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Education, Citizenship and Social Justice: Special Issue

Introduction: Conceptions of social justice and citizenship in Scottish and Swedish education systems

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The focus of the special issue

This special issue examines Swedish and Scottish education through the lens of social justice and citizenship. Each paper has a slightly different take on these central concepts, but all recognise that social justice has multiple dimensions relating to (re)distribution, recognition and participation (Fraser, 2005). We also recognise the multi-dimensional nature of citizenship, which refers to the rights and duties accruing to members of a society. Following Marshall (1950), citizenship encompasses civil, political and social rights, all of which may mitigate, but not necessarily eradicate, inequalities in status and wealth. Within the welfare states of Western Europe, which were established in the aftermath of the Second World War, institutions such as education were accorded a central role in promoting social justice and safeguarding citizens' rights while underlining their duties and responsibilities.

The papers in the special issue compare educational systems in Sweden and Scotland, two relatively sparsely populated northern European countries with a similar commitment to social democratic principles. The papers from both countries highlight the

marked similarities between their respective education systems, including the early adoption of comprehensive schooling and inclusion of children with special and additional support needs in mainstream schools and tertiary education. At the same time, in both countries there are concerns about persistent inequalities, uncertainties about how well the system is performing relative to others and debates about future directions of travel.

The papers in this special issue draw attention to concerns in both Sweden and Scotland that comprehensive schooling has only partially eroded social inequalities, with critics noting that the school system continues to channel children into different curricular areas at secondary and upper secondary levels, leading to unequal post-school and labour market outcomes. Howieson et al. (this issue) provide a historical account of the development of comprehensive education in Scotland. From the inception of comprehensive schools in the 1960s until the late 1990s, there was a broad adherence to the principles of universalism, with efforts to provide equal funding to schools and ensure that all children, irrespective of social background, had access to the same high status knowledge. Since this period, there has been a growing emphasis on choice and diversity, accompanied by a belief that the curriculum must be tailored to the assumed needs of different groups and individuals, irrespective of the unequal opportunities which may be introduced into the system as a result. While the broad comprehensive character of the Scottish school system has been maintained, successive administrations have failed to narrow the attainment gap between the bottom fifth of the school population and the average (Hills et al, 2010, McCluskey, this issue), leading to wide gaps in university participation by students from different social classes (Weedon, this issue). The Scottish National Party (SNP) administration, in power for ten years at the time of writing, is seeking

to address the problem by devolving funds from local authorities to individual schools, although there are concerns that this may exacerbate rather than eliminate the problem of unequal educational outcomes.

In Sweden, the commitment to universal services which characterised the post-war welfare state has also been compromised, with concerns that marketisation and diversification of the school system is widening social inequalities in educational outcomes and depressing overall attainment (Johansson, this issue, Dovemark et al., this issue). Government-funded free schools, often run by private companies on a for-profit basis, were introduced in 1992. The policy rhetoric justifying the introduction of the voucher system focused on the need to raise standards by widening parental choice and ending public sector monopoly on school provision. Swedish free schools now cater for about 20% of the school population at upper secondary level. Research suggests that these schools have led to higher levels of segregation by ethnicity and social class within urban areas and have not contributed to improved educational outcomes across the system as a whole (Böhlmark and Lindahl, 2007). In both Sweden and Scotland, there are also ongoing debates about levels of taxation, social expenditure and the future shape of welfare (Rummery and McAngus, 2015; Blomqvist, 2004).

While the growth of economic inequality is a major cause of disquiet across Europe and the developed world (OECD, 2008; 2011; 2015), there are also concerns about other forms of inequality and their inter-relationship. For example, although Sweden and Scotland share a commitment to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Riddell and Weedon, 2016a), over recent years there has been a growth in formal and informal types of exclusion from mainstream classrooms (Isaksson & Lindqvist, 2015; Hjörne 2016; Riddell and Weedon, 2016b). Papers in this special issue, for

example those by Riddell and Weedon and Johnansson, illustrate the way in which additional support needs and disabilities are mediated by social class, with children from less advantaged backgrounds receiving less effective learning support than others.

The focus of the papers

Having provided a broad outline of the themes addressed in this special issue, we now provide a brief overview of the individual papers. Howieson, Croxford and Murphy explore the status of Scottish comprehensive education fifty years after its inception. The paper outlines the underpinning principles of comprehensive schooling, focusing in particular on changes in the understandings of equality over time. The authors note that the early proponents of comprehensive education were mainly concerned with ending academic selection and equalising access to educational opportunities, particularly high status knowledge. More recently attention has shifted to equality of outcome, with growing concern about the persistence of social class inequalities in attainment. The paper highlights the inherent tensions facing comprehensive schooling, as it seeks to equalise experience, processes and outcomes, whilst at the same time selecting young people to fit into highly differentiated post school education systems and labour markets.

