



NRT SWEDEN 2019

Report

Author: Denkelaar, Monique, Fryshuset Foundation

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Almedalen, Hamnplan H200, Visby - 1st July 2019



Context

Equal access to quality education in Swedish schools

Equal access to education in the world's richest countries appears to be different for children within the same school system. In Sweden, many children especially those coming from socioeconomic vulnerable areas, enter the education system being challenged by systemic dominant discourse, and consequently remain further behind in experiencing all the advantageous outcomes of education that could favour them to reach their full potential for a better quality of life. Current educational policies and practices seemingly do little to reduce the gap between them and their peers. They consequently drop further behind due to the current educational policies and practices, rather than reduce the gap between them and their peers.

According to UNICEF report "Unfair Start"¹, equal opportunity has dropped significantly for children in Sweden to reach their full potential, to pursue their interests and to develop their talents and skills. The report focuses on educational inequalities in 41 of the world's richest countries, all of which are members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and/or the European Union (EU). The report examines inequalities across childhood – from access to preschool to expectations of completing secondary education – and explores in depth the relationships between educational inequality and related factors such as gender, parents' socio-economic and educational background and the design of the school system.

Besides, the OECD report "Equity in education"² shows that the lack of equality is a problem for school systems around the world. The report points out, among other things, that the proportion of adults with lower educational levels or qualifications compared to their parents is 17 percent in Sweden, which is lower than the average in the OECD. According to an equality measure based on seven factors, the Swedish schooling system has deteriorated within five. When it comes to how much a child's social background affects the feeling of belongingness at school, Sweden is one of six countries where development deteriorates - the proportion of students from resource-poor homes who feel they belong in school has decreased from 81 percent to 66 percent, which is below the OECD cut.

At the same time Sweden is facing a national shortage of school buildings due to rapid population growth in recent years. At the beginning of 2017, Sweden's population passed 10 million and it is anticipated that it will reach 11 million in 2028. A large part of the population growth occurs at school age and according to Statistics Sweden's forecast, in ten years there will be 107,000 more at school age, 6-15 years. For example, many school buildings are more than 40 years old, in poor conditions, and not suitably adapted to offer adequate learning and teaching environments. Inadequate environments negatively impact student learning, performance, outcomes and their overall educational experiences. The school staff are invariably included in this problematic situation.

¹ Unicef (2018), Report: *An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children's Education in Rich Countries*
https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/an-unfair-start-inequality-children-education_37049-RC15-EN-WEB.pdf

² OECD (2018), *Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264073234-en>



The population growth and inadequate facilities may result in a shortage of pre- and primary schools in Sweden. According to Magdalena Andersson, Minister of Finance, 1400 new preschools and schools will be needed by 2026. Shortage of school buildings affects the whole of Sweden, both large cities as well as smaller urban areas.

The shortage of school buildings in Sweden need to be acted upon in the years to come. Caution should be taken when investing state funds to meet the higher demand for building these new learning and teaching environments. Poor decisions and incompetence can potentially lead to lowered equitable opportunities of children's quality educational experiences in Swedish schools, especially for those children already marginalized.

National Round Table

Date: July 1st 2019
Time: Half day event 09.45-12.30
Number of participants: 10 panelists – 30+ other participants
Venue: Almedalen, Hamnplan H200, Visby

The event was organized by Stiftelsen Fryshuset in cooperation with NCC Building Sweden.

Agenda:

09.45-10.30	Introduction and presentations of panellists
10.30-10.40	Presentation of key findings of UNICEF report on school segregation and OECD's report, "Equity in education".
10.40-11.25	Panel discussion on how to create learning environments that promote equity in Swedish schools.
11.25-11.45	Q&A: questions from the audience
11.45-12.30	Conclusions and remarks

Moderator: Anna Trane, NCC

Participants: Johan Oljeqvist, CEO Fryshuset and Head principals of Schools, Marcus Sandlund, business manager schools NCC Building, Fredrik Lindgren, CEO, Kunskapsskolan, Tomas Kronståhl, member of the Swedish parliamentary Committee on Education, Faisa Jama Nur, student, Kawasar Ibrahim, student

Inequality in school education leads to disadvantage, social -emotional challenges and insecurity. One of the biggest challenges when building new schools is to include early in the process all key stakeholders such as school children, business leaders, teachers and educators to administration managers and operational staff. Early involvement of key stakeholders is the key to building socially sustainable school environments.

The overall aim of the NRT was to discuss how multi-stakeholder cooperation can contribute to the positive development of building new school buildings and development of better teaching and learning environments that promote equity in schools around Sweden. A broad discussion was held about stakeholder's strengths and their response to challenges regarding preparedness and anticipation for tackling the challenges ahead. As well as identifying the skills and knowledge required to tackle challenges and discuss ways different stakeholder groups can jointly create commitment and involvement early in planning. The NRT also aimed to highlight the



risks involved in the planning process when demand of creating new learning and teaching environments is so high.

The goals of the event were to:

- increase awareness regarding necessary policy changes and of strategies for tackling the high demand for building new learning environments that promote equitable learning opportunities for all students in Sweden.
- increase awareness of students' views on these issues and actively involve them in the process.
- increase and improve knowledge about and awareness of obstacles and strategies to overcome them among different groups of stakeholders (e.g. students, policy makers, NGOs, school representatives and building in-group cooperation).

Inputs and debate points

J. Oljeqvist, CEO and Head principal of Fryshuset Schools pointed out that one of the underlying factors of the current situation is that school concept was designed according to the demographics and community structures of the 1950-1960s. Government therefore lack preparedness to deal with current social challenges and educational demands. Student composition today is very different from