

## English summaries

**Tom Hagström, 2007: Work-life pedagogy and boundaryless work. A transactional approach/ Arbetslivspedagogik och det gränslösa arbetet. En transaktionell ansats/ *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 12, No 4, pp 257–280. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788**

Structural changes during the transition to post-industrial society are associated with dissolving boundaries of work terms such as time regulation, place allocation and organisational structures, herein referred to as boundaryless work. Further, educational research seems to have moved beyond formal education, to a spectrum of issues concerning learning and competence development and including contextual conditions. This alteration calls for theoretical consideration of both the interactionist and transformative character of learning and competence.

This article aims to describe the use of a transactional approach to elucidate people's competence to act and interact within boundaryless work settings. On the basis of action, socialisation and adult developmental theory and research, four broad competencies are of interest: (i) Cognitive competence, being instrumental, goal-oriented action in terms of sequence and logical thinking on different abstraction levels; (ii) Communicative competence, being communication and social interaction action; (iii) Collective competence, being social-societal action to relate to and integrate within a collective context of norms, values and rules as well as in the production and reproduction of goods and services; and (iv) Existential competence, being meaning making action in for example, a life-course perspective that highlights existential issues and challenges.

Each of these four refer to an individual's capabilities and the environmental conditions as well as the person's underlying competence to interact with the external world. Results from studies of independent consultants, free-mover civil servants, freelance journalists and so forth, indicate that the more boundaryless the work context, the higher the demand for collective and existential competence. Advantages from individual autonomy (essentially cognitive and existential competence) appeared as relevant as disadvantages from communication and collective integration (essentially communicative and collective competence).

Generally boundaryless work demands are discussed using the four dimensions of action competence. Cognitive competence demands are associated with a lack of time or »space» for reflection, and with satisfying possibilities

to work autonomously. Enabling the tying together of short and long phase learning, a kind of »meta-learning« and relating to cognitive schemata and differing discerning capabilities; sorting and applying information out of the information stream to create knowledge. Communicative competence demands relate to active communication, as well as initiating and maintaining social contacts (e.g. social networks). These seem to provide shared experiences and community spirit, but also threaten admission and present a risk of exclusion from liberation for unclear reasons.

Boundaryless work settings seem to underline a need for trust and psychological contracts regulating employee-employer relations. Collective competence demands relate to insufficient integration into a collective-societal structure seemingly leaving the person isolated. Finally, existential competence demands relate to a self-perception as a continuously learning individual from one situation and point in time to another, often expressed nowadays in the demand for lifelong learning, for example. This competence seems to concern a »self-governing« (Hanson 2004) metacognitive competence bringing to the fore existential problems and challenges.

Findings indicate that mastering boundaryless work settings builds on well-developed cognitive and communicative competence as well as integrating collective and existential action competencies on a metacognitive level. Possibly providing a competence to meet and confront other frames of reference that may conflict with and challenge deeply held ideas and beliefs that constitute a person's identity.

The transactional approach relates to positive mental health and distinguishes between the automatisisation and the transformation of competence. Automatisisation can be considered schematically as an »upward-down« process from more to less intellectual consciously regulated levels of action. Comparatively, the transformation process is »down-upward«, from less to more complex action. For positive learning spirals to be initiated and maintained, both processes appear to be necessary. Metacognitive competence is assumed to be expressed as integrated cognitive, emotional, value and moral based conscious thinking and acting, internalised to a broad societal and long-term perspective.

These processes can be illustrated by the following two problems. In the industrial society era, repetitive work sequences limited reflection possibilities, creating for example, a deskilling process and decreased intellectual flexibility. In post-industrial boundaryless work contexts, the problem is reversed. Intellectual action regulation increases the risks of information overload and complex choice situations, so limiting reflection possibilities.

A necessary but insufficient condition for competence development seems to be that external situations provide possibilities to influence and reflect on one's work condition, taking into account the »intellectual regulation level«. However, for more long-term transformations to occur (e.g. to a metacognitive level) such action possibilities must be perceived as valuable or challenging, perhaps coupled with resolution of internal dissonances concerning social-collective integration and individual existential issues. Such transformations may evolve through critical questioning of the taken for granted

values and norms, praxis and life conditions. This way of reasoning connects the transactional approach with critical traditions within adult education, such as transformative learning theory.

While other work-life pedagogical approaches also tend to stress the action–interaction character of learning, fewer links have been made regarding the transformation of competence. Generally, the transactional approach reflects the concept of »educology», a broad field of learning, socialisation and developmental processes coupling theory and research from disciplines such as education, psychology and sociology.