McCluskey's paper contrasts the policy rhetoric of social justice in Scottish education which lies uneasily alongside the widening inequalities which are revealed by official statistics on pupil attainment. She argues that the problem of social class inequality in educational outcomes might be better understood and tackled by focusing on three specific areas, namely student participation (Mannion et al., 2015); home-school relationships (Macleod et al., 2013); and behaviour and relationships within school (McCluskey et al. 2013).

The paper by Riddell and Weedon explores the way in which ideas of social justice are reflected in education for learners with additional support needs, who are particularly likely to live in the most deprived parts of Scotland. Whilst administrative data suggest that growing numbers of pupils are identified as having ASN, children living in the most advantaged areas are significantly more likely to have their difficulties formally recognised through statutory support plans, which provide some guarantee of additional support and access to tribunal services to facilitate dispute resolution. Children living in deprived areas experience the cumulative disadvantage of attracting potentially stigmatising labels (such as social emotional and behavioural difficulties), without the potential benefit of the allocation of extra resources, which might contribute to improved educational outcomes. The paper argues that, in order to equalise provision for children with additional support needs, attention needs to be paid to the three dimensions of social justice described by Fraser (2005) relating to distribution of economic and social resources, recognition of cultural value and representation in social institutions and networks.

Turning to the Swedish system, Dovemark et al. note that completion of upper secondary education is of increasing importance for individual, economic and societal development (OECD, 2013). In Sweden, post-16 education has been targeted at all 16 to 20 year olds since the late 1960s within the upper secondary system of 'Gymnasieskola'. Following recent curricular reform, new introductory programmes have been instituted aimed at students who do not qualify for regular national programmes. The research presented illustrates the way in which these new routes, rather than providing greater opportunities, instead represent an additional sub-stratum within a system which is already highly marketised and divided. The courses are predominantly delivered by public rather than free school providers because of their high cost and low status. Overall the programmes tend

to contribute to the exclusion rather than inclusion of a significant proportion of post-16 students, most of whom come from less socially advantaged backgrounds.

Further exploring the nature of social differentiation within the Swedish upper secondary school system, Johansson's ethnographic study analyses the delivery of student support within a municipal upper secondary school. The paper analyses the nature of learning support within the individual, health care and technical programmes. Support services appear to be focused on male pupils from higher socioeconomic backgrounds participating in the technical programme, while students from poorer backgrounds who are enrolled in either the individual or health care programmes receive much less support. The social justice implications of these priorities for resource allocation are discussed.

Finally, Weedon's paper focuses on the position of disabled students within Scottish and Swedish higher education systems, noting some of their key similarities and differences. In both Sweden and Scotland and the UK, the number and proportion of disabled students has increased markedly over the past two decades, with a particularly marked increase in the proportion of students with a diagnosis of dyslexia/specific learning difficulties. The Scottish system, like that of the rest of the UK, has been more tightly regulated than the Swedish system, with an increased focus on the publication of publicly accessible data. One of the advantages of gathering administrative data is that it allows the development of intersectional analysis, exploring the relationship between disability and social class. The UK data show that the majority of university first year students tend to come from professional and managerial backgrounds, and that disabled students are slightly more advantaged than their non-disabled peers. This is in large measure accounted for by the steep rise in participation by students with a diagnosis of dyslexia, who are disproportionately drawn from higher social class backgrounds. The UK is the only European country which gathers the type

of data required for such an analysis, and there may be strong arguments for other countries to gather similar data for comparative purposes. More importantly, however, the data highlight the need for closer grained analysis, focusing on the relationship between a range of variables including type of impairment, social class, gender, ethnicity and age with the overall aim of addressing cumulative disadvantage.

Overall, the papers in this special issue underline the need for ongoing analysis of the fate of comprehensive education systems in post welfare societies (Tomlinson, 2001), as social institutions originally characterised by a high degree of collectivism are reshaped by the pressures of globalisation and marketisation. Comparisons between Sweden and Scotland highlight similarities and differences in the remoulding of the post-war settlement across Europe, and the serious challenges for social justice which are emerging in the wake of ongoing economic insecurity.

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