

## Abstract

The title of the present thesis is *Equality without solidarity? Studies from the vantage point of history of ideas on uses of marking systems in education, and of meritocracy.* (Likhet uten solidaritet? Idéhistoriske studier av karakterer i utdanning og meritokrati). ISBN-10: 91-628-6863-2, ISBN-13: 978-91-628-6863-5.

The thesis circles around two central knowledge objects. One is the use of marking systems in education. The mark is a standardised way of assessing educational performance, that has a variety of functions relating to pupils and students, parents, further education, and working life. The study of the use of marking systems in education is not an established research field. My studies relate to the topic in a more general way, in broader contexts than education. That is why even ideas of meritocracy and meritocratic norms are of interest, and have become the other knowledge object of my thesis. The thesis consists of four papers, and also includes my earlier diploma thesis as a separate volume. However, all the studies concern the same question: Why have the uses of marking systems in education become so self-evident, why has the practice become so naturalised? Both marking systems and meritocratic norms combine ideals of equality and competition in a special way. There shall be equal opportunity to compete for an achieved inequality. In the education system this is also a legitimate inequality. I use the words of equality and solidarity in the title to play up the promises of the revolutionary values of equality, fraternity and freedom. Relating to the papers of the thesis, however, equality means more the struggle to get away from a structure of inequality that generally was regarded as unfair, e.g. in the educational system. However, the new inequalities constructed in these processes of change achieved varying degrees of focus. As long as equal opportunities meant broader access for e.g. working class children to higher education, it was seen as an instrument of equality. Michael Young, however, in his thought experiment *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, paints a picture of how a class-ridden society with a remote elite, may look like through a consistent implementation of principles of equal opportunity for merit. This is a society where solidarity, in a loose meaning of duties of reciprocity and community feeling, has minimal chances to survive as culture and style of life.

Keywords: Marks, marking systems, assessment, reform pedagogy, the Bell Curve, Bernhof Ribsskog, Michael Young, meritocracy, equality and education.