

English summaries

Mats Alvesson, 1999: Education is the solution. What is the problem? On education fundamentalism /Utbildning är lösningen. Vad är problemet? Om utbildningsfundamentalism/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 4, No 3, pp 225–243. Stockholm ISSN 1401-6788.

The article is a broad, critical discussion of the notion of the knowledge society and the rapid expansion of education, in particular higher education. It is argued that dominating notions of increased need for knowledge is exaggerated and is grounded in a wish to make the present and the future look bright. Expansion of the school and higher education system is an easy, and for politicians therefore grateful, way to exercise influence and seemingly to solve problems. Education is easily presented as the solution to a wide range of problems, in particular it can be used to reduce unemployment in the short term. Expansion of the education system may, however, also create problems: Increasing number of students may lead to quality problems. If a longer education is seen as the norm, to which the majority of people feel that have to adapt to, also those with limited interest in higher education participate. Quality – the degree of learning and development of intellectual skills – may suffer. If there is a misfit between the increased length of study and a working life that is not changing in a corresponding way, then there will be increased competition among people with the same formal qualifications and a high likelihood that many people will get jobs in which their education have limited relevance or value. This may lead to frustration and low job satisfaction. Another, more subtle and farreaching, consequence is the power effects of the expansion of the school system and the norm of a long education being necessary for contributing to working life and society. A raising of the norm for acceptable level of education means that those not meeting the norm become increasingly caught in what Foucault refers to as disciplinary power. This power catches and forms both the education-oriented and those less so. In school society, there is little space for people to develop and contribute in ways not grounded in sufficiently long and repeated formal education. Those not conforming to the standards are singled out as problems to be 'worked upon' and to be subordinated to processes of normalization.

Simon Wolming, 1999: A fair selection? /Ett rättvist urval?/ Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 4, No 3, pp 245–258. Stockholm ISSN 1401-6788.

In this article the concepts of fairness and justice are discussed in relation to the selection to higher education. Selection to higher education is generally required to be a fair process. For example, research has focused on differences between boys and girls and between social and ethnic groups. Thus, the issue of fairness is central to the selection procedure. Justice and fairness can also be regarded as a question about the distribution of resources in the form of course places.

Different countries have different procedures for admission to higher education. Different selection instruments are used but the significant differences between the countries are the principles for the distribution of the course places. This article describes the selection to higher education in some countries. Theories about distributive justice identify at least three different perspectives that the selection can be based on. This article gives a short presentation of these three perspectives of distribution.

(i) The first perspective is when the selection is based on an egalitarian principle of distribution. This principle implies that the course places should be distributed equally between different subgroups (e.g. males-females, social groups, etc). (ii) The second perspective is the utilitarian principle for distribution. This principle means that the selection process strives to identify those applicants who will contribute to the common good after they have finished their studies. And (iii) the third perspective is the principle of meritocracy. The selection processes are usually connected with this principle. The indicators for merit in this case could be the levels of the applicant's grades or their results on selection tests.

When the Swedish selection to higher education is viewed in the perspective of principles for distribution, several different principles can be identified. The first is that of meritocracy since the main instruments used in the selection process are the applicants' grades and their results on the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (SweSAT).

Other principles for distribution can also be identified in the Swedish selection process. One important aspect of the Swedish educational system has over the years been the emphasis on the leveling between different social groups. Several reforms have been carried through over the years with this purpose. These reforms can be said to be based on the egalitarian principles of distribution, for example the introduction of different quotas depending on the educational background of the applicants or the possibilities to use credits for work experience in the selection.

The utilitarian principle can be connected to the selection, in terms of the subsequent study success of the applicants. One major issue for research on selection has been the predictive ability of the instruments. The focus has generally been on the students' study achievement and not on their contribution to the common good after they have finished their studies.

The mix of distribution principles makes the concepts of justice and fairness problematic. The selection can in one perspective be quite fair to the

applicants, but rather unfair in another perspective. Fairness is one criterion for the quality of the selection, and another criterion is the validity of the selection procedure.

The final part of this article discusses the relation between justice/fairness and validity in the context of selection to higher education. One central question that deals with the validity of the selection procedure is the purpose of the selection. It is quite easy to identify several, and sometimes opposite purposes of the selection procedure. One purpose is for example the leveling of differences between different social groups and another is that the selection procedure shall be an indicator of the quality of the students' ability.

Another issue is the consequences that may be the result of a certain distribution principle. These consequences must be taken into consideration in order to make the selection as valid as possible. Thus, distribution principles are a central question in the perspective of validity. When the selection procedure aims to fulfill different purposes, and when the consequences are contradictory, this leads to a validity problem for the selection process. The article concludes that no selection process can be valid to any higher extent when different principles of distribution are applied.