



Book Reviews

Dissertations

Åsa Broberg

Utbildning på gränsen mellan skola och arbete: Pedagogisk förändring i svensk yrkesutbildning 1918–1971
Stockholms universitet (PhD diss)
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The three Nordic countries – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – are often grouped together in social analyses, being welfare states with similar languages, a common labour market and similar systems of higher education. Interestingly, however, they have quite different models of vocational education and training. School-based and work-based learning have been given different emphasis, education and the labour market been linked in different ways. Most notably, apprenticeship has developed historically very differently in these countries, either as a separate dual system (Denmark) or as an integrated part of upper secondary education (Norway) whereas in Sweden apprenticeship has almost disappeared. How have these differences come about? More specifically, how has the particular “Swedish model” of vocational education and training (VET) evolved over time?

Recent studies have linked the different destinies of Danish and Swedish VET during the early and mid 20th century to the predominance of small firms in Danish capitalism, large firms in Sweden (Dobbins and Busemeyer 2014). Similar ideas about the role of trade and industry to explain why Swedish VET has been almost exclusively located within the secondary school system and subject to a schooling logic have been put forward by e.g. Olofsson and Persson Thunqvist (2014). The doctoral thesis under discussion here, Åsa Broberg’s *Education on the border between school and work. Educational change in Swedish vocational education and training 1918–1971* (2014), takes a different approach. Broberg’s con-

cern is with the ideas and varying “figures of thought” that have guided pedagogical transformations of the Swedish VET sector during most of the 20th century, rather than with the economic or social forces behind it.

Changing figures of thought

“Figures of thought” is a notion borrowed from sociologist Johan Asplund. It concerns a level between basic existential conditions of life, on the one hand, and articulated thought in the form of theories, arguments and explicit ideas, on the other. Broberg argues that a close attention to the dominant pedagogical discourses about how to organise training will reveal the figures of thought, i.e. the rationalities or logics, behind the changes over time. She discerns two such logics, the “figure of work” versus the “figure of school” as being guiding paradigms behind educational ideals, practices and institutional set-ups in VET, with the latter replacing the former over time. Her argument is based on a reading of public inquiry reports, archival material from schools in the Stockholm region, journal articles, and commemorative books from vocational schools. This provides for a rich and detailed study with many interesting insights into everyday practices within Swedish VET, their changing rationales, and evolution over time.

In the period between 1918 and 1971, the organisation and character of Swedish vocational education and training changed. In 1918, special schools for practical training received state support and school statute for the first time. It was the first step in acknowledging that practical training could be learnt within schools and be improved with the help of theoretical knowledge. The system was nevertheless and for a long time characterised by low government involvement; rather, education was geared towards the local community, as much of the training took place in the workplace or at technical schools with production of goods and services linked to the surrounding commu-

nity. During the next decades, vocational education expanded greatly. It differentiated into a variety of school forms but later became increasingly centralised and streamlined as to governance and types of training. In 1971, VET was integrated into the upper secondary school and thus became part of a coherent national educational system, its rules and ideals. Most practical training now was to take place within a school setting.

VET differs from other forms of education in that it is influenced by both work and school logics, the balance between them is, however, not given. Broberg's study focuses on three educational practices that were important within the vocational school system but which were re-negotiated over time – the probation period, production, and the "diligence allowance" (*flitpengar*). They had been inspired by the figure of work but were considered less suitable in a VET-system inspired by the figure of school and were finally discontinued. Instead, new practices linked to other pedagogical norms were introduced.

Pedagogical changes

Broberg's first example concerns how students were accepted into vocational education. Grades from elementary school were in the early and mid 20th century less important than in other school forms when judging the applicant's capacity for practical work. Instead, various tests were used that were unique to VET, including aptitude tests. In general, physical capability, a sense of order and responsibility, but also curiosity and initiative were valued – traits that were less favoured within other school forms at the time. There was a probation period – a period in the beginning of the training during which the student's suitability for the chosen profession was tested. If the student was found to be unsuitable, he or she could be denied further training. It was the teacher acting in his or her capacity as a representative of the profession that decided the student's fate. When VET was reformed at the end of the period discussed by Broberg, these specific procedures were gradually abandoned. The assessment criteria changed, from reflecting the requirements of the profession to reflecting those of the school system. Grades replaced individual tests as selection mechanisms, and the pro-

bation period became a time for the student to reflect about whether to continue or not rather than a tool for the teacher to deny him or her a place.

A second important change was that VET schools ceased their production of goods or services for internal or external use. For many years, apprentice-based training or production at school were established pedagogical practices. In this way, VET was an integrated part of the local economy and school buildings sometimes looked more like production units than educational establishments. According to the figure of work, production was authentic work, valuable for student motivation and integration into the labour market. Doing such "real work" would give the students relevant and high quality skills, train problem-solving and cooperation with workers and customers. Production as part of the education was also seen as a necessity from an economic point of view since state support was limited; in addition, it contributed to keeping the schools up-to-date about machines, products and working methods.