A certain »inclusiveness» and theoretical breadth is useful to discern rapidly changing and complex phenomena in post-industrial society. The transactional approach is presented as a work in progress rather than as a fully articulated theoretical model. The research process is considered an ongoing process developed neither purely inductively nor purely deductively but rather as an abductive process, requiring exchanges between empirical findings and conceptual considerations. The ambition is, not least, to be able to capture rapidly changing societal phenomena without losing theoretical relevance or being trapped by academic rigidity or paradigmatic antagonism.

**Stefan Lund, 2007: Educational choice and school competition – recent tendencies in upper secondary education/ Valfrihet och konkurrens – Utvecklingstendenser inom gymnasieutbildningen/ *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 12, No 4, pp 281–300. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788**

Competition between upper secondary schools has increased since the reforms of the 1990s brought decentralisation, free schools and freedom of choice. One aim of the reforms is to make it easier for schools to create special profiles and to develop locally adapted educational alternatives (SOU 1996:1; SOU 1997:1; Prop. 1997/98:169). As upper secondary schools acquire the opportunity to specialise and begin to compete with each other, the information given to pupils about available educational paths will be an important factor if the educational system is to function as planned.

Firstly, the dissemination of information will become a question of pupils' equal opportunities to choose. All pupils with pass grades should be able to choose their upper secondary education according to their interests and inclinations. To be able to make well-founded educational choices requires objective information about programme content, the future labour market, eligibility for higher education, etcetera.

Secondly, upper secondary schools must ensure that the information reaches the pupils for strategic reasons. Through effective advertising, the schools can, when necessary, also try to attract pupils and fill their programmes for financial considerations. In certain cases it seems as if the flow of information from

upper secondary schools is geared to aspects that are only loosely connected to the content and form of the education. This can involve, for example, offering the pupils portable computers, driving lessons, opportunities to travel, etcetera (Lund 2006).

The aim of this article is to discuss the development that has taken place as a result of the reforms bringing decentralisation, free schools and freedom of choice since the 1990s. Special interest is devoted to the profile strategies of the upper secondary schools, how they present themselves in their information to pupils and parents. The analysis is carried out in three steps. I begin by painting a picture of the circumstances of a local educational market. As a second step I interpret the different profile and information strategies of upper secondary schools. This interpretation is based on the websites of upper secondary schools, the information and advertising folders distributed to the pupils, and observations of how principals and teachers present their range of education at »Open House» days. The categorisations serve as a foundation for interpretation in the conclusion of the article, where two different programme texts about a municipal upper secondary school are analysed.

### **A local educational market**

At the time the study was conducted, there were seven free schools and three municipal schools in the municipality. In the surrounding municipalities in the county there were at the same time two free schools and eight municipal upper secondary schools. In other words, almost half of the upper secondary schools in the area were located in the municipality studied here. Only two of the surrounding municipalities can offer their pupils more than ten of the total seventeen national programmes. The consequence is that many pupils from the surrounding municipalities apply to schools in the studied municipality. An interesting observation is that almost 70% of the places in the free schools are filled by pupils from outside.

At the same time, the pupils in the municipality itself show a very lukewarm interest in the programmes offered by the free schools. Although the number of free schools is increasing, at the time of the study there were only marginally more pupils from the municipality applying for this educational alternative. The establishment of free schools thus seems to be of minor significance for pupils who are registered in the municipality. The establishment of free schools in the municipality thus seems to be based in large measure on pupils from a wider catchment area (Söderström & Uusitalo 2005 p 19).

### **Upper secondary school's profile categories**

As the second analytic step I discuss the information and profile strategies of the upper secondary schools. The analysis is based on the schools' oral and written information to pupils choosing their upper secondary education. The profile categories are thus not about what happens in the schools in the form of real tuition. Five different profile categories are revealed:

*Labour market orientation:* This profile category is geared towards work outside school. The information emphasises the close contacts of upper secondary

school with the labour market and its trade organisations. The aim is that the pupils will be given knowledge and skills that are currently required by the trades and professions the education concerns.

*Business orientation:* This profile category is geared to work outside school. Preparing pupils for further studies, this education is reinforced by the engagement of representatives of business as mentors for the pupils. Via their upper secondary education the pupils are supposed to establish social contacts and be »socialised» into the environments for which they are educated, so that they will be able to conduct themselves in those social contexts.

*Academical orientation:* This profile category represents an educational ideal in which subjects with a scholarly foundation give the pupils lasting knowledge. The content is closely connected to higher education, pupils' preparations for university education, and an academic canon with knowledge of arts and science subjects.

*Pedagogical orientation:* This profile category proceeds from the idea that the pupils should be able to influence and argue for how their education should be organized, often linked to »micro-democracies» where decision-making channels are short and flexible. In their tuition the pupils should be permitted to argue for and gain a hearing for their opinions.

