



## Book Review

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Anders Burman, Joakim Landahl

(eds.)

*1968 och pedagogiken*

Södertörn: Södertörns högskola

2020, 281 pp.

The cultural and political rupture caused by rebelling youth, students and proponents of new counter-culture movements during the 1960s and the 1970s has been captured by Arthur Marwick (1998) with the term 'the long sixties'. In the anthology *1968 och pedagogiken*, the editors Anders Burman and Joakim Landahl use the term 'the long '68' to close in on a number of events and ideas that caused rupture in pedagogical thought and practice in Sweden. The book thereby, in contrast to many other histories about the decades such as for instance Marwick's much cited work, focus is not on the highly visible strikes, protests and happenings, but the multiple ways in which established pedagogical thought and the educational system at large was critiqued and discussed. Together the volume's twelve well-written individual chapters demonstrate that the alternatives launched by the critics of the established educational institutions, systems and ideologies took many different forms and had long-term impact.

Many of the chapters have overlapping themes and interpretations, but their empirical material differs. Together they demonstrate how everything from abandoning schools as institutions, to introducing more democratic forms of instruction, to having schools build on various communist ideologies

were discussed during the long '68. In the following, I have tried to show the breadth of the volume by pointing to salient themes in different chapters. The many arenas where pedagogical discussions took place included official committees (e.g. in the chapter by Holmén & Ringarp), the press, journals (Landahl & Lövheim) and organisations for primary school kids (Lind & Hasselberg). Taken together the chapters show the remarkable span of interests and facets captured in the debates. Debates about *pedagogik* encompassed schools both as institutions and proponents of specific educational systems and ideologies (Härnsten; Lundahl), they concerned philosophy, *bildung*, enculturation as well as indoctrination (chapter by Ohrlander and Östberg). And, ultimately, the debates were dealing with big questions about the make-up of the social fabric and how it was intertwined with schools and education, as clearly demonstrated in the introduction by Burman and Landahl and the final chapter by Burman and Kaveh. It is amply demonstrated that discussing *pedagogik* was about much more than education and schools; it was about the kind of society the debaters wanted - and whether that was served by the current institutions and its dominant ideologies. Thus, the period's legacy might be as much about the increased attention given to the interests and wants of children and youth within the educational sector and society in general, as the reforms of the educational sector: of higher education (universitetskanslerämbetets reviderade reformförslag 1968), of preschool education

(barnstugeutredningen 1968) and central educational goals (läroplanen 1969).

A striking feature of this edited book is that its chapters are remarkably heterogeneous. It might be that I have just become used to the rather dull and narrow genre conventions of Anglophone publication standards, but it took me a little by surprise that some contributions to quite a large extent were centred around the author's experiences as participants in the pedagogical debates of the long '68. However, maybe this might be just the way to convey the period's zeitgeist? I would nevertheless have liked that the editors had explained this choice more in depth. This goes hand in hand with another wish along the same lines, namely that the volume's collective project had stood out a little more clearly. Many of the authors mention the same events, reforms and people, which left me wondering what they think of each other's chapters. Ultimately, however, the fact that they appear together brings them in contact at least to the reader who reads the book cover to cover, which I fully recommend. Many of the chapters are written in clear, easy-to-follow prose, and the mixture of memoirs, scholarly analysis and interesting empirical material makes it a refreshing read.

The lack of an explicit, collective idea behind the volume has given the authors the leeway that makes the volume more lively than regular scholarly anthologies. It also, however, means that the chapters are very uneven when it comes to methodological approaches. Some are methodologically very rigorous, others offer more loose reflections on experiences or current events. This unevenness is acceptable as the authors in most cases are very clear about where they are coming from and how they see their contribution. However, as someone who teaches Digital Archival Lite-

racy, I feel obliged to point out that there are two instances where keyword search in a database/digital collection is used to support general arguments, but it is done without a minimum of reflection on what methodological implications this entail.

Another and more serious methodological discussion could address the volume's comparative aspects (or lack here of). It is made perfectly clear in the introduction that the volume's main focus is on Sweden. Some of the chapters (Holmen & Ringarp; Ahlskog and Wickström; Härnsten) are explicitly comparative, an element that brings real strengths to their arguments. Other chapters, however, offer *en passant* side glances to events and social movements in other countries, especially in the US. This includes the Civil Rights movement, protest within US higher education, the feminist movement and the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. There is, of course, no doubt that what happened in the US was related to what happened elsewhere as has been demonstrated in abundance in recent scholarship on the long sixties. Nevertheless, I wonder if the volume had not been better served by looking at what made discussions about *pedagogik* in Sweden different from the US.

The Swedish society was very different from that of the US at this point. The existence of a well-functioning welfare state with an explosion in day-care facilities, ideals of a strong state as protector of individual freedom, and a long tradition of education from below as well as other factors, meant that the educational system, the relationship between pupils and teachers, adult authorities and the young could develop differently. The long-term legacy of student protests, discussions about the educational system and society at large as

well as the relationships between those who teach and those who are taught, are very different in the US and Sweden. Unfortunately, this book's potential to show why that is has been left untapped, or perhaps even worse, by drawing many parallels but not pointing out the differences, it leaves readers with an impression of a great similarity which did not exist.

Despite the critical questions raised above, this book is a good and important read that I would highly recommend to anyone interested in the long '68 in Sweden and Finland. Debates around on *pedagogik* from this period are key to understand long term changes in the Nordic welfare societies, but even so they are often overlooked as historians focus on more popular political and cultural changes and events. The volume's introduction and last chapter, as well as many of the chapters in between contain interesting, and I think often spot-on, reflections on the 68' debates' relevance today. This, in addition to the historical analysis in and of themselves, makes the book an interesting read for anyone interested in *pedagogik* today (whether to lament the loss of the period's energy or celebrate that we have moved on).

### **References**

Marwick, Arthur. *The sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

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