

Ethnic Diversity in Education: An Overview of Policy, Research and Projects

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1. INTRODUCTION: POLICY CONTEXT

This is a presentation of a survey¹ aimed at mapping research on multicultural and antiracist issues connected to Sweden's increasingly ethnically diverse classrooms. Themes emerging from this survey include different aspects of discrimination, for example, the notion from a (Swedish) majority perspective of the 'immigrant student' both as a valuable resource and as a problem, evident in educational policies, steering documents and research studies. Language is a key issue, as an example of an (un)conscious discriminatory practice where focus on language is used as a boarder of inclusion/exclusion. Additionally, individual experiences of racism and discrimination emerge as part of everyday life in Swedish schools. There have been attempts to work against discrimination at an everyday level, evident in a range of anti-racist projects aimed at schools. However, the complexity of the area makes it hard to evaluate the outcomes of these strategies.

There are several reasons for directing attention towards multicultural and antiracist issues at the present time. Changing policies on asylum seekers and the dispersal of immigrants across the country have drawn attention to Sweden as a multi- rather than monocultural society. This has in turn led to a need for Swedish schools and teachers to consider how to address culture diversity as well as challenging discrimination. However, there seems to be little agreement about how to do this beyond the importance of teachers adopting an intercultural perspective, and the need for a more inclusive approach to dealing with ethnic diversities in schools.

We argue here that perspectives on social and cultural difference, say of teachers and students, draw both on conception of national identity and value framework, and on wider, more global structures and pressures. In recent years, the Swedish state has ceded power and responsibility to the European Union on the one hand, and to local municipalities and the individual on the other, yet simultaneously has sought to impose control over the values and behaviour of individual citizens, for example, through raising the profile of "grounded values" (värdegrund) in schools. In the latest steering documents for schools (Lpo 94; Lpfö 98) grounded values are emphasized and furthermore, the multicultural nature of Sweden is for the first time clearly acknowledged (Hedin, 2000).

This policy shift is not, in our view, due merely to the wish to promote ethical behaviour or to prevent social disorder. It is also an acknowledgement of the importance of national reputation (or "branding") at a time of heightened global competition, where production of a "good" national image is essential. The international reputation of Sweden is generally positive; based on perceptions of Sweden as a successful, advanced capitalist state and highly networked, knowledge society, imbued with human rights and gender equality, and with a strong commitment both to the environment and to the welfare of its citizens (Weiner, 2003).

¹ The survey was carried out for the National Agency for Education and aimed at mapping and examining multicultural and antiracist issues in the ethnically and culturally diverse Swedish classroom. It was a part of a project *Mapping and disseminating research on multicultural and antiracist issues for ethnically diverse classrooms* (project leader: Gaby Weiner). The project consisted of two parts, a national conference that was held in March 2003, entitled "Sharp situations in everyday life at school" and a survey of research and projects on multicultural and antiracist issues in the Swedish school.

This national image can provide a feeling of superiority, and thereby be used as an escape route away from acknowledging racism (SOU 2005:41). Moreover, this good reputation could also serve to hide the history of ethnic discrimination in Sweden and its failure to resolve the struggles around diversity and racism.

Government policy regarding multiculturalism and antiracism in education has seemingly favoured rhetoric over actual strategies aimed at change. Rhetoric has its uses, for example, as a means of confirming commitment to a set of values, but when it is pursued without those involved having the opportunity to think through the implications, inaction ensues, perhaps due to perceptions of “political correctness”². This lack of opportunity for individuals to “open-up” about their inadequacies and difficulties constitutes an obstacle to reflective and conscious change, and leads to a denial that there is a problem. A more productive alternative, we suggest, is to build on government policy-making by providing teachers, education policy-makers with both a comprehensive introduction to issues of policy and practice surrounding “race”³ and ethnicity, and opportunities to reflect on language and everyday practice. This article seeks to illuminate the current educational context in Sweden with regard to this discussion and in particular, concerning the perspectives and actions of teachers and students.

2. SWEDISH APPROACHES TO ETHNICITY AND RACISM IN EDUCATION SETTINGS

The research method chosen was a systematic survey of government reports, research studies, articles, dissertations and other sources of information, with the aim of identifying patterns and issues relating to multicultural, intercultural and antiracist issues in the Swedish compulsory and upper secondary school⁴. The themes emerging from the survey (and shown below), were drawn up initially in consultation with educational policy-makers, teachers and

² Political correctness is defined as “the avoidance of forms of expression or action that exclude, marginalize, or insult certain racial or cultural groups” (The [Canadian Oxford Dictionary](#). Oxford University Press Canada 2001), but it is often used to refer to real or perceived attempts to impose limits on the acceptable language and terms used in public discussion. (Barber, 2001)

³ “Race” is shown with inverted commas (or parenthesis) to denote its status as a discursive symbol (of general debates around ethnicity) rather than with reference to biological differences between so-called human races. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001:7-8) point out:

Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they [racial stereotypes] correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin colour, physique, and hair texture. But these constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly, human, higher order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behaviour...

That society chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics.

⁴ Materialet har främst samlats genom att söka i det nationella biblioteksdatasystemet Libris och i databasen ERIC. Under vår datainsamling har vi således fått fram en variation av material, t ex avhandlingar, rapporter från högskolor, statliga utredningar och propositioner, handlingsplaner, rapporter från Skolverket, artiklar publicerade i tidskrifter, C- och D-uppsatser, böcker som sammanställer vad som presenterats vid konferenser och även publicerat material från skolor som beskriver projekt som genomförts. I de enstaka fall vi refererar till C- och D-uppsatser är dessa av sådan betydelse att de är publicerade och tillgängliga i LIBRIS. Vid läsning av materialet utgick vi från ett antal kategorier. Kategorierna har växt fram i dialog mellan lärare i skolan, kommunen, skolkontoret och universitetet, inom ramen för projektet för Umeå multicultural project. I dialogen identifierades ett antal områden av intresse för arbetet i skolan. Dessa områden har därefter legat till grund för vår kategorisering av innehållet i översikten. **(translate into English)**

researchers involved in the Umeå Multicultural Project⁵ and were later used also to shape the structure of the report.

