

## English summaries

**Petter Aasen, 2000: The Swedish Agency of Education as a knowledge based organization and its research strategy 1993–99 /Statens skolverk som kunnskapsorganisasjon: Skolverkets forskningsstrategi 1993–99/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 5, No 2, pp 81–105. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788.**

In the beginning of the 1990s there was a shift in Swedish educational policy and state practice from a rule oriented system and a social engineering model to a goal oriented steering model of education, where greater responsibilities was placed on local municipalities for devising strategies to implement policies and to evaluate strategies. This changed the priorities for research funding. A new research program launched by the new Agency of Education in 1993 claimed to introduce a break with an instrumentalist research rationale and the model of social engineering that had dominated the educational research program within the former National Board of Education. This research was less cognitive, less bolted toward technology and lent more towards the search for successful solutions to apparent problems. This move broke with the previous tendency which was reinforced by the behavioral perspective that was inherent in the dominant psychological tradition of educational research in Sweden.

Principally, the new program built on the assumption that the activities of policy making, educational planning and teaching do not take place within linear and rational processes in which technical solutions are balanced against predefined criteria. Policy making, planning and teaching are predominately characterized by uncertainty. Decisions emerge successively and knowledge, whether of a tacit or scientific type, has a problematizing, contextualizing, and synthesizing function. These common principles for teaching, planning and decision making have consequences for the production of and utilization of the knowledge contributed by research. This is mirrored in the new research program. With reference to utilization of knowledge, the new program stated that this was not a matter of dissemination in a simplistic way, but an issue of arranging encounters between research knowledge and the insights of practitioners. These encounters were, moreover, to the advantage of both parties, since both have to act in a situation of uncertainty.

Traditionally two linear models which aim at explaining the connection between R&D activities and educational practice have dominated. The knowledge-driven model is a classic representation of a linear process; fundamental research leads to applied R&D, which in turn leads to application. The second

is a problem-solving model, where the problem is formulated by the users and steers the process. Here problem definition is followed by the identification of gaps in knowledge and the execution of a research study. A key issue in the formulation of the new Swedish research program was how to organize a coherent educational R&D system within an educational system that was becoming more decentralized. To deal with this new situation, the program introduced a third model; an interactive model introducing a complex pattern of connections between various partners (research, practice and policy). The article describes this new model, analyzes the implementation process and identifies problems and challenges.

Data from a study of the research financed by the new research program from 1993 to 1999 is also presented. In general the research conducted within the program was found to be more oriented towards understanding educational phenomena as framed on social science knowledge. It was more theory than instrument oriented, and it aimed at generating a conceptual base that would be useful to those who were the target groups for the knowledge generated: the teachers, the school leaders, and the decisions makers.

**Urban Dahllöf 2000: Discipline development and interest-groups' needs as basis for support of educational research /Ämnesutveckling och intressent-behov som bas för stöd åt pedagogisk forskning/. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 5, No 2, pp 107–130. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788.**

During the last 30 years Sweden has been running a binary system for support of its educational research. On the one hand, funds have been provided by the National Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences mainly based on internal discipline criteria. On the other hand educational research has also been commissioned by the National Agencies that are responsible for the administration and evaluation of different parts of the education system. Here the two agencies for the school sector and higher education have been the main actors.

In contrast to many other countries, educational research in Sweden has a quite long tradition related to the governmental ad hoc committees. These started already in the 1930s and reached a peak during the 10-year period from 1955, after which the national agencies took over the responsibility for sector-oriented research. As a background to an analysis of the experiences of this dual mode for research support in education, the article takes its point of departure in some general characteristics of education as a discipline.

First it is emphasized that education is more like economics and politics, criminology and law than it is general disciplines such as psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology. The latter deal with totalities at a certain level of analysis such as individuals, social groups and institutions or cultures and

societies at large. In their concentration on certain societal aspects, although the former also study their respective phenomena along a micro-macro dimension, this starts with individual characteristics as preconditions and ends up with a systems analysis at a societal level. Between the micro and macro-extremes we have a long series of meso-level situations acting as important links in a chain of events from relatively simple to more complex phenomena.

