

Abstract

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In the present thesis, I analyse how the idea of equality appeared in Swedish educational policy documents from 1946 to 2000. The dissertation aims to advance our understanding of equality as an educational ideal by analysing it as a politico-temporal problem. I do this by combining political thought with historiographical reflections. The material on which I draw is primarily governmental official reports (*Statens offentliga utredningar*) and Government bills. Utilising what I call the historico-political approach, I examine the empirical material by focusing on how the idea of equality has been envisaged with regard to the past, present, and future. The chief problem is divided into five research questions, which in turn are analysed in four separate studies.

By exploring how the relationship between teacher, pupil, and content has appeared in key policy documents, I reveal a crucial dislocation in educational policies that has been overlooked to date. Whereas the idea of centring education around the individual pupil was initially popularised in the post-war period and articulated as a more efficient means for ensuring that pupils assimilated greater knowledge, this successively morphed into a democratic goal in itself, in line with the overt attempt to further the democratisation of the educational system in the 1970s. Concurrently, the role of the teacher and the content taught also underwent substantial changes. I show how these transformations can be seen as indicative of a new way of temporally charging equality, where the present is given priority at the expense of both the past and the future. Building on and yet diverging from previous research on Sweden's educational reforms, in which the reforms around 1990 are depicted as a break from earlier educational policies, my results showcase important and seldom noted strands of continuity in educational policies from 1946 to 2000. In short, this project shows how the desire to further equalise conditions in the educational system paradoxically undermined the democratic order that it was intended to strengthen, helping to pave the way for the changes around 1990, which are often depicted as manifestations of a major, systemic shift.

Keywords: Equality, politico-temporal problem, education, post-war period, Sweden, political thought, regime of historicity, Arendt, democratic paradox, imaginary equality, the social, Tocqueville, world

The Aporia of Equality

A Historico-Political Approach to Swedish
Educational Politics 1946-2000

Tomas Wedin

Centrum för utbildningsvetenskap och lärarforskning
(CUL) Forskarskolan i utbildningsvetenskap

och

Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria, och religion

Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i Humaniora med inriktning mot utbildningsvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av humanistiska fakultetens dekanus kommer att offentligen försvaras fredagen den 7 december 2018, klockan 13 i T302, Olof Wijksgatan 6.



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