



WHICH VALUES ARE REPRODUCED WITHIN THE SWEDISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM?

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INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses a tension between the general evaluative outlook of Swedish teacher students and the task, imposed on all Swedish teachers by The Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE), of conveying to their pupils certain fundamental values established in the curriculum for the national school system.¹ Our study is partly motivated by the results from the World Values Survey (WVS), which maps evaluative differences between approximately 80 countries in the world.² These differences are often categorized in two dimensions, traditional vs secular-rational values and survival vs self-expression values (see section three).³ On these dimensions Sweden distinctly stands out as the country in the world that to the largest extent rejects traditional and survival values and embraces secular-rational and self-expression values.⁴

Against this background we conducted a survey of the values embraced by Swedish teacher students in order to see to what extent they share the evaluative outlook of Swedes in general. As expected, the survey revealed no significant differences. This result is particularly interesting in relation to the fact that the curriculum for the Swedish school system does not only emphasize secular-rational and self-expression values, but also values that

¹ The Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE), *Curriculum for the upper secondary school* (2011). <http://www.skolverket.se/>, accessed 21.09.2015.

² See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>, accessed 21.09.2015.

³ Ronald **Inglehart**, "Mapping Global Values" – *Measuring and Mapping Cultures*. Eds. Yilmaz Esmer and Thorleif Pettersson (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11-32.

⁴ See http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/images/Cultural_map_WVS6_2015.jpg, accessed 21.09.2015, and Thorleif **Pettersson** and Yilmaz **Esmer**, *Vilka är annorlunda? Integrationsverkets rapportserie 2005:03* (Norrköping: Integrationsverket, 2005).

are plausibly placed on the traditional side of the spectrum.⁵ Hence, the question arises as to the appropriateness of the general evaluative outlook of Swedish teacher students to the task of conveying such values. Furthermore, our results indicate that these students in general embrace certain evaluative attitudes that make it legitimate to question their receptiveness to the task of conveying certain fundamental values at all.

The main purpose of this paper is to make visible and discuss the relation between the general evaluative outlook of Swedish teacher students, the values established by SNAE, and the place of these values within the Swedish teacher education. However, at least parts of our discussion should be relevant to the situation in other countries as well, given the generality of questions concerning reproduction of values within an educational system. Besides the task of conveying information, methods and skills to their pupils, teachers are also expected to mediate certain basic values. Depending on which country we look at, this latter task is either implicitly taken for granted within the educational system or, as in the case of Sweden, explicitly established in regulatory documents.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the point of departure in the questions from WVS judged to be most relevant to our purpose, a survey was constructed with questions to investigate the attitudes of Swedish teacher students with respect to the evaluative dimensions presented above. The survey was distributed anonymously to two groups of teacher students at Umeå University – one larger group at the beginning of their education (134 respondents) and one smaller group at the end of their education (45 respondents). The answers from the first group – ‘Swedish teacher students early’ – constitute our main empirical material, while the main role of the smaller group – ‘Swedish teacher students late’ – was to provide a control group to reveal whether or not some significant change seems to take place in the students’ evaluative outlook during the teacher education. As the tables on pages 58 and 59 show, there is no indication of such a change.

⁵ SNAE, *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, 4.

The students who took part in the survey were invited to participate (voluntarily) under the condition that they could discontinue at any time. They were informed that their answers would be anonymized, treated as confidential, and used for teaching and research purposes only. We have not stored any personal data or used questions of sensitive character concerning political, philosophical or religious conviction that would have motivated an ethical review.⁶ In this way we have ensured compliance to the general research ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and precautionous use of collected information.⁷

Our survey was deliberately designed to investigate the attitudes of two particular groups of teacher students. Consequently, we are mapping the values of a limited number of students, and only students from one university – in this respect we are working with a nonprobability sample.⁸ In relation to this point it is important to emphasize that the purpose of our investigation is not to draw precise conclusions about the percentage of Swedish teacher students embracing certain values, but to track evaluative tendencies among this group and put them in relation to an extensive existing body of work conducted by WVS. The result then serves as a background to our upcoming discussion, the character of which is mainly normative and nonempirical.

In comparison to WVS, which uses a large number of indicators tracing each value dimension, we settled for fewer questions in order to investigate to what extent teacher students share the evaluative profile of the Swedish population in general. By an evaluative profile we are referring to a generally shared, relatively stable set of attitudes, representing a common point of view within groups or whole populations regarding authority, individual freedom, security, etc., i.e. the kind of basic values that the

⁶ *Personal Data Protection* (Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, 2006), <http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/87382a7887764e9995db186244b557e4/personal-data-protection>, accessed 21.09.2015, and *Lag (2003:460) om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor* (2003), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Lag-2003460-om-etikprovning_sfs-2003-460/, accessed 21.09.2015.