- i. Educational policies and steering documents
- ii. Second-language teaching
- iii. Raising achievement, especially for minority students
- iv. Impact of increased diversity on the Swedish classroom
- v. Experiences of racism in schools
- vi. Strategies for challenging racism in schools⁶

i. Educational policies and steering documents

Analysis of educational policy documentation is important, not so much in terms of the explanations for change that it reveals, but for identifying shifts of policy *emphasis* against a historical and policy backdrop. Thus, the shifts from 1960s until the beginning of 2000 we have been able to discern, have included: early interest in educating the children of immigrants to enhance their adjustment to Swedish society, rights of immigrants to home language tuition and special provision, and more recent concern about the elimination of racism and discriminatory treatment in schools. From these policy discourses it is clear that schools are regarded by the state as one of the key actors in delivering an integration policy aimed at the new heterogeneous Sweden (Bunar, 2001). An emphasis on acquisition of adequate Swedish language skills of minorities has been a recurring theme, yet different values have been emphasised at different periods and terminology has changed accordingly.

Policy change The first enquiry into immigration was carried out in the 1960s and concerned Swedish children living abroad (SOU 1966:55). Children coming into Sweden from abroad were then viewed as a different problem and “in a much bigger context, namely immigrants’ adjustment to Sweden” (SOU 1966:55, s 224). Swedish language teaching was seen as particularly important. With the ratification of the UNESCO convention against discrimination in education in 1967, a shift could be discerned from focus on integration of immigrants toward recognition of ethnic diversity. In the same year, Swedish minorities gained the right to have their cultural backgrounds taken into account in their education, and in 1968, a government proposition allowed the provision of complementary education for “some minority children” (Schwarz, 1971:108; Prop.1968:67; Borevi, 2002, s196-197)⁷.

⁵ The Umeå Multicultural Project (UMP) was jointly funded by Skolverket, Umeå Skolkontoret and the Faculty of Teacher Education, Umeå University in 2001 with the main aim of supporting the development of work in Umeå schools and in teacher education, as follows: to develop strategies to deal with diversity; raise achievement in the multi-cultural classroom; find ways of addressing issues of racism and other forms of anti-social behaviour such as bullying; improve language teaching and educational experiences and outcomes of young immigrants and refugees; identify and develop suitable teaching and support materials included expanded use of the Internet; increase sensitivity among teachers and teacher educators to cultural difference and diversity; and ensure that knowledge of the causes and effects of racism and how to challenge it, becomes a core feature of all teacher education.

⁶ Den forskning och de projekt som vi varit intresserade av att dokumentera har varit de som genomförts med fokus på den svenska skolan, grundskolan och gymnasiet, ur ett mångkulturellt perspektiv. På grund av arbetets tidsramar har vi utslutit forskning och projekt som fokuserar modersmålsundervisning, förskoleverksamhet, vuxenundervisning och forskning kring läromedel.

⁷ I propositionen 1968:67 anges att det inte finns någon officiell statistik över språkliga eller religiösa minoriteter. ”Såväl svenska medborgare som utlänningar redovisas endast efter födelseland och utlänningar dessutom efter medborgarskap. Uppgifterna om utlandsfödda och utlänningar i Sverige kan emellertid ge en

Also offered was tuition in home language and culture, but not in relation to compulsory school subjects or the social or educational environment of the school. The aim rather was to offer *extra* tuition for immigrant students, in home language and culture.

The home language reform became fully operative in 1977-8, when all children whose first language was not Swedish gained the right to home-language tuition as “a living element in their home environment”. Other arguments put forward at the time were that home language teaching was important for the children’s development, and that bilingualism was beneficial to learning more generally. Thus, one goal of immigrant education was to develop active bilingualism (Borgstöm, 1998). Consequently, by the end of 1970s several models for teaching both immigrants and minorities were in existence; home language classes, classes which used both Swedish and home languages, and the right to two hours’ individual home-language tuition in addition to ordinary schooling.

By the early 1980s, education provision for immigrant children became a more pressing issue for government, alongside other reforms relating to immigrants (Borgström, 1998). Additionally, the intercultural perspective was officially introduced (SOU 1983:57). By 1985, however, financial cutbacks meant the restriction of mother-tongue teaching to pupils/students speaking a language other than Swedish at home, though two years later this was extended to Sami, Roma and Tornedaler. A stricter definition of who was entitled to home language tuition and emphasis on parental freedom of choice in terms of their children’s schooling contributed to the idea of school as “an arena” for children with different backgrounds (Borevi, 2002). By the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, individual rights and freedom of choice were beginning to be prioritised over collective school goals, with financial cutbacks again resulting in home-language tuition no longer compulsory for all children born abroad (Borevi, 2002:243). Additionally, as collective goals were abandoned, “individualization” was largely seen in terms of “Swedish” students, while “immigrant” students were viewed as a more homogenous group “whose problems, culture and tradition are contrasted with modern, rational and international Swedish students” (Gruber, 2001 s 38). Significantly, the curriculum from 1994 can be seen as the first guiding document that clearly express and acknowledge a multicultural Sweden (Hedin, 2000).

As we have seen policy discourse focused both on *special* measures with the children with immigrant- and minority backgrounds and viewed as exceptions, for example, in the debate about whether private, minority or religious schools should receive state support (Borevi, 2002). Meanwhile, Swedish language acquisition continued to be the main concern of school policy-makers. In 2000, formal recognition of National Minorities meant that language support was extended to Swedish-Finns, Tornedalers, Roma, Jews and Sami and additionally, that instruction in national minority languages, culture, religion and history was made available to all students.⁸

föreställning om problemens storlek.” (1968:67 Skolgång för vissa minoriteters barn. 4.1, s 32). Längre fram i står att läsa: ”En person anses tillhöra en viss språklig minoritet endast om han själv känner sig tillhöra minoriteten i fråga.” (Sedan 1945 registreras i Sverige inte modersmål, etnisk eller konfessionell grupp tillhörighet eller dylikt i folkräkningar)

⁸ Skolverkets rapport från 2003; *Sveriges nationella minoriteter, att gestalta ett ursprung i barnomsorg och skola*, bygger på möten med personal, barn och ungdomar från olika verksamheter inom barnomsorg och skola. Rapporten presenterar fakta om de nationella minoriteterna och ger exempel på hur man arbetar med nationella minoriteter, syftet med rapporten är också att stödja det pedagogiska arbetet och att synliggöra elever som talar ett nationellt minoritetsspråk.

Most recently emphasis in policy has shifted to reducing the discriminatory treatment of immigrant and minority students, and increasing the extent to which schools actively challenge racist behaviour and practices. Parallel to this shift in policy, a 2004 report suggests that laws against discrimination need to be extended to schools:

Mobbing och andra trakasserier har visats sig utgöra ett så stort problem för skolornas del, inte minst ur elevernas synvinkel, att de bör tas med i lagstiftningen oavsett vad som ligger bakom kränkningarna **Tranlsate into English** (SOU 2004:50, s 12).

