote social, cultural or economic access or integration of these individuals or groups. Thus, a central problem of social inclusion/exclusion is a problem of representation: to what extent do individuals or groups with certain characteristics have access to educational measures? What practises produce or eliminate exclusion of these individuals and groups?

The knowledge problematic focus on the rules and standards of reason that 'make' the actor who is represented in the equity problematic, such as the grouping of a child to be seen as a minority or as 'at risk' or as belonging to a family that is deviant. Such systems of reason govern the ways by which actors are classified, represented and normalised for action and participation. It is in the governing practises of knowledge that we can entertain a way of understanding how the systems of inclusion/exclusion function in modern educational systems. The normalising and dividing practises simultaneously place the processes of exclusion with those of inclusion.

At this point, then, we can differentiate between the problematic of equity and the problematic of knowledge, as follows. The equity problematic treats governance of inclusion and exclusion as a problem of access and participation in the represen-

tation of groups or populations, typically classified through categories of race, class and gender. The knowledge problematic considers the construction of the 'qualities' that distinguish and differentiate the individual being for action and participation. It is not gender or class that is the central concern of research, but the production of gender-ness or class-ness of individuality. The knowledge problematic governs through the distinctions, differentiations and categories that construct identities for action and participation. The exclusion and inclusion joined (i.e. inclusion/exclusion) is embedded in principles of reason (the distinctions, differentiations and categories of knowledge) as divisions that simultaneously create an inside and an outside.

Each problematic embodies different notions of change. The equity problematic is to scrutinise the points of access and organisational processes through which access and participation occurs. The positive outcome of policy is to eliminate exclusion through full inclusion. The problem of governance in the knowledge problematic is related to the duality of inclusion/exclusion. Change is tied to the diagnostic of the present, i.e. to disturb 'that which forms that groundwork of the present, to make once more strange and to cause us to wonder how it came to appear so natural' (Rose, 1999, p. 58).

What is educational restructuring can be understood in many ways. We look at different notions of restructuring phenomena in education, as we see them in transition not necessarily from one state to some other defined state but as a movement. We ask our questions not to find out if there is a progress but rather what are the reasons and considerations that are part and parcel of transitions from government to (new) governance. Thus, we need to describe and analyse arguments and facts used for restructuring education. And since social inclusion and exclusion brings our focus to subjects and groups, it is of vital importance to learn about the subjects who are to be included or excluded in the reasoning about education governance.

As pointed out in several texts, the restructuring of education is related to financial measures, mostly in terms of cuts and alternative funding of education (see for example Dale, 1998). Looking at the financing of education during the period of restructuring we mostly find large cuts in finances. In Sweden, for instance, the cuts were considerable during the 1990s in general, and especially for children outside the mainstream (Lindblad *et al.*, 2001). Though there is not a one to one relationship between education resources and social inclusion/exclusion, this specific period means that measurements of education restructuring in terms of social exclusion of individuals to a large extent could be explained by these cuts and that changes in the construction of education would be 'hidden' by the specific financial context. Thus, it seemed to be fruitful to emphasise other aspects of restructuring. Instead we focused on the systems of reason (Popkewitz, 1991) that were used to implement and manage changes in education governance as well as to deal with the practises inside education. This focus is due to the fact that education is a social construction and that conceptions, distinctions and categories matter in the production and reproduction of such a system (Giddens, 1984; Hacking, 1999).

Based on the above considerations we put forward three main theoretical fields of research on educational governance and social inclusion/exclusion.

Constructing narratives. What are the stories of progress and denials in the restructuring of education? What are the images, myths and sagas that are to place people in a collective whole?

Constructing subjects. What are the conceptions of the individual to be included or excluded? What are the silences in these constructions?

Constructing governance and social inclusion/exclusion. How do the constructions of narratives and subjects produce systems of governance and social inclusion and exclusion? What are the conceived or constructed relations between systems of governance and social inclusion/exclusion?

DESIGN OF STUDIES

The design was built around the two interconnected problematics of equity and knowledge described above. Within the equity problematic we study the construction of the educational system and relate that to the distribution of resources among different categories such as gender, ethnicity and social class. In this way we find out what 'the playing field' looks like in terms of social inclusion and exclusion and implications of this in terms of integration and segregation in society. Here we look for information concerning access to education, enrolment, as well as dropouts and unemployment. However, our studies on education governance and social inclusion/exclusion focus on discursive patterns in different contexts. Thus, we say little about implications of changes in governance for classroom interaction and schooling.

We initiated our research programme with case studies dealing with recent educational reforms in the participating countries (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 1999) in combination with distinct features of educational systems and educational ideologies. A conceptual research review was carried out (Popkewitz *et al.*, 1999; Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2000) showing different problematics and perspectives in research. Informed by this we developed a system of studies to be carried out in each national case and locally adjusted to obtain information of importance to the theoretical questions presented above. These studies were as follows.