⁷ *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning* (Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet, 1990), <http://www.codex.vr.se/texts/HSFR.pdf>, accessed 21.09.2015.

⁸ See Alan **Bryman**, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183.

two value dimensions aim to capture. According to Pettersson and Esmer these dimensions are relatively robust and insensitive to changes in the outline of the questions.⁹ We thus take it that our more limited set of questions is sufficient to capture the general evaluative profile of the teacher students, and get an indication of whether or not it matches that of the Swedish population in general.

For this investigation we chose a set of questions that cover both of the evaluative dimensions while at the same time having a distinct relevance to the teaching profession. In this way we could get an indication of: (i) whether or not the evaluative profile of teacher students corresponds to that of the population in general; (ii) which values have been present in their previous education and are likely to be present in their future teaching. In section four we present a sample of the result in two tables, chosen on the grounds that it is representative of the two dimensions and the values emphasized by SNAE, and that it is relevant to a teaching context. This sample can in turn be used as a background for a discussion of the prospects of different fundamental values from the curriculum to be reproduced through education.

Point (ii) draws on the idea that teachers tend to reproduce a set of values in their pedagogical practice, consciously or unconsciously, dependent on their own background, resulting in shared ways of thinking, valuing and acting.¹⁰ Given this assumption, one way of mapping the values that are reproduced within an educational system is to study the evaluations of students.¹¹ Although it is possible to change priorities or interpretations within an educational system there is strong support for the view that a set of shared values is important in the shaping of the views of the next generation.¹² Since such reproduction of values is not only a conscious, but to a large extent an unconscious process, it is particularly interesting to

⁹ Pettersson and Esmer, *Vilka är annorlunda?*, 15.

¹⁰ Pierre **Bourdieu** and Jean-Claude **Passeron**, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 196-197.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71-73, and Pierre **Bourdieu** and Jean-Claude **Passeron**, *The Inheritors, French Students and Their Relation to Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 14-19.

¹² Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education*, and also Conrad P. **Kottak**, *Mirror for Humanity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 25-27, and Michael W. **Apple** (Ed.), *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

examine the evaluative outlook of teacher students and put it in relation to the fundamental values they are supposed to convey in their coming profession. Presumably, the evaluative outlook of teacher students reflects their previous education and will affect their future teaching. Somewhat simplified, unless teachers embrace a certain value, that value is less likely to be reproduced to their pupils, in which case its general absence from the educational system is likely to continue. An important aspect of our result is hence that since the traditional values emphasized by SNAE are scarcely represented among Swedish teacher students it is questionable to what extent they will be reproduced in their future teaching.

As stated above, Sweden stands out with respect to both dimensions – i.e., the extent to which Swedes embrace self-expression values as well as secular-rational values. On the other side of the spectrum – with regard to both dimensions – there are several countries. We have chosen to present results from WVS with respect to one such country as a comparison to Sweden, namely Zimbabwe. In order to further place the Swedish results in context, we also present results from one of the countries with a typical average evaluative profile, namely Spain. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of presenting results from Zimbabwe and Spain merely is to put the Swedish results in context and give the reader a brief idea of the extent to which Sweden stands out in comparison with other countries.¹³ It helps us to see both which values are taken to belong to the respective categories (survival, self-expression, traditional, secular-rational) and the extent to which Swedish teacher students resemble Swedes in general as regards their evaluative profile. As the two tables below (p 58 and 59) reveal there is no significant difference between teacher students and Swedes in general in this respect.¹⁴

¹³ The results from WVS are available and easily attainable on the WVS-website: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp>, accessed 21.09.2015.

¹⁴ As stated above, we have only surveyed the views of teacher students at Umeå University. But we see no reason to think that their views differ from those of teacher students in other parts of the country (indeed, the Umeå students come from all over the country). Since we investigated the views of the students at the beginning of their education, the evaluative profile of this group cannot be explained with reference to particular features of the teacher education in Umeå. We have also seen that there is no significant difference between the evaluative profile of this group and that of the group of students surveyed at the end of their education. Thus we see no reason to believe that anything significant happens during the teacher education which impacts the evaluative views of the students. Here it may be worth noting that the teacher education in Umeå involves

EVALUATIVE DIMENSIONS AND FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

In analyzing the results from the recurrent World Values Survey, it is possible to distinguish between two different, empirically derived, evaluative dimensions: traditional vs secular-rational views on authority and survival vs self-expression values.¹⁵ These dimensions are ostensibly characterized – through examples (see below) – rather than theoretically defined. It is important to emphasize that these dimensions are descriptive and used in order to discern value patterns in groups or whole populations and not to evaluate these patterns.