The focus on challenging discriminatory behaviour has been further strengthened by the request from government to the National Agency for Education (in 2004), to provide general guidelines to schools concerning how to deal with different forms of discriminatory behaviour (Skolverket, 2004b). Government education minister, Lena Hallengren, has likewise made it clear that schools are not value-neutral but rather should actively address and challenge racism and other non-democratic forces in *all* situations (Regeringens nyhetsbrev, 2004; Skolverket, 2004b). Thus, the continuing presence of racism in education is seen as ‘mycket oroande’ (very worrying) (Prop. 2005/06: 38, s 88), and has resulted in a further governmental bill in October 2005, proposing, as suggested above, an extension of the law against discrimination to cover schools and education more generally (Prop. 2005/06:38).

Values and “värdegrund”

Parallel to the increased visibility of immigrants and minorities in educational policy, has been an ongoing emphasis on school values, as mentioned earlier. From 1946 onwards, a vision of the democratic school was introduced with the aim of fostering in students a strong moral commitment to democratic and free citizenship (Linné, 2001). By the 1960s, student-centred teaching and “equal rights” had become more prominent features of educational policy-making (Hedin, 2000; Lgr 69), such that schools were seen as offering a window on the world which encouraged awareness and consciousness of what it means to be an immigrant, presented until then as romantic and exotic (or threatening). Thus, it was generally “they” (immigrants) who were seen as needing to contribute to “our” (Swedish) knowledge and understanding about foreign countries and cultures in order to lay the ground for international understanding (Hedin, 2000). The idea of strong solidarity between groups was also emphasised, but this was solidarity at a distance, aimed at foreign countries and at providing Sweden with an international role in the struggle for social justice (Hedin & Lahdenperä, 2000, s 10-11). In the revised curriculum of 1980, the school’s fostering role was re-emphasised, drawing on the work of the so-called “Norm Group” (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1979⁹). At the same time, values remained targeted out “in the world” rather than in Sweden, and empathy and solidarity were viewed as a global rather than local concern. A shift to the local came in the mid 1990s with the changed perception of “having big enough problems here” (Hedin, 2000:96). Thus, as already mentioned, the 1994 curriculum was the first Swedish education policy document to overtly acknowledge Sweden as multicultural, with tolerance emphasised over solidarity (Hedin, 2000).

The value-base of schools has been a continuing concern. After World War II, for example, the main aim of schooling was to develop free individuals, and democracy emerged as a metaphor for morality. Later, during the 1960s, the values emphasis changed with students

⁹ Gruppens fullständiga namn var ”Arbetsgruppen kring normbildning och normöverföring i skolan” och opererade under Utbildningsdepartementet, 1979.

now placed at the centre, and greater importance attributed to the relationship between the individual and the state. Values during the 1980s concentrated on plurality with schools' fostering role seen as crucial, while in the 1990s, greater efforts were made to promote understanding and empathy for a national multicultural identity. Values most recently have been expressed in terms of national solidarity, with emphasis placed on tolerance towards foreigners as well as action against racism. Thus *both* multiculturalism and internationalisation are significant discourses in recent policy documents, with students from foreign backgrounds associated with the multicultural discourse, and "Swedish" students, with internationalisation (Gruber, 2001). These different messages, however, make policy difficult to interpret in the classroom as shown in Runfors' (2003) study and Granstedt's research reported in this volume. Eklund (2003) argues that there is a mismatch also between policy intentions, the curriculum (läroplansmål) and school students' perceptions and experiences which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency; for example, by prioritising goals and ensuring equivalent, (economic) resources for each policy goal (Eklund, 2003). Similar mismatches have been noted in other areas of educational policy (Öhrn, 2001).

The multicultural perspective seems to be attractive to teachers and other practitioners, used largely as a means of expressing tolerance and celebrating difference because it seems both positive and outward looking. However, multicultural perspectives have been criticised in two main ways: for liberalism/ relativism in the non-judgemental acceptance of the worth of different groups, whatever ideologies and religious beliefs; and for ignoring the importance of historical and cultural specificity. "Critical" multiculturalism is thus preferred by May as encouraging appreciation and celebration of difference yet also able to recognise ethnic, cultural and other social identities as "differing in salience among individuals and across given historical and social contexts" and "situated in a wider framework of power" (May, 1999: 33). The ideas of critical multiculturalism are closely connected, and in some cases, overlap with ideas contained in the Swedish intercultural perspective (SOU 1983:57) which likewise promotes interaction, understanding and integration among and between different cultures and ethnic groups without glossing over issues such as racism (Feldman, Frese & Yousif, 2002; Lahdenperä, 2001b). However "interculturalism" is also used as an umbrella term; for example, the International Association for Intercultural Education (2005) defines it broadly as including "multi-cultural education, anti-racist education, human rights education, conflict-resolution, multi-lingualism issues, etc."

Parallel to multiculturalism "värdegrund" has received increased attention, for example in recent school documents and for educational policy makers (Lpo 94 och Lpf 98). How can this be understood? A number of explanations are available. For example, the concept might reflect the decision to acknowledge and bridge the divide between different categories of inequity in order to understand better and thus to develop a "joined-up" strategy for encouraging democratic values. Alternatively, it might have been introduced to bring together the specific histories, struggles and cultural frames of various groups that have shaped understandings of ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc. Or värdegrund might be seen as a positive strategy to challenge other terms viewed as excluding, such as "icke-svenskar" (non-Swede) or "invandrare" (immigrant). Or it may be a preferred substitute for outdated (and perhaps inaccurately used) terms such as "invandrarfrågor" (immigrant issues) or "invandrarproblematik" (immigrant problems).

Diversity in terminology

A key factor emerging from this overview is the complex role of language in defining and placing boundaries about what can be said and done educationally. From the scrutiny of

school policy relating to issues of immigration and ethnicity since the 1960s, we can see that the term most commonly used to depict minority children is the “immigrant student” (“invandrarelev”), especially used for children of school age who have come to Sweden from other countries (see also Lahdenperä, 1997). In the 1980s, invandrarelev was still in general use but now applied to children with one or more parents from abroad and having a foreign mother tongue (Lgr 80) (a a), while in the 1990s, its meaning narrowed to those not having Swedish as a first language (Lpo 94) (Mårtensson, 2000). Thus, definitions gradually shifted in the post-war period from emphasis on parental background, to focus on individuals and their language environment (Municio, 1987).