Second, at each level researchers study interactions in terms of teaching and learning, upbringing and socialization as goal-directed processes in a social field. These processes are on the one hand influenced by certain structures but they end up on the other hand up in various outcomes in terms of skills, insights and attitudes. These are sometimes evaluated in line with intended educational objectives but not always so. Some of the structures are entirely fixed givens, others may be subject to change by the authorities if not by individual teachers during a school year, still others may to some extent be varied also by the actors during the process.

In Swedish educational research since the late 1960s it has been emphasized that educational outcomes cannot be properly explained or understood unless they are seen in relation both to the preceding processes of teaching/learning and to the surrounding contextual »frame-conditions» in terms of time at disposal, class-size, grouping, access to and use of various resources etc. Thus, at each level of analysis there is a horizontal dimension of interactions between the factors and phenomena discussed here, at the same time as each level plays a role in interactions along the vertical micro-macro dimension outlined above.

Third, grand theories of a very general kind are scarce and not very informative since educational processes, man-made as they are, to such a great extent are influenced by contextual frames and other environmental conditions. Consequently, theories of the middle range (Merton 1957) are much more likely to be profitable.

Fourth, the context-dependency means that a good research design has to put proper emphasis on an analysis of the total situation and its main components. In this way it may profit from a good familiarity with the respective field of practice, which in turn makes it natural to invite representatives for these fields to become additional members of such agencies or research councils that have responsibility for the qualified information needs of the sector.

Fifth, such a system has already been practiced in Sweden, but a number of recent developments have made this issue still more relevant since the number of interest groups has increased. Behind that development are several circumstances such as an increased local freedom due to more decentralization, new student groups at the non-compulsory levels (partly in relation to the life-long learning perspective) recurrent education policies and strengthened working-life connections. Moreover, the growing demand for evaluation as a basis for improvement and new policy decisions calls for explanations which need a good theoretical understanding.

Taken together, these characteristics of the field make it difficult to draw a distinct division line between basic and sector-oriented research in education. It seems to be much more fruitful to regard the discipline base and the practice field as two different entries to a common problem area of interactions between empirical observations and context-dependent theories of the middle range.

One part of the present article analyses the specific experiences from the early planning-related research for the governmental reform-committees in the late 1950s and early 1960s and that of the new national agencies which were created in the mid 1960s charged with duties to follow-up and evaluate the recently launched reforms.

Even though the two »grand pioneers», Torsten Husén [1916–] in Stockholm and Kjell Härnqvist [1921–] in Göteborg, from the beginning had a solid background in psychometrics and problems of aptitude testing and personnel selection in the military forces, their work for the governmental school committees led to a »critical sting» directed towards the old school system, because of its heavy role for a socially biased recruitment of students. Both Huséns early research in that area and two large specific projects by Härnqvist – the one on the reserve of talent among Swedish youth (1958) and the other of inter- and intraindividual differences in intelligence and interests in relation to the issue of school differentiation (1960) – gave rich returns back to the discipline base of education. Thanks to the need to focus on social background factors related to educational problems and their impact on a systems level, the macro level analysis of the field of education was particularly strengthened.

Moreover, thanks also to the high standard of the Swedish census statistics, in both cases their pioneer work laid the foundation of a long series of longitudinal cohort studies which are quite unique in an international perspective. This cohort-based research has in its turn generated a lot of new questions and approaches of a fundamental kind.

Also two other educational problem areas have been subject to basic revisions thanks to contributions from projects with roots in committee research. In the first case a critical re-analysis took place of earlier research on ability grouping which finally ended up in a new model of a paradigmatic kind about interactions between frames, processes and outcomes as discussed earlier in this paper. In the second case, another critical analysis revealed that the government's criteria of examination rates and student flow in higher education were producing misleading meaningless means, since they did not distinguish between student groups with different study goals and in varying life situations (such as school leavers and adults).

In conclusion, in the perspective applied here there is ample evidence that commissioned, which has been carried out the educational research in connection with evaluation and reform-planning has enriched the discipline of education to a great extent, by generating a number of new fundamental problems and approaches. It has been fruitful to have two different entries to the research field independent of each other, the one within the National Research Council representing the basic disciplinary interests and the other

the practice-sector's needs of a deepened theory-based understanding as a base-line for evaluations and new reform decisions.

However, since so many crucial problems are found on the borderlines between different parts of the system of schools and higher education, the sector-oriented research would by all probability profit from becoming one common large research authority as a substitute for the present order, according to which each authority disposes limited funds for the agency's specific sub-area. The kind of double entry system for research support outlined above will probably lead to a more vital future development than just one body within the National Research Council.

**Harald Eklund, 2000: What direction will educational research take? Subject fields and research patterns in Swedish doctoral dissertations 1993–1997 / Vart är svensk pedagogikforskning på väg? Ämnesområden och forskningsmönster i svenska doktorsavhandlingar i pedagogik åren 1993–1997/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 5, No 2, pp 131–150. Stockholm ISSN 1401-6788.**

The article has its empirical base in a study of the 165 Swedish dissertations in education presented the years 1993–97. The questions that have attracted special attention are the following: (i) How frequent are studies of teaching methods compared to studies of other questions related to the educational field? (ii) How frequent are historical and naturalistic studies compared to studies with a mainly experimental design? (iii) How are questions about reliability and validity dealt with in the reporting of results?

My interest in these questions has been closely connected to a longstanding impression that Swedish educational research provided something of a paradox. On one hand I saw educational research as linked almost by definition to the question of teaching methods. On the other, educational researchers seemed to take surprisingly little interest in this special field, even if some extensive projects around teaching methodology had been carried out and professorships in education were established at the Swedish colleges of education.

Of course studies based exclusively on dissertation texts are too limited to give any full picture of Swedish educational research as a whole. Yet, as doctoral theses most likely mirror the general research policy of a discipline, it seemed possible to justify the study also from a more general perspective. The main results may be summarized as follows:

- Few studies have dealt directly with patterns and effects of methods of teaching. Only 18 out of 165 were judged to have methods of teaching as their main field.

- Few experimental or quasiexperimental studies were found among the dissertations compared to studies with historical or naturalistic designs. In all 19 studies were assigned to the first category, while 25 were seen as historic and 121 as naturalistic.
- Among the 25 historical studies none had the development of methods of teaching as its central theme.
- Qualitative designs played a clearly dominating role. More than 9/10 of the empirical studies had interviews, inquiries or both as their main data collecting methods.
- Studies based on systematic samples from the relevant population were relatively few, as were follow up studies and studies with some kind of external control of classification validity by co-evaluators.

The results of the present investigation show tangible similarities to those obtained in a corresponding study for the years 1988–92.

A side issue of the study was to find plausible reasons for the priorities in students' choice of subject fields. Obviously pure practical-economic questions may have influenced their decisions. A study of methodological effects is time consuming and complicated. The need to enter into and even control a practical work situation with its many interest groups is demanding; questions of school methodology may reveal strong ideological-political loadings that cause hard public debates.

That the priorities could be fully explained solely by practical-economic considerations seemed rather unlikely. A literature study clearly indicated factors of more vital significance. Many leading scientists in the educational field had developed quite sceptical attitudes towards studies around teaching methods out of ideological grounds. One of the arguments was that human interchange was much too complex to be captured in generally applicable lines of action. Further, this and most of the other arguments seem to be closely connected to the trend among scientists to leave empiricism for more relativistic ways of thinking with postmodernism as one of its sources.

However, the initial literature checks were mainly based on data up to 1995. To see if changes in professional opinions could be traced to have occurred after these earlier analyses a new review was made covering different professional journals for the years 1996–99. Here some tendencies to a more positive interest in methodological studies and in establishing a closer co-operation between educational science and educational practice could be discerned.

If these tendencies are sufficient to affect the content and general direction of future Swedish dissertation research seems uncertain, however. Most articles give little support for such a conclusion. Even those articles that could be interpreted as advocating a change in priorities very seldom discuss methods of teaching as such as an urgent object of research. If you combine these tendencies with the results from the present empirical study, a drastic change appears to be unlikely. I see it as a distinct possibility that also the majority of future students of education for quite a time will hesitate to focus their dissertational work on the methodological side of upbringing.