In this investigation we use concepts from WVS as analytical tools, to categorize tendencies in the fundamental values stated in the curriculum, and in the teacher students' evaluative outlook, in order to get an indication of whether or not these values have been present in their previous education and will be present in their future teaching. It is of course possible to identify and conceptualize evaluative patterns in very different ways. We could, for instance, distinguish between values which are more or less (a) instrumental or final; (b) traditional or secular; (c) survivalist or self-expressionist; (d) modern or postmodern, etc. Some of these notions are well defined theoretical concepts (a), others represent not as well defined practical empirical findings (b-c), and yet others are used in both ways depending on context (d). An analysis of the fundamental values stated in the curriculum for the Swedish school system, or of the values embraced by teacher students, can hence be conducted in several different ways, and it is not obvious that one should take the path of categorizing these values along the two value dimensions traditional vs secular-rational and survival vs self-expression. However, there are certain important gains to be made with this choice, and we judge there to be sufficient overlap between the values expressed in the curriculum by SNAE and the values typical of the two value dimensions for it to be possible to take this route. Even if

more courses where values are discussed and problematized than does the teacher education in Sweden in general.

¹⁵ Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values" – *American Sociological Review*, 65/1 (2000), 19-51; Petterson and Esmer, *Vilka är annorlunda?*, 14-17; and Inglehart, "Mapping Global Values", 11-15.

the theoretical concepts would provide sharper analytical tools, the practical findings enable comparison between the content of the fundamental values and the evaluative profile of teacher students, in relation to both national and international data. This we consider to be an important reason to choose a more practical empirical path in order to capture some of the tendencies in the school system as well as in higher education.

The aim of the Swedish educational system is that the pupils shall acquire and develop not only knowledge but also certain *fundamental values*.¹⁶ The curriculum for the Swedish school system states that

“[e]ach and everyone working in the school should... encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person and the environment we all share. [...] In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is to be achieved by nurturing in the individual a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility.”¹⁷

The curriculum for the Swedish school system establishes both values that can be considered traditional and values that can be considered secular-rational. Traditional values include the importance of family life, a sense of national pride, and religion as significant in peoples' lives, but also typical social or collective values.¹⁸ Some of the values expressed in the curriculum share characteristics of the traditional dimension, e.g. the emphasis on 'cultural history', 'a secure identity and awareness of one's own cultural origins' and 'a common cultural heritage'.¹⁹ At the same time there is another opposite set of ideals present in the curriculum, stressing individualism, internationalism and absence of religious faith. These values are often embraced by the population of industrialized societies, and can be described as a set of rational secular values.²⁰ The curriculum emphasizes "students' developing greater understanding of cultural diversity within

¹⁶ *Education Act*, SFS 2010:800 (Stockholm: Ministry of Justice, 2010), Ch. 1 §4.

¹⁷ SNAE, *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, 4.

¹⁸ Ronald Inglehart and Daphna Oyserman, "Individualism, Autonomy and Self-Expression" – *Comparing Cultures*. Eds. Henk Vinken, Joseph Soeters and Peter Ester (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 74-96.

¹⁹ SNAE, *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, 4.

²⁰ Inglehart and Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values", 23-28.

Sweden”, as well as “justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility”,²¹ where teaching should always be ‘nondenominational’.²²

Other values in the curriculum share the characteristics of the self-expression dimension. No one should, for instance, be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of “gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment, or to other forms of degrading treatment”. The school should also “be open to different ideas and encourage their expression”, “stimulate students’ creativity, curiosity and selfconfidence” and develop “knowledge and attitudes that promote entrepreneurship, enterprise and innovative thinking”.²³ The opposite set of ideals, i.e., the survival values, with an emphasis on trust as well as economic and physical security, are not as present in the curriculum, with the possible exception of aims regarding vocational education.²⁴

One conclusion from WVS is that the most divergent evaluative outlook, from an international point of view, is that of the Swedes. There is no other society which to the same extent renounce traditional and survival values and embrace secular-rational and self-expression values. And there is no country which can be placed further away from an international average evaluative outlook than Sweden.²⁵ Nevertheless, there are values present in the curriculum representing a more traditional view, which – given these results from WVS – prompts the question of to what extent these values will be present in the Swedish educational system. Hence, given the assumption stressed above, that teachers tend to reproduce a set of values in their pedagogical practice, it is an important question whether those who teach within this system share the evaluative outlook of Swedes in general.

