

English summaries

Gunilla Roos, 2001: »New» students or »old» ones? Recruitment to study centers in Hälsingland / »Nya» studerande eller »gamla»? Rekrytering till studiecentra i Hälsingland/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 6, No 1, pp 1–18. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788.

The past decade has been characterised by a strong faith in education in general and higher education in particular, as a present and future condition for national, and regional economic growth and welfare. Raising the level of competence in the labour force is seen as an important – perhaps the most important – factor for remaining competitive with the rest of the world. Education is seen as the »key of the future». Recurring education in a life-long perspective has become an important principle in the planning of higher education. But I want to stress that this has long been a guiding principle in educational planning in for example OECD education policy, and is not a product of the so called education optimism of the 1990s. A realisation of life-long learning means that new groups gain access to higher education.

In order to make higher education accessible to a majority of the inhabitants in the region of Hälsingland, study centres were established in its six municipalities in the middle of 1980s. These centres act as a local study arena for distance post-secondary programmes and courses offered by different universities and university colleges. It is worth mentioning that these centres are not branches of any specific higher education institution but are independent partners who negotiate courses and who provide services to the students in their local area.

By offering higher distance education in the home municipality it is hoped that it will become possible to recruit »second chance» primarily geographically non-mobile adults and education returnees (i.e. individuals who have previously been in higher education and who need a strengthening and widening of their professional competence). Another important target group is young people who for various reasons, i.e. no experience in the family of higher education, do not see on-campus studies as a realistic or obvious alternative.

In order to get information on which students who are recruited to study centres in Hälsingland, a questionnaire survey was carried out in 1997 aimed at all study centre students in the academic year 1994/95. The same study was repeated in 2000 to students in the academic year of 1997/98. A relatively large group answered the questionnaire, 78% in 1997 and 71% in 2000.

With data from these two investigations I will describe the group profile of students at study centres with regard to gender, age, family situation and educational and social background and discuss whether this group of students differs from »traditional» on-campus students at universities and university colleges.

One thing worth stressing is that the median age of the students is 35, which means that study centres primarily recruit mature students. However, we can

also notice that the largest group is between 21 and 25 years old, a larger group than is usual in distance education of another form. A majority of the students are women, two thirds 1994/95 and about three quarters 2000. They constitute a greater share of students at study centres than at universities and university colleges on the whole but are roughly the same as in other decentralised distance education. Slightly more than half of the students live in a family with children.

Something that may contribute to geographic non-mobility is not only the students family situation but also their work situation. It appears that slightly more than half of the students also have a full-time or part-time job.

Approximately half of the students, in both 1994 and 1997, have no previous university or university college experiences and are new entrants, one fourth have a university degree and the remaining fourth have taken single-subject courses without obtaining a degree. The share of new entrants is higher at study centres than in other forms of distance courses. Two thirds of the students have once upon a time started their higher education at a study centre and the same amount say that they would not have commenced distance education if it had been arranged in the form of meetings at universities or university colleges. Something we can call »non-mobility» seem to apply to people when they are quite young i.e. already from 25 years of age. One can therefore say that study centres have been the gateway to higher education for most of the students.

Despite efforts in education policy to reduce uneven social recruitment, the social strata in higher education has been relatively stable and has changed very little in relation to changes in society during this century. This is reflected in the social background among the students in study centres, which is almost quite the opposite from that of students in »traditional» higher education, first and foremost comprising non-skilled workers, farmers and entrepreneurs, and less students from the higher white collar group. Half of the students at study centres also state that their families, parents and siblings, lack an academic tradition.

To sum up the experiences from the study so far we can say that those who studied at local study centres in the 1994/95 and 1997/98 academic years are a new group in the sense that they are different from on-campus students in general, not only in age but also socially. Firstly I would like to point to the fact that the studies at a local study centre are the only possibility for the majority of students to carry out higher education. In other words, they would not go to campus. Furthermore, a majority come from homes without a higher education tradition and a large number have a working class background. Therefore it seems as if the local study centres contribute to a broader social recruitment to higher education. In many investigations about uneven social recruitment to higher education the focus is on the individual and his or her lack of ability in one way or another. Perhaps it is time to also focus on the higher education institutions and their way of organising education to make it possible for new target groups to get access to higher education and thereby make life-long learning possibility for everyone.

Jörgen From & Carina Holmgren, 2001: Harmony, hierarchy and perfection. On Chinese foundations for conceptions of the educational process /Harmoni, hierarki och perfektion. Om kinesiska utgångspunkter för förhållnings-sätt till edukation/. Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige, Vol 6, No 1, pp 19–33. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788.

Behaviourism and cognitivism have for a long time dominated Western educational thought in a way that have made them fundamental assumptions, taken for granted as well in educational research as in educational practice. Thereby, Western concepts of the educational process often contain, and are based on, dualisms as theory – practice, thought – action, body – soul. The roots of both behaviourism and cognitivism are traceable throughout Western intellectual history, all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy. Likewise, China has its own tradition of educational thought, which goes back to ancient Chinese philosophy. Since this tradition differs from its Western counterpart, the conceptions of the educational process that this tradition constitutes also differ from Western conceptions.

For more than two thousand years China's intellectual history has consisted of a mixture of Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism, Moism and Legalism, and this mixture is still the ground for conceptions of the educational process in China. This mixture makes it possible to talk about Chinese philosophy, in which Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism, Moism and Legalism are integrated parts. Confucianism deals with ethics, based on social relations, Legalism with the rational of social life, Taoism and Chinese Buddhism with the unity of man and universe and Moism with a focus on the concrete. One common and major concern is education and human-becoming, Chinese philosophy is basically a philosophy of education.

The world-view of Chinese philosophy is a relational unity between being and non-being, where the natural state is movement and change in accordance with the ultimate principle. In other words, the ultimate principle goes back to the idea that everything that changes - and thus exist - has an opposite pole, the non-existent. The existent and non-existent mutually constitute each other in a never-ending process governed by the ultimate principle. This implies a universe constantly in motion and change. The highest ideal is fulfilment of the ultimate principle, characterised by a state of perfect balance and universal harmony. Then, true knowledge is insight into this ultimate principle lying behind movement and change of the universe. As the latter is mutable so too is knowledge, knowledge itself acquires the attributes of movement and change.

Society, as part of this all-including system, is constituted as a hierarchy of social functions. Every human being has several functions to fulfil, and how well these are done is the sole criteria for his or her position in the hierarchy. Society is the sum of social functions, and when they are fulfilled in a correct

way the hierarchy is perfectly balanced. Humans, as part of the rational unity, have the ability to attain true knowledge; they are always educable. At the same time humans must continue to educate themselves in order to perceive true knowledge. True knowledge, as insight into the rational unity, manifests itself as perfection in the relations between humans and their surroundings. Such relations, which is a guarantee for perfectly fulfilled social functions, are characterised by moral perfection. This means that all knowledge contains a moral dimension, and therefore also a concrete practical dimension. Self-cultivation and education are the means to acquire both knowledge and the moral perfection necessary for a hierarchy in perfect balance, i.e. a social order imbued with the great harmony where the morality in the hierarchies is bidirectional.

Some general aspects of conceptions of the educational process, based on Chinese philosophy, can be outlined. In a universe that is not neutral but morally active, education is not a neutral tool for transmitting knowledge and values. Education in itself is a moral practice, within a system of relations. Just like everything else, education, teaching, learning and so on are relational and social entities, impossible to isolate from the surrounding world. Likewise, an Individual, as a part in or as a precondition for education, is impossible. For instance teaching is not a relation between teacher and student, teachers and students emerge from, and within, the relation that is teaching. In the all-including system of relations there can never be any kind of dualisms. So, as far as we understand, conceptions based on Chinese philosophy are different from, and sometimes the opposite of, their Western counterparts. Thereby, Chinese philosophy offers a possibility for a critical awareness of our own, culturally embedded, conceptions of the educational process.