*Market orientation:* This profile category proceeds from the curriculum, stressing different segments in order to create contentual niches (for example, economics and sport). The upper secondary schools aim at certain groups of pupils, those who are particularly gifted in, say, sport or those who have special ambitions in education. The upper secondary schools try to attract pupils with various offers, computers, driving lessons, travel, etcetera.

### **Objective information versus advertising**

In the concluding analysis I compare two different programme descriptions at the same municipal upper secondary school. The first deals with a specially designed Industrial programme. The programme description is based on a mixture of profile categories, with the market-oriented category setting the tone. The text is in large part about selling a commodity. »The new technology rocks! We are looking for 30 would-be industrial stars. The dream job awaits you. We light the stars!»

The second programme description concerns the Electrical Engineering programme. The text can be regarded as an example of what traditional information about a municipal upper secondary programme often looks like. It is aimed at a collective of adolescents with an interest in technology. The emphasis is on a labour-market-oriented profile category where the pupil's relation to the development of society is the starting point. »Tomorrow's technology is shaped by young people. Boys and girls, you are really needed!»

My interpretation of the two programme texts indicates that there is a struggle in progress about discursive legitimacy within one and the same educational practice. An interesting question for the future is which profile categories will be established and take over the dissemination of information

about the total range of programmes on local educational markets (cf. Fairclough 1995). If the development that I have tried to reveal continues, it seems highly plausible that the market-oriented profile category will expand.

This in turn has the result that the pupils will receive less and less objective information. For the individual pupil this means that information about the significance of different educational choices, as regards their content and their relation to the labour market and higher education, will be combined with advertising campaigns. An already complex choice process will thus be made even more difficult, as pupils in their selection of upper secondary education may need to weigh their study interests against, for example, the prospect of having their driving lessons paid for, of travelling aboard, or having a laptop of their own. These types of economically steered choice processes undoubtedly limit open communication between school and pupil in upper secondary education.

**Allan Svensson, 2007: Upper secondary school in Sweden – not as black as painted?/ Dagens gymnasieskola – bättre än sitt rykte?/ *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 12, No 4, pp 301–323. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788**

The aim of this study may be formulated as: How is dropout in upper secondary school associated with different kinds of factors? The aim is specified in the points below:

- Which differences will be found between those who interrupt and those who continue their studies according to sex, socioeconomic background and grades from compulsory school?
- To what extent are there differences between the two categories in interests, motivation, attitudes and school adjustment?
- Are background and/or personality variables of different importance for students who have chosen different programmes?

The data used are taken from a large longitudinal project – Evaluation through follow-up – including a number of representative samples. One of the samples contains about 9 000 students born in 1987. Most of these students started in upper secondary school in 2003 and finished the school in 2006. More than 90 per cent were admitted to a three years national programme. These students are selected for this study.

To be included among the students who have completed their studies, a leaving certificate must be obtained after three academic years, the stipulated time. Among those who started a theoretically-oriented programme (Natural science, Technology, Social science) about 80 per cent reach this goal, compared to 75 per cent of those at the vocational-oriented programmes. On most of the programmes women were more successful than men. However, on some

programmes this was not the case, namely on the occupationally-oriented programmes dominated by male students (Vehicle, Construction, Electricity).

There are many reasons to the higher number of graduates among female students. Among other things they start in upper secondary school with much better grades from compulsory school. But, why do we find more women interrupting their studies at the technical vocational-oriented programmes? Is it because of the difficulties of being a lonely or almost a lonely woman among a lot of men? We will come back to this question.

Are there any differences among students from separate socioeconomic groups? There is an evident trend. Students from working-class homes do not get their leaving certificates after three years as often as students from upper socioeconomic groups do and this trend is most obvious on the natural science programme. On this programme we also find the largest differences in grades from compulsory school between those who complete and those who do not complete their education. This indicates that knowledge from compulsory school is of great importance. However, it ought to be mentioned that there are many other factors, which are of importance for successful studies in upper secondary school.

Those who interrupt show weaker interest for the programme chosen and this is true for almost all programmes, both for male and female students. They also show less carefully prepared plans for further studies and occupation. Not unexpectedly their experiences of school work are more negative and they express concentration difficulties, too. These difficulties are most often found on the vocational-oriented programmes. Those who interrupt these programmes do often mention that they have not got enough support from their teachers. On the other hand we found no systematic differences in feelings of stress between those who had not completed and those who had. However, for both categories large sex differences exist – the feeling of stress was much more common among female students.

The majority of the students expressed satisfaction with their classmates in upper secondary school. However, those who had not continued were less satisfied. Most dissatisfied were female students on occupationally-oriented programmes dominated by male students. Many of the dropouts among those women also mentioned that they had been the victim of harassment by their classmates. This harassment may be one of the most important reasons for interrupting the programmes. At the end of the article the following questions are exhaustively discussed: Is the frequency of dropouts alarmingly high? Which measures are required to reduce the numbers of dropouts?