²¹ SNAE, *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, 6, 4.

²² *Education Act*, Ch. 1, §6-7 and SNAE, *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵ Pettersson and Esmer, *Vilka är annorlunda?*, 18.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As explained above, we present a sample of our result in two tables, chosen on the grounds that it is representative of the two dimensions and the values emphasized by SNAE, and that it is relevant to a teaching context. The first table shows answers to the following query, taken from WVS. The respondents were given a list of eleven 'child qualities', and asked to mark a maximum of five such qualities considered to be especially important to encourage children to learn at home. In addition, we asked the teacher students which of these eleven qualities (a maximum of five) they considered it to be especially important to encourage children to learn in school. The table shows – with respect to each quality – the percentage of individuals from each group who chose to mention the quality in question as particularly important. The results from WVS reveal that Swedes tend to embrace secular-rational as well as self-expression values (e.g. independence and imagination), while typical traditional values (such as religious faith and obedience) are mentioned as important by very few. Furthermore, our investigation indicates that there is no significant difference between the views of teacher students and Swedes in general.

It is interesting to note that the teacher students to some extent seem to perceive a difference as regards which qualities are mainly to be learned at home, and which are to be learned in school. With respect to some of the values most clearly belonging among the traditional ones – most notably religious faith and obedience – the students seem to regard them as a private matter, something that the school should not interfere with. This result is in line with a common view among secularization theorists, that it is possible to separate the individual choice of private religion from the public logic of liberal market economy, which dominates modern institutions.²⁶ In secularized societies it is generally thought that one can have a religious faith and at the same time maintain that such beliefs should not be mediated through education but rather be the result of informed individual choice. Even if secularization theory has been disputed in recent years, partly due to the comeback of religion as a political force on the

²⁶ Peter **Berger**, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 107-108; and Gordon **Redding**, "Separating Religious Content from Religious Practice" – *The Hidden Form of Capital*. Eds. Peter L. Berger and Gordon Redding (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 226-227.

Table 1. Child qualities.*

Value dimension**	Child qualities	Learn at home, Zimbabwe	Learn at home, Spain	Learn at home, Sweden	Learn at home, Swe. t.-students early	Learn at home, Swe. t.-students late	Learn in School, Swe. t.-students early	Learn in School, Swe. t.-students late
Sec.-rat./self-expr.	Independence	39.1	43.1	70.3	61.9	53.3	65.7	57.8
Surv./trad.	Hard work	76.0	66.6	13.8	11.2	6.7	26.9	15.6
Sec.-rat.	Feeling of responsibility	43.1	78.6	82.5	82.1	84.4	83.6	84.4
Self-expr.	Imagination	13.3	24.8	46.7	44.0	55.6	43.3	66.7
Self-expr.	Tolerance and respect for other people	63.8	74.1	87.0	94.0	88.9	90.3	84.4
Surv./sec.-rat.	Thrift, saving money and things	25.1	29.6	38.6	34.3	35.6	13.4	20.0
Surv.	Determination, perseverance	49.4	37.5	33.6	30.6	35.6	41.8	46.7
Trad.	Religious faith	59.6	10.6	4.4	3.7	2.2	0.7	2.2
Sec.-rat./trad.	Unselfishness	29.5	35.0	30.4	41.0	66.7	40.3	51.1
Trad.	Obedience	70.1	31.4	12.2	17.2	15.6	9.0	4.4
Self-expr.	Self-expression	20.6	8.3	37.6	28.4	31.1	50.7	53.3

* The results from WVS for tables 1 and 2 are available at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp> (WVS Wave 6: 2010-2014), accessed 21.09.2015.

** This column shows to which kind(s) of value we take the affirmation of these respective qualities to primarily belong. We consider several of them to share characteristics typical of more than one kind of value.

international arena,²⁷ the results from WVS seem to confirm that religion is more persistent on a personal level than on an institutional level.²⁸

Table 2. Attitudes to proper behavior.

Behave properly	Zimbabwe	Spain	Sweden	Swe. t.- students early	Swe. t.- students late
Very much like me	43.3	22.7	10.2	6.7	4.4
Like me	31.8	40.0	23.5	15.7	17.8
Somewhat like me	15.0	22.5	21.3	26.9	17.8
A little like me	7.8	8.8	20.3	23.1	22.2
Not like me	1.7	4.0	16.0	20.9	22.2
Not at all like me	0.4	1.0	7.8	6.7	15.6
No answer/ Don't know	0.0	0.9	0.9	0.0	0.0

In the context of our investigation it may be worth noting that if this tendency to exclude traditional values from the area of responsibility attributed to the educational system comprises also the more cultural and social values emphasized by SNAE, this is problematic given its aim that the pupils shall acquire and develop these fundamental values along with the more secular-rational and self-expression ones. The distinct secular-rational/self-expression evaluative profile of the teacher students is not only problematic in relation to the aim of mediating traditional values, but to the very aim of mediating a set of fundamental values at all. If one regards questions of values as to a large extent a private matter, one may be reluctant to consciously mediate a certain set of values in one's own teaching practice. In fact, this evaluative profile seems to come with

²⁷ Judith Fox, "Secularization" – *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. Ed. John Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2010), 306, 318-319.

²⁸ Inglehart and Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values", 46.

a tendency to downplay the importance of ethics in general. One of the questions asked in WVS was to what extent the respondents considered themselves to be similar to the following person: “It is important to this person to always behave properly; to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong” (Table 2).

As table 2 shows, Swedes in general and Swedish teacher students identify with this person to a much lesser extent than for example people in Spain and Zimbabwe. Apart from the arguably worrying fact that teachers-to-be are so insensitive to the importance of their own behavior, one may wonder how suitable this kind of attitude is for someone whose task it is to mediate certain (allegedly important) fundamental values to children.²⁹

CONCLUDING REMARK

The results of our survey of the evaluative outlook of Swedish teacher students indicate that values on the traditional side of the spectrum are scarcely represented among this group. Yet, certain such values are highlighted by SNAE in various ways – in particular in its emphasis on the importance of a sociocultural perspective within the educational system, where learning is considered to be an essentially social process and not just an individual affair.³⁰ On the assumption that the traditional values which are largely absent from the students’ evaluative outlook include important educational values emphasizing the social and collective aspects of education, the imbalance between on the one hand “individualist values” and on the other hand “social values” in this outlook is troubling (cf. the point made above about the tendency of our respondents to view traditional

²⁹ In relation to this point it may be worth noting that the confidence for teachers among the teacher students is not very high. Only 7.4% of “Swedish teacher students early” and 5.4% of “Swedish teacher students late” report a great deal of confidence in teachers. 56.8% of “Swedish teacher students early” and 51.8% of “Swedish teacher students late” claim to have quite a lot of confidence in teachers. Only 2.5% of “Swedish teacher students early” and 3.6% of “Swedish teacher students late” let their choices be influenced by their teachers to a great deal. Thus, it seems common among teacher students not to regard teachers as role models.

³⁰ E.g. SNAE, *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre* (2011), 12, <http://www.skolverket.se>, accessed 21.09.2015.

values as a private matter, something that the school should not interfere with).³¹ In light of the view that teachers tend to reproduce values in their pedagogical practice, this makes it questionable whether such social values will be present in their future teaching.

For this reason we believe it to be of great importance that teachers – both school teachers and university teachers at the teacher education – are aware of the tension highlighted in this paper, and are capable of reflectively relating themselves to it. A first rather simple step towards such awareness, we suggest, would be to provide dedicated space within the teacher education for discussions both of this tension and of the kind of traditional values that Swedish teacher students tend to reject. Here it might be objected that this would be to force these values on the students. Hence it is important to point out that this is not what we have in mind. Rather, the point is to bring in a wider spectrum of evaluative viewpoints than what these students are currently subjected to, and to provide the opportunity to discuss and problematize one's own values (which are all too easily taken for granted and mutually confirmed) in light of alternative viewpoints (which, of course, should also be discussed and problematized). Hence, the objection can be reversed. The current situation, where certain allegedly important educational values are largely absent from the general evaluative profile of Swedish teacher students, may be partly due to the fact that pupils and students are scarcely subjected to these values. The space for making one's own autonomous decisions with respect to what values to adopt is widened if one has a wider spectrum to choose from. How this is to be achieved more precisely is a difficult question that requires further empirical and normative research.

³¹ See Roger Säljö, "Learning in a sociocultural perspective" – *International Encyclopedia of Education*. Eds. Penelope Peterson, Eva Baker and Barry McGaw (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2010), 499, for a discussion about the importance of a social context for learning. See e.g. Inglehart and Oyserman, "Individualism, Autonomy and Self-Expression", for the relation between secular and individual values as well as traditional and social/collective values.