- Analyses of significant texts dealing with the reconstruction of the education governance system (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2000).
- Interviews with top politicians and administrators in the education field as well as with school actors in different local sites: headteachers, teachers, school nurses and so forth in compulsory and post-compulsory education (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001b).
- Reanalyses of national and international statistics on education and social inclusion and exclusion (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001a).
- Surveys directed to samples of students at the last year of compulsory education in the sites studied (Australia, Finland, Iceland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) (Rinne *et al.*, 2001).
- Studies in the systems of reasons in educational governance (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001c)

A main point in this overall design is the use of different sources for analyses positioned at different levels of education systems in different national contexts. Thus, we are constructing and analysing data emanating from different social circumstances. Another main point is that it is the theoretical questions and not specific methodologies that are guiding the investigations produced by the national teams. By means of this we counteract misconceptions of comparative studies as abstract and culturally free production of data on variables (Kazamias *et al.*, 1999).

The Nordic countries are often considered to represent special and similar historical and social circumstances in terms of, for instance, education and labour markets (Esping-Andersen, 1996). While the three Nordic countries in the EGSIE project portrayed, Finland, Iceland and Sweden, were primarily selected because of researchers' professional relationships and past research cooperation, they are also a good 'sample' of the five independent Nordic countries. In fact, these three countries may represent the 'extremes' in Nordic countries more than the similarities: Sweden is the largest and it has for long time had a 'leading' role, at least in the eyes of those outside the Nordic countries; Finland is the easternmost country and its chief language is not, as are the other Nordic majority languages, an Indo-European language; Iceland is the westernmost of the independent nations and it also has a special language status within the Nordic language group; Finland and Iceland have not had almost continuous social democratic governments as has Sweden, in fact, Iceland has never had a purely social democratic government; two of the countries are EU countries and one is a member of the EEA (European Economic Area); Iceland is a member of NATO, as are Denmark and Norway, while Finland and Sweden are not.

Therefore, the Nordic countries and their broadness is, perhaps, better represented than if, for instance, Sweden, Denmark and Norway had been the participants, or if Iceland and Denmark had been together in the project, with their close historical ties. This is not to underestimate educational changes in Norway and Denmark today that are to some extent different from those discussed in this issue.

Many things are similar in Finland, Iceland and Sweden both in relation to how the society as a whole functions and also in the educational system. In all these countries, access for children from all socio-economic groups has been considered very important. In Sweden, a comprehensive school system was established in 1962 for the primary and lower secondary levels, in Finland in 1971 and in Iceland in 1974.

COMMENTS ON TEXTS

The articles in this issue are written to present education restructuring in the Nordic welfare states to an international audience, with the assumption that each case represents a part of an international movement of educational change. Yet these are different national cases that we pull together in the last article.

First, the Finnish article traces the emergence of a specific discursive formation constituted by an intersection of the myths of competition, corporate managerialism, an educational clientele and social democracy. The main subjects constituted in this

discourse are the students as rational choice makers and invisible clients and the teachers as individual-centred learning professionals. As a conclusion of the paper, a new system of reason as a historical shift of responsibilities in the national education system will be outlined.

The Icelandic article focuses on changes in governance and integration/exclusion practises as modern educational sagas. Reforms in governance, such as marketisation budget practises and school-based self-evaluation legislative requirements, are being implemented to combat what authorities, school professionals and the public perceive as declining discipline and schools that need to become more efficient to prepare young people for global competition in the modern world. The Icelandic article also points out that a clinical approach to defining special educational needs treats students as consumers of individual rights and tends to neglect socio-economic differences. The article concludes by arguing that marketisation discourse appears in Iceland as a technical solution to make education better.

Third, Sweden is a case of rapid transformation in governing of a highly inclusive education system, where exclusion tendencies occur inside this system. A basic theme in the narratives is that of no other way than the one chosen. A discursive map is presented where conceptions of individual agency are distinctive between different kinds of education actors. Another distinctive aspect deals with finances, where school actors emphasise the impact of financial cuts on social inclusion/exclusion compared with system actors. The system of reason among education actors is contrasted with variations in the local context of Swedish schools and with the different cultural responses to schooling among students in this context.

Fourth, the youth study deals with how and to what extent social structures, ideologies and norms get transmitted to the level of attitudes of the students. The article is based on students' responses to school and society in different socio-political contexts as described by Esping-Andersen (1996); the Nordic welfare states (Finland and Sweden), conservative welfare states (Spain and Portugal) and the neo-liberal Australian state.

In the final article we relate the different cases to each other in order to present how education restructuring as an international movement has emerged in different Nordic contexts.

NOTES

- [1] Consider here the introduction of markets in England and Wales in the early 1980s and a little later in the 1988 education reform act (see for example Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995) and the presentation of a restructured educational system in *The Swedish Way Towards a Learning Society* in 1992.
- [2] The articles in this issue of the journal are based on the research programme Educational Governance and Social Integration/Exclusion (EGSIE), with financial support by the European Commission, Targeted Socio-Economic Research (grant no. SOE2-CT97-2028). Participating countries besides Finland, Iceland and Sweden were: Australia, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain and the UK (England and Scotland). The Finnish research team consisted of Hannu Simola, Risto Rinne and Joel Kivirauma with Katariina Hakala, Piia Seppänen, Mikko Aro and Tero Järvinen. The Icelandic research team consisted of Gudrun Geirsdóttir, Gunnar E. Finnbogason, Ingólfur Asgeir Johannesson, Ólafur J. Proppe and Sigurjon Myrdal with Elin Dogg Gudjonsdóttir, Kristín Indridadóttir, Regina Stefnisdóttir and Thorsteinn Gunnarsson. The Swedish research team con-

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