At governmental level, the term “invandrare” (immigrant) likewise has become problematic, and in 2000 it was ruled that anyone born in Sweden should not be termed immigrant, whatever his/her ethnic background. Rather the label should be used only for those who have settled in Sweden from another country (DS 2000:43 s, 9-10). This was because terms such as “invandrare” or “invandrarelev” were no longer seen as neutral; rather, they became associated with exclusion and discrimination, while “svensk elev” (Swedish student) was more associated with the norm (Westin, 1999; Lahdenperä, 1997). The term “invandrarelev” was also seen as universalising, in the sense that it downplays individual characteristics such as first language, nationality, religion, length of residence in Sweden etc. Thus, the focus on background rather than individual characteristics was seen to convey the erroneous impression of “immigrants” as a homogeneous rather than heterogeneous group (Lahdenperä, 1997; Parszyk, 1999).

Despite the official position on terminology, however, “immigrant student” has remained widely in use in research, government reports and teacher discourse until the present time, although other terms have also emerged such as “student with Swedish as a second language” (Hultmo, 1998), “student with an immigrant background” (Elmeroth, 1997), “minority student” (Parszyk, 1999), “Turkish/Somali (etc.) child”, “minority child” and “immigrant child” (Boman & Rodell Olgac, 1999; Berkta, 1999; Rodell Olgac, 2001). Also used in second-language teaching are adjectives such as “bilingual” and “multilingual” to refer to minority students in the Swedish school system often studying in two or more languages simultaneously and therefore developing, of necessity, multilingual competency (Johansson, 2000; Holmegaard, 1999).

ii. Second-Language Teaching

As we have seen, immigrants’ acquisition of competence in Swedish has been a consistent policy priority. While in the 1960s, this was conceived of as a form of special education where the importance of Swedish as a foreign language¹⁰ and mother tongue, was recognised in the school syllabus, by the 1970s, discussion turned to exploring the best educational environment for bilingual students. One option was the so-called mother-tongue class, involving students initially studying their home language and later, Swedish as a second language; and was possible only where enough students share the same mother tongue. Another option was the so-called compound class (sammansatt) where half the students have Swedish as their mother tongue and the other half, another first language. Here, both groups receive some tuition in Swedish from the start, though those students with another first language also receive tuition in that. The aim is that eventually the whole group will be taught only in Swedish (Sjödoff, 1989; Hyltenstam & Tuomela, 1996).

¹⁰ It later became known as “Swedish as a Second Language”.

This greater interest in language and relatively less emphasis on understanding issues of diversity, ethnicity, racism and xenophobia in school (Paulston, 1983; Tallberg Broman, Rubinstein Reich & Hägerström, 2003) are due, it is argued, to the perceived need to generate knowledge that is useful to classroom teachers as well as helping them to work with Swedish as a second language, practically and theoretically (Tingbjörn, 1992; Hammarberg, 1992). A further point is that language has been promoted as a key source of identity and recognition among Swedish national minorities themselves, particularly as a means of marking ethnic borders and determining group membership (Wingstedt, 1998). Language has thus been particularly prioritised in formation of research questions and studies, as well as aiding teachers in their task of supporting minority students in the classroom and in examinations.

However different language topics have attracted interest in different periods. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, research on Swedish as a second language included a range of linguistic topics such as learner language, learning processes, methods of teaching, and contrastive grammar¹¹, with most interest in bilingual children with a Finnish-speaking background (Tingbjörn & Andersson, 1981; Eriksson & Fägerlind, 1987; Eriksson, 1989; Sjödooff, 1989). By the 1990s, attention had turned to pedagogies for teaching and learning a second language. For example, Holmegaard (1999) explored overall language acquisition and Lindberg (1995) focused on classroom activities which enable extension of language competence (Lindberg, 1995). Other studies focused on the perspective of the learner, and factors that influence the learner's Swedish language competence (Löfgren, 1991; Tuomela, 1993; Sundman, 1995). For example, Tuomela's (1993) study suggests that competence in Swedish is primarily affected by the social situation of the learner; thus, where students have few or no contacts with Swedish-speakers, their possibilities for development beyond the earliest stages of Swedish language competence, are much reduced.

From the late 1990s, studies also explored the influence of other educational and social factors, e.g. immersion in the form of a "book flood program"¹², adoption of guessing as a strategy when deciphering text (Axelsson, 2000; Holmegaard, 1997). Meanwhile, Fredriksson & Taube (2001) found that students' ability to read is influenced by a "complicated weave" of social, cultural and language factors, and Nauclér (2000), that students from different ethnic backgrounds choose different reading strategies. In a comparison of Turkish and Swedish children Nauclér (2000) shows that when reading children's books at a very young age with their parents the Turkish children learn how a story is constructed ("berättargrammatik") while the Swedish children learn a construction of a text discussion typical for Swedish schools. (*det typiska skolsamtalet om texters innehåll*)

Also highlighted has been the negative attitude towards learning Swedish held by many second-language learners. Such negativity arises, according to Johansson (2000), because teachers tend to emphasise conformity to Swedish cultural norms, with the outcome that minority students rarely feel that their background is acknowledged. In other words, minority students' unenthusiastic attitude towards the Swedish language may be interpreted as a form of silent protest against the majority group whose culture mirrors that of the school (Nordenstam & Wallin, 2002). Runfors' (1996) study shows that when teachers of students

¹¹ "Contrastive grammar" involves comparison of two languages concerning categories which might cause problems, for example Turkish-speaking children wishing to learn Swedish.

¹² The book flood programme is a means of improving students' capacity to read, with a main emphasis on a generous supply of books and reading materials.

from ethnically diverse backgrounds concentrate on language and language learning, it might be a way for them to organise differences. For example, if they define differences between students of different cultures as a difference of language, it becomes easier to handle the work situation in an ethnically diverse school. The subject of Swedish as a second language then becomes a way of finding a common denominator. Other studies suggest that tuition in Swedish as a second language alone, is insufficient; a wider linguistic understanding is important and necessary for minority students to succeed educationally (Holmegaard, 2000; Bergman & Sjöqvist, 2000).

iii. Raising achievement, especially for minority students

This is a relatively well documented and researched area, with a number of studies carried out employing existing data sets and large scale surveys of school students, in order to establish achievement patterns in schools and the most influential factors on them. These studies were initially carried out to chart trends which began to emerge from the 1980s onwards, concerning the relative failure of minority and “immigrant” students in school examinations (Petersen, 1983; Hedberg-Granath, 1987; Jönsson, 1988; Löfgren, 1991, 1993; Fredriksson & Taube, 2001). Factors seen as influential include students’ first language, parental background, competency in language, and home environment. Also evident has been the influence of mother-tongue tuition on student achievement, and the form of class grouping (mother-tongue or compound) used. Impact factors on student failure have mostly focused on students and their parents rather than on schools, teachers, teaching methods used or teacher training. Thus, these studies highlight knowledge of Swedish as the single, most important determinant for students’ school success.

Other studies concerning the examination patterns of minority students have drawn on a more diverse range of research methods and have taken a broader perspective in attempting to explain student failure (Parszyk, 1999; Alm, 2000). While in/competence in Swedish is acknowledged as important, pedagogical and social circumstances are also highlighted such as the attitudes of school staff and students. Parszyk (1999), for example, focuses on a variety of factors, such as students’ background, treatment in the school system, language development as a whole, and personal perspectives, to show that where the school emphasises cultural differences, a distance is created between school and minority students in which wider problems such as discriminatory and racist treatment, go unrecognized (a a) (see also Runfors, 1996 above).

iv. Impact of Increased Diversity on Swedish Classrooms

One response to the increased diversity and hybridity of Swedish classrooms has been to investigate ways of supporting schools’ and teachers’ possibilities for changing and extending their pedagogies. For example, it has been found that schools benefit if staff have a better understanding of students’ and parental cultural backgrounds, and of child-rearing approaches in other countries and (Berkta, 1999; Rodell Olgac, 2001), which in turn helps in their attempts to contact and work with parents. At present, contact with minority parents is generally instigated only when their children are in trouble (Eckerbrant Cantillo, 1985; Berkta, 1999).

While government steering documents stipulate that cultural diversity should be seen as a resource, it is generally left to classroom teachers to determine what this might mean in practice (Runfors, 2003). One source frequently under-used by schools is the specialised

knowledge and experience of minority students themselves (and mother-tongue teachers) (Nyström, 1993; Konstantinides, 1994, 1995; Johansson, 2000). Thus, as we have already seen, schools rarely show an interest in experiences or cultural backgrounds of minority students; rather, such backgrounds are seen solely as problematic in terms of school progression (Runfors, 1996, 2003).

The role of the teacher has clearly changed to accommodate the increased diversity of Swedish schools in terms, for example, of the need for greater awareness of cultural and ethnic difference, more varied teaching strategies, a more individual focus, greater knowledge of minority backgrounds and expectations and so on (Nyström, 1993; Berkman, 1999; Boman & Rodell Olgac, 1999; Källström, 1999; Lahdenperä, 2001b; Rodell Olgac, 2001). However, most Swedish school teachers have little or no knowledge about, or training for, this new role or the different expectations of them (Källström, 1999). For example, as we have already seen, many teachers lack knowledge about their students' backgrounds and the students rarely meet any interest in their culture of origin (Parszyk, 1999; Nordenstam & Wallin, 2002). Among teachers in Swedish schools, there is also a cultural homogeneity which makes it difficult for them to realize the position of power they are in, in relation to the ethnically diverse classroom (Rodell Olgac 2001; Parszyk, 2002). One teacher strategy is to emphasise conformity to the Swedish norm and downplay cultural difference, as a way of not singling out minority students for particular attention (Eckerbrant Cantillo, 1985; Runfors, 1996; Parszyk, 2002). Thus, in order to be seen as neutral and fair to all students, teachers opt for the strategy of similar and equal treatment. However, instead of levelling difference, this strategy often leads to minority students becoming "invisible" rather than "ordinary" (Boman & Rodell Olgac, 1999). Taylor (1994) refers to this stance as the "difference-blind" position; in other words, while the attempt is not to discriminate, it results in the continued dominance of the majority culture and interests while other value-systems and perspectives are ignored.

The recruitment of teachers from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds has been viewed a possible solution to the "difference-blind" position of Swedish teachers. However, as in other European countries such as the UK (Pole, 2001; Shah, 2002; National Union of Teachers, 2003), it has proved difficult to recruit (or promote) such teachers. Reasons range from clear discrimination (e.g. at interview), to emphasis on perceived poor linguistic proficiency in Swedish over broader pedagogical skills (including expertise in a second language) (Wahlberg, 1999; Boyd, 2000).

v. Experiences of racism

Parallel to increased diversity in Swedish schools are also reports on experiences of racism and negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities. During 1990 and 2000, several surveys appeared which reported how young people from a foreign background experience racism and how they are more often (than ethnic Swedes) discriminated by peers and teachers; see, for example, Lange et al 1997; Lange & Hedlund, 1998; Skolverket, 2002; Integrationsverket, 2002a; 2002b; Rädde Barnen 2002a, 2002b; ECRI, 2003; Integrationsverket, 2003; Motsieloa, 2003; Osbeck, Holm & Wernersson, 2003; BRÅ, 2004; Rydgren et al. 2004). Thus, a National Agency for Education report stated that "bullying and racism are still part of the dark side of Swedish educational system" (Skolverket 2000, s 124) which was again confirmed in a more recent report (Skolverket, 2004a) which showed that a quarter of students and a fifth of teachers believe that racism exists in school.

During the 1980s and 1990s patterns of immigration changed as “new” (non-Nordic) immigrants came to Sweden, mainly from Eastern Europe and countries outside Europe, many of whom were racialised as non-white. One consequence of the changed pattern of immigration was the emergence of a number of overtly racist groups which opposed the entry of the “new” Swedes. As a consequence, racism became a national issue for the first time in the post-war period (Lange, Lööw, Bruchfeld and Hedlund, 1997)¹³. Yet, there was little concerted action on how to fight racism, and no systematic distribution of information and research related to racism, despite repeated requests for guidance, advice and support from municipalities, schools and trade unions. This resulted in a general lack of knowledge about the nature of racism, how it can be characterised, or what motivates perpetrators (Integrationsverket, 2001). Thus, “common-sense” assumptions prevail, shown in a survey where 48 per cent respondents claimed to believe in the existence of distinctive human races, each differentiated by skin colour, culture and religion, personality, looks, temperament and treatment of women (Integrationsverket, 2000). Furthermore, a third of Swedes admit that they would opt to vote for a xenophobic party, if given the chance (Integrationsverket, 2002), though this falls to less than five per cent for school students (Swedish National Agency of School, 2002). “Conscious” racism is much in evidence; for example, 11 per cent of young people think “rasblandning” (racial integration) is against the laws of nature, 12 per cent, that Jews have too much influence in the world today, and 29 per cent, that there is too much emphasis in Sweden on the evils of Nazism and the Holocaust. More disturbingly, over a third (34 per cent) agrees or partly agrees with the statement that non-European immigrants should return home (Lange et al, 1997).

For many young people, racist behaviour against them is an everyday experience. For example, almost half the respondents in a survey of 305 schools indicated that they believe racism is a regular feature of school and classroom life (Save the Children Sweden, 2002a), and a collection of narratives similarly recounts a range of incidents involving racism, discrimination and injustice in Swedish schools (Save the Children Sweden 2002b). Likewise, many incidents have been reported, of abusive language from teachers, and discrimination against minority students, for example, by being judged and assessed differently or having fewer opportunities to talk to adults (Swedish National Agency for Schools, 2002). Minority students also claim an inability to “hit back” or “put their foot down” without fear of reprisals. Further, 20 per cent of minority students give their background as the main reason for discrimination, compared to only 2.7 per cent of “Swedish” students (Skolverket, 2002).

Studies have also focused on within-school attitudes to, and experiences of, racism. For example, Lange & Hedlund, (1998) show that while teachers seem more positive towards Sweden as a multicultural society compared to the rest of the population¹⁴, they are likely to report feeling more unsafe in schools with higher numbers of immigrant children and a significant proportion express negative attitudes towards immigrants (Lange & Hedlund, 1998). Meanwhile, young people’s experience of school racism tends to be covert rather than overt, hidden in everyday attitudes and behaviours inside and outside the school gate (Motsieloa, 2003; Hällgren, 2005a). For example, teachers are reported as using the word “neger”¹⁵ repeatedly and non-reflectively, while minority students report receiving continual

¹³ In addition several small, extreme, right-wing political parties came into existence from the mid-1980 onwards, such as: Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD), The Sjöbo Party (Sjöbopartiet), Progressive Party (Framstegspartiet), and New Democracy (Ny Demokrati). See also; Lindström (2002)

¹⁴ 5 494 lärare utfrågades i grund- och gymnasieskolor runtom i Sverige

¹⁵ ‘Neger’ is a derogatory term in Swedish meaning ‘a Black person’, similar though not identical to the English word ‘nigger’. Sawyer (2002) argues that Sweden was part of the slave trade and that the presence of the term

and negative comments about their appearance or skin colour (Motsieloa, 2003). They also feel discriminated against, by the forms of teaching and organisation used in the school. Thus, despite many teachers' claims that racism should *not* be a feature of Swedish schools, it persists in the form of "invisible racism", from the minority students' perspective at least (Parszyk, 1999: 255).

vi. Strategies for challenging racism in schools

Policy documents have recently placed emphasis on schools as important actors in combating racism and xenophobia¹⁶, as we have seen. Nevertheless, "bullying, racism and violence remain a dark side of the Swedish school system", and criticism has been made of the insufficient guidance for teachers on how to challenge racism and discrimination (Skolverket, 2000:124). Thus, only a quarter of teachers express confidence that they have enough knowledge to work with different cultural groups (Skolverket 1998; 2000) while Swedish schools have "few or passive roles in the process of creating understanding, talking about and acting towards refugees, immigration, racism and antiracism" (Lindström, 2002: 184).

While there has been relatively little research focusing on teachers' strategies against racism (Norberg, 1999), this does not mean that no such work is going on in Swedish schools. Rather, what happens is largely dependent on individual teachers' priorities and skills. Yet, a number of projects have attracted attention over the last decade or so, at international, national and local levels which have contributed to a growing information-base and deeper understanding about how to address ethnic diversity and anti/racism in the classroom. A selection of these is outlined briefly below together with evaluations, where available:

a) A real Swede does not shout "svartskalle" [blackie] (1980), a project based in Stockholm, which took students' experiences and emotions as a starting point for raising the status of "immigrant students".

Evaluation

A shift was identified in attitudes among students and teachers, although it was difficult to determine if this was due to the project or to external factors (Johnson & Lahdenperä, 1982).

b) Tillsammans kan vi (1987-90), a project carried out in a Malmö compulsory school, which involved a series of lessons linked to students' attitudes towards issues of immigration.

Evaluation

The organisation of the school was viewed as a problem since "immigrant" and Swedish children were taught in separate classes; also, the difficulty for schools of changing wider xenophobic attitudes was also noted. Such a project, it was argued, always runs the risk of being seen as too "preaching" or "politically correct", which may strengthen rather than weaken negative attitudes towards immigrants (Jönsson, 1990).

'neger' in the Swedish language provides evidence that racist colonial meanings were/are in circulation in Sweden.

¹⁶ For example, *Nationell handlingsplan mot rasism, främlingsfientlighet, homofobi och diskriminering* Näringsdepartementet 2001, (Roth 1998) (SOU 1998:99) Samordningskommittén för Europaåret mot rasism, reports from The National Agency of Schools and the Swedish Immigration Board. *Regeringens proposition om riktlinjer för invandrar- och minoritetspolitiken m.m.* argues that school is a key arena, described as 'the base for future mutual tolerance and understanding' (Prop. 1975:26,s 16).

c) Strategier mot rasism och främlingsfientlighet (1995), was developed in the form of a *guidance document* aimed at decision makers, teachers and youth leaders and was part of a collaboration between the Swedish Immigration Board, the National Agency for Schools, the Committee of Youth, and Counsellor for Cultural Affairs.

Recommendation/Evaluation

“Intercultural education” is recommended as a strategy, though Nordmark (1995) argues that intercultural education is not a single issue or topic but rather an attitude that should embrace all activities in school. He also argues that schools should not have the sole responsibility for intercultural or antiracist work.

d) FOLIS (1997), a university-based project (Göteborg) involving collaboration between teachers and researchers, with the aims of intercultural development and the promotion of equality. Outcomes included a teaching guide and reference material (developed by the National Agency for Schools, 1995) which depicted “global and intercultural” issues in education as a collection of ideas from an intercultural perspective, for use by teachers (Skolverket, 1995).

Evaluation

The materials were judged as “well thought-out”, offering a comprehensive overview which clarified concepts and contributed to a common frame of reference for dealing with intercultural issues in the classroom (Andersson och Refinetti 2001:16).

e) Hur är läget? (1997), a project which produced a “toolbox” of study material developed by the National Co-ordination Committee against Racism (SOU 1998:99)¹⁷. It was launched by means of a high profile publicity campaign and distributed to all compulsory schools, upper secondary schools, local education authorities and student councils in Sweden. The intention was to initiate long-term work against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and bullying in schools.

Evaluation

4,000 evaluation questionnaires were sent out to school leaders, of whom only 20 per cent responded - leading to doubts about the extent to which the toolbox was actually used (Norberg, 1999). Although no general conclusions could be drawn due to the low response rate, over half of respondents reported that they had used the material, and the majority described the material as good, important, engaging, and generating fruitful discussion. However, only 14 respondents reported that students were engaged in the discussions (Norberg, 1999). Some claimed that they did not need to work with racism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism in their own schools, since there are no perceived racist tendencies, “our students are very Swedish”, “other things have higher priority” or “the subject is already on the school agenda” (Norberg, 1999:56). Prominence was given in the evaluation to the importance of not just seeing “multicultural” education as an emergency or “fire-police action”; but rather as a structural feature of schools and teacher education (Norberg, 1999:64).

f) Pow-Wow (1997), a second project initiated by the National Coordination Committee against Racism, in which racism and xenophobia were addressed through school student forums, with the aim of creating a flexible action plan which could be adapted to the circumstances of individual schools.

Evaluation

¹⁷ Av EU's ministerråd proklamerades 1997 som ”Europaåret mot rasism”. Avsikten var att alla projekt skulle agera mot rasism, i Sverige tillsatte man den nationella samordningskommittén mot rasism, som skulle arbeta i enlighet med de direktiv som fastslagits i EU. Arbetet fokuserade fem områden, däribland skola och utbildning.

Drawing on the experiences of the project, it was argued that important factors in the work against racism include: student influence as a confirmation of democracy, support for students involved in anti-racist work, involvement of as many people as possible in creating action plans, and exchanging experiences between schools (1998:99, s 44). Norberg (1999) judges this approach as “worth passing on to other teachers in school” due to the encouragement of students to start from their own perspectives and experiences (a.a s 58).

g) The youth ambassadors project (2001-3), a project aimed at supporting young people’s work against racism and xenophobia. It also aspired to educate 100 *youth ambassadors*.
Evaluation

The evaluation asserts that information, knowledge and long term thinking was particularly important for the project. Factors of success were described as the same for local and national initiatives: knowledge and a long term perspective (“egentligen de samma för lokala projekt som för statliga initiativ; kunskap och långsiktighet utgör grunden”) (Arvsfondsdelegationen, 2004:98).

h) Swedkid (2001-4), an antiracist website which aimed at introducing school students of 10 years and upwards to issues and debates around multiculturalism and antiracism. Based at Umeå University, the project was part of the EU-funded Eurokid project (see website: www.eurokid.org), which established websites in different countries which could be used by young people in and out of school to learn more about the ethnically diverse society of which they are a part. The content of *Swedkid* (see website: www.swedkid.nu) draws on interviews with young people from minority and majority backgrounds carried out in 2001 (Hällgren, 2005a).

Evaluation

The main strength of the project was judged as that it provides attractive materials for use in schools and at home in which issues of racism and multiculturalism may be addressed in a non-threatening way. A disadvantage is that it is difficult to find teachers with the twin commitment necessary for engagement with the website; first, of incorporating new technology into their ordinary pedagogical practice, and second, of addressing issues of ethnicity and anti/racism in their classroom practice and with their students (Hällgren, 2005b).

i) Teacher Strategies in the Multicultural School (2002-6), an ongoing collaboration between Umeå municipality, Umeå University and the National Agency for Education which uses action research to involve teachers in working on issues of ethnicity and racism in their classrooms. The researcher and teachers work together to identify and problematise their experiences of the project, in order to develop new and better strategies to support other teachers and students in addressing multicultural and antiracist issues.

Evaluation

While the project is not yet completed, action research (aktionsforskning) has been shown to be a productive approach for helping teachers with “difficult” issues, and the municipality and university together have initiated another such study on a “multicultural” topic, due to begin in the near future

j) The Living History Forum¹⁸ (2003 and ongoing), initiated by the Prime Minister as an information campaign on the Holocaust, and its implications in Sweden. Building on positive responses from the campaign this forum was suggested to be founded as an accompaniment to ‘many other initiatives and inquiries... against racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Ziganism, xenophobia and antidemocratic movements to strengthen the democracy’ (SOU 2001:5, s 33). Using the Holocaust as a starting point, the overall aim is to encourage and strengthen awareness of values, equality and rights, and to support discussions and reflections about democracy, tolerance and human rights. School, teachers and students are viewed as important target groups for this body and its activities (SOU 2001:5).

In summary, what we see is an uneven picture of experiences of, and strategies against, racism and discrimination in Swedish educational settings. There is evidence generally of high ambitions and good intentions among policy-makers and teachers in terms of recognising the inequalities of schooling and counteracting racism in schools, particularly from the late 1990s onwards when the dangers of racism and discrimination in schools were increasingly recognised. On the other hand, research studies and government reports provide a continuing picture of hostility, difficulty, denial and insecurity among many educators in relation to these questions. We have noted various recent projects and strategies which have aimed at providing students (and teachers, teacher educators) with information about issues surrounding immigration, ethnicity and racism, and which have also to some extent addressed attitudes and feelings of both perpetrators and victims of racist behaviour. From the beginning of 1990s, there are examples of state initiated projects where the work against racism is seen as part of the intercultural perspective¹⁹. By the end of the 1990s, projects began to target *all* schools, with the aim of working against racism on a long term basis. Most recently, projects and strategies may be characterised as aiming to further develop and concretise antiracist action at the same time as having more awareness of the complexity (i.e. intersectionality) that surrounds the whole area.

Evaluations of the various projects (as above), indicate difficulties with applying and integrating antiracist strategies at the everyday level of schools, and thus highlight the importance of having an informed, knowledgeable and committed teacher workforce. Short term initiatives seem to have had little or no impact compared with longer-term actions, or comprehensive and systematic data-gathering and dissemination of experiences and ideas, although even the more ambitious projects such as those sponsored by the National Coordination Committee against Racism, have had to rely to some extent on the goodwill and commitment of individual teachers and schools. There is a need for research directed at supporting teachers and students as well as research and development that addresses systematic professional development.

¹⁸ Forum för levande historia; <http://www.levandehistoria.org/>) Informationssatsningen initierades av Göran Persson 1997, som lovade ”/.../ att samtliga hem där det fanns barn i skolåldern skulle erbjudas ’information om vad som hände under andra världskriget och om den människosyn som låg bakom förintelsen av judarna.’” (SOU 2001:5 s 33). Insatser riktade till skolan var ett av projektets fyra övergripande mål.

¹⁹ In the Swedish context Intercultural Education is implied to be a process facilitating students from different cultural, ethnical backgrounds to interact with each other, share experiences and discussions in a multicultural classroom where the Swedish culture is not excluded, neither used as a norm. The perspective is described to encourage recognition of the individual as well as the cultural (see for example Lahdenperä, 2001, 1995). The intercultural perspective is, however, generally vague when it comes to explain the role of the teacher.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In reflecting on what might be drawn from this overview, language constitutes one key element in discriminatory practices in education. First, we can see how the language which frames education policy and practice reflects and reproduces the ideologies at work. This is exemplified in the various terms used to describe minority young people and their positioning in the school system. Second, the predominant emphasis has been on issues of language, which displace more complex issues surrounding racism and discrimination. The emphasis on language has constituted a barrier to further action, in the sense that the (language) barrier is easy to put up, difficult to get past, and provides a means by which educators and researchers can maintain their distance from the “r” word (racism) (Wingstedt, 1998). Third, everyday language needs to be problematised in order to reflect on the use of terms such as “immigrant students”.

Another aspect of discrimination emerging from the survey is the dichotomy of “us” and “them” evident in educational policies and steering documents, in focus of research, and in the reported individual experiences of racism and discrimination as part of everyday life in Swedish schools. Since this dichotomy tends to be the starting point taken within this field there is an absence of an overall inclusive perspective. This results in a lack of connection between “us” and “them”, thereby adding to discriminatory practices. The focus is on “them” as a category in special needs or as another similar problem. At the same time, the perspective is “ours” in, for example, in labelling the “other” which shapes research approaches and policy. In avoiding recognition of “our” part, position and responsibility, “our” hegemonic worldview is maintained and continues to permeate educational practices.

We further suggest that education policies which frame ethnic diversity in educational settings as a question of language and as one of “values”, can be understood as moments where racism and discrimination have not only been avoided but also as structural instances where normative, white, understandings of society and power are legitimated and made hegemonic. As in other countries (Essed, 1991; Modood, 1997), racism should be seen as an endemic (or latent - see Macmaster, 2001) feature in Swedish life which needs nevertheless to be challenged and reduced. Challenges to racism and xenophobia thus have necessarily to come from public discussion about the benefits that being antiracist can offer to schools, communities and Sweden as a whole, as well as in terms of social justice or democracy. Theoretical concepts such as “race” as a social rather than biological construction or “whiteness as property” are also important to the knowledge-base of teachers as well as to the public as a whole; likewise the stories and narratives of minorities and immigrants about their experiences in Sweden. The role of the individual as well as that of the state or municipality also needs to be acknowledged in minimising the effects of every-day racism.

Thus, we would like to suggest Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a useful theoretical perspective. While this theory originated in the USA, we believe that the perspectives this theoretical approach to education has to offer are applicable in the Swedish context, and that CRT might encourage a better understanding of problems and possibilities in Swedish education and educational research. CRT came into the field of education in the 1990s and has the overall two-fold aim of exploring and seeking to transform the relation between “race”, racism, and power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Particularly relevant for schooling and education generally are CRT’s emphasis on:

Counter story-telling which is used to challenge hegemonic and privileged discourses by allowing a voice for marginalized groups hitherto absent, and by giving space to stories which offer different perspectives on the world. (DeCuir & Dixson 2004; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995); for example, by inviting the voice the “other” i.e. the minority student and their parents in everyday school practice as well as in research. Furthermore, the use of counter-stories could be one way of exposing discriminatory practices and how they are produced in schools and as such offer a different overall perspective in research, policy and practice. The acknowledgement within CRT of “*race*” as *socially constructed* offers a counter-argument to the scientisation of race which continues today. Racialisation here is seen as the outcome of both social desires and power relations (Delgado & Stefancic 2001:7). This enables us to understand why “race” matters. In acknowledgement of the permeation of racism where racism is seen as constitutive of and produced through, social structures and discourses including education (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), CRT offers an understanding that racism is part of social structures in everyday life in Swedish schools. The perception of *whiteness as property* is another tenet within CRT. “Property” here is viewed as a constructed privilege within education which is manifested in many ways - “through curricula, school choice, and even student behavior that sets standard for ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ actions” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005:24). The notion of whiteness as property helps illuminate that prevailing norms are constructed and can consequently be re-constructed.

Anti-racist projects referred to in this overview are examples of strategies aimed at eliminating discrimination. Within these good intentions of the Swedish state to seek actively to combat racism in education, schools are seen as key actors in promoting integration. However, parallel to these good intentions, racism and xenophobia continue to flourish in schools, uncertainties remain about how to work practically with intercultural and antiracist issues in schools, and teachers feel inadequately prepared for their increasingly ethnically diverse classrooms.

We have also seen how research on minority students’ linguistic needs dominates the educational agenda, with the main focus on the ‘immigrant’ student (“*invandrarelev*”). There is also tendency for socio-political issues to be transferred to the language discourse; it seems to be easier to focus on difficulties in language skills than the complexity surrounding power, integration and discrimination in classroom and society. Recently, however, perspectives have broadened to include more emphasis on teacher and student perceptions of what is going on in the ordinary classroom. Institutional and individual racism has been shown to be reality in Sweden; yet teachers and students are left very much on their own as to how they should deal with often, complex situations. Sensitive issues about racism, identity and culture among students seem to be difficult for teachers and policy makers to respond to; even though these issues provide the foundation for students’ level of success in school. Some themes reappear time after time, for example, on the desirability of incorporating into schools, the perspectives and experiences of minority parents and students: however, this seems extraordinarily difficult to achieve. One reason is that knowledge about, and action on, intercultural and antiracist issues in Swedish schools today remains highly dependent on the commitment of individual teachers, and their skills and priorities.

The intercultural perspective as part of everyday school practice was officially introduced more than twenty years ago, and the shift from applying theory to practice in relation to this perspective is still going on. However as long as teachers’ practice and school organisation remain unproblematised, seen rather as an automatic development of policy-making, long-

term change will be difficult to achieve. Additionally, there are too few minority teachers in Swedish schools, and there is an urgent need to develop a more inclusive curriculum (and text books) and to change notions of what it means to be a Swedish citizen.

Finally, while many of the attitudes towards, and practices concerning, minority and immigrant students in education are unique to Sweden, due to its specific educational history and structure, it is also necessary for Swedish educators to gain a sense of what has been achieved in other countries (Gill, Mayor & Blair, 1991 [UK]; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2004 [Canada]; Anderson, Attwood & Howard, 2004 [USA]). Thus, the goal is not to identify a one-size-fits-all, single solution to racism and discrimination in Swedish schools, but rather to develop a range of individual and general competences and nuanced strategies for existing and future teachers and other school workers, which can then be used in a variety of different educational and practice situations.

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