When the figure of school gained ascendancy from the 1950s onwards, production was, however, problematised. Proponents of schooling argued that production-based training was unsystematic and inefficient. Production depended on external demand, which would fluctuate between years, types of education, and geographical location. Therefore, it was not easy to fit within an orderly curriculum; necessary skill elements would be trained in a non-pedagogical order, or maybe not at all. Production within a workplace setting was also seen as non-optimal, since it was not always possible for the apprentice to train all necessary skills, the pace of production was often hard, and workplace culture was sometimes considered inimical to learning.

Instead, the figure of school favoured a de-coupling of education and production. This was thought to lead to more efficient learning, a more concentrated period of education and a more systematic and all-round training of the necessary skills. It would also permit a more rational way of assessing what the student had learnt. The schools tried to accommodate to this critique and adapted their production in various ways to fit the national curriculum; eventually, however, the figure of school came to

predominate and production more or less disappeared. New pedagogical methods and technologies for learning were developed, with inspiration from industry and applicable to all kinds of skills, from typing to turning a lathe.

Instead of the students learning from contact with the master teacher and their work mates, they should now read texts and follow written instructions. Learning became organised around training objects arranged in a pedagogical order, from easy tasks to more complicated ones. These objects were originally part of production for sale but were soon to be organised as pure learning objects with no evident use or sales value; their sole function was to make the student train specific methods or procedures. Textbooks, step-by-step instructions and drawings would help the student along. Training was now individualised: the student should move at his or her own pace between training objects. Coupled with the use of learning objects were other pedagogical inventions. The curriculum was divided into many small parts which should be trained separately at different stations, for example, at different machines or with different kinds of material. Having the students train a number of times at different stations would guarantee that they learnt all the necessary steps and that all students learnt the same things. Circulating between the stations would, it was thought, enhance student motivation and help him or her work independently without the direct intervention of the teacher. The result would be a more efficient education, with students learning more and in a more systematic way than before. Thus, the image of efficient learning was one that trained predetermined, ordered knowledge bits, systematically organised according to a national curriculum, separate from production and the social relations of the work place.

Accordingly, the teachers' professional knowledge became less important and teachers changed from being masters or co-workers to a school based role of supervising, controlling, and grading students. Professional expertise was now located within handbooks and detailed instructions produced by pedagogical experts somewhere else.

The transformation of everyday practices at VET was completed with the third

change discussed by Broberg. Monetary compensation ceased for what the students produced as apprentices within local enterprises or within the schools' production of goods and services. The so-called "diligence allowance" was for a while used to motivate students; its withdrawal was also used as punishment for various misdemeanours to emphasise the need to adhere to workplace moral and social codes. But all schools did not have the financial means to provide for this allowance. This went against the homogenising ambitions of the figure of school; all schools across the country should be equal. It therefore disappeared when production disappeared as part of the education, and work in VET was re-coded from "real" work to school work.

Comments

Broberg's dissertation is well written and makes interesting sense of a multifaceted and sometimes contradictory history. Her focus is on ideas, discourses and their materialisation in pedagogical practices, not on actors, political decisions, or institutional re-organisations, although these are also given some attention. I will take up three points here. They are not so much points of critique as a way to further a discussion of important issues occasioned by Broberg's approach.

The first issue concerns the notion of "figure of thought". It is an interesting concept which Broberg uses to make sense of the dichotomies of ideals and practices within VET. Asplund himself refers to it, in Broberg's words, as "the underlying structures, that complex of ideas and notions which give support and meaning to more articulated thoughts manifest in what we say and do in different circumstances" (p. 51). They are stickier than articulated thought, slower to change, normally not reflected upon, and may be materialised in both physical objects, words and social practices.

The concept has been used in other studies, including some of Asplund's own; however, as Broberg notes, its theoretical status has not really been clarified. I see it as, what one may call, a "promissory concept", one that "refers to something undefined and *hidden* that is accorded with the power of explaining what we share and how we act" (Gad and Bruun Jensen 2014: 705).

My questions relate to this somewhat

uncertain theoretical status of the concept. Do they – in this case the figure of work and the figure of school – refer to something that actors are conscious about and adapt their practices to? Or are they hidden, unconscious structures, something that only researchers can gain an insight into through a systematic analysis? In other words, do they exist, or are they theoretical tools for the analyst to provide order into “what we say and do in different circumstances”? And, if they exist, how are we to understand their power and influence? For example, *must* the figure of work (or of school) always mean certain favoured criteria and practices? Does it form a coherent complex, a logic or rationality (terms also used by Broberg), which consistently will produce certain forms of seeing and acting, and not others? And if it is internally differentiated: what parts of a figure of thought – or its manifestations – are more fundamental, which more peripheral and temporary?

These are difficult questions, but Broberg comes some way in answering them empirically. Her analysis makes room for contradictions and flexibility in how figures of thought are manifested in articulated practices. For example, in how production and monetary compensation based on the figure of work for a while were re-interpreted to fit practices emanating from the figure of school – but eventually abandoned. Thus, pedagogical change may come about when the two logics meet and challenge each other, and where processes of conquering, insertion, and re-negotiation may take place.

This said, it is not altogether clear what the figure of work actually represents – and even less what the figure of school is, apart from “what most can relate to” (p. 56). Does the figure of work relate to craft work, industrial work, salaried work, or even entrepreneurship? These aspects are bundled together to constitute the figure of work. One may wonder if “work” is the same over the whole period, or whether its fundamental logic has not changed over these 50 years, something which may have consequences for how, for example, efficiency is conceptualised within the figure of work. It also seems to me that the figure is based to a large extent on male occupations within craft and early industry. For example, curiosity, independence, mobility, etc. were, it is argu-

ed, personality traits to be assessed during the probation period and all-round skills something to be furthered by production at school. However, these are traits that were not particularly favoured within *women’s* work in factories, offices or service occupations. Their jobs were rather characterised by immobility, fragmentation and subordination. Thus, there seems to be a male bias in how the figure of work (as a construction by the historical VET actors or by Broberg herself) is translated into pedagogical ideals.

Neither is the class dimension of VET really discussed. Issues of power and social relations within work places and in society at large are not given much attention, by Broberg or, it seems, in the discourses studied by her. But VET students train to become workers, to a large extent within capitalist production. The ambition to discipline a potentially unruly working class may have been an important rationale behind how educational practices were first constituted in the politically turbulent interwar years. And the figure of school is linked to ambitions to abolish the class structure through individual mobility; the focus on written texts, grades, and individual trajectories opens up for VET students to leave the working class (cf. Berner 1999).

My second point of discussion concerns the place of actors within a history focusing on ideas and notions of suitable pedagogical practices. Broberg loosely identifies what she calls an “epistemological community” which expresses ideas based on either the figure of work or the figure of school. As with all such communities, it is difficult to methodologically delineate who belongs and who does not belong, depending on which sources and definitions are employed in the analysis. To investigate this is not Broberg’s main concern and indeed the strength of the thesis lies instead in the systematic and detailed depictions of ideas and practices, something which is lacking in other studies.

However, it would have been interesting to know a bit more about this “community”. In what sense was it in fact a community? Which actors were central, which peripheral and – perhaps important – which groups were *not* given a voice in the sources or in the analysis (students, for example?) Other actors than VET professionals did indeed play a role, e.g. industrial engineers and ma-

nagers, trade unions, politicians (as depicted in other histories of VET, such as Olofsson 2005). Thus, the community was at all times heterogeneous, but heterogeneous in *new* ways in different periods. A closer analysis of this heterogeneity may have shed some more light upon how the figures of thought were configured and re-configured over time.

As to the actors within VET whose roles were affected by changes in pedagogical practices, Broberg has quite a lot to say about teachers, much less about the students. The teacher's role was previously based on strong links to the labour market, local employers and the local community. When the figure of school reorganised education, teachers became functionaries of a school system explicitly detached from production and characterised by the logics of school schedules, by school hierarchies ranking theory before practice, and by norms of systematic learning and evaluation.

School-based VET must nevertheless, Broberg argues, be seen as a kind of hybrid – a unique learning environment and social arena, where intertwinements and de-couplings between school and work form a dynamic and contradictory whole. Other studies have shown that actors within the system must re-interpret and even transgress the logic of schooling in order to provide authority and relevance. Thus, teachers combine elements from both work and school settings and engage in various forms of boundary work, e.g. to reconstitute the logic of work in their everyday interaction with students (Berner 1989; 2010).

Finally, how historically and geographically specific is this story? How can these particular thought figures be used – if at all – to understand changes after 1971? Are they valid forever, or do we need other figures to understand what goes on today when apprenticeship is again on the agenda within Swedish VET? These questions point to there being a Swedish bias in the interesting story presented by Broberg. Her approach has given important insights into changing pedagogical practices and priorities within Swedish VET – but can it also be used to understand the historical evolution of other, quite different VET-systems? This is an interesting challenge for future research.

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Nationalism i fredens tjänst: Svenska skolornas fredsförening, fredsföstran och historieundervisning 1919–1939
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Peace is the central issue in this thesis, which Ingela Nilsson defended in the beginning of 2015 at Umeå University. The author examines the peace movement in Sweden in the interwar years, especially the activities of Svenska skolornas fredsförening (Swedish School Peace League, SSF). The utopian aim of this organisation was to create a new type of human being, who could work for a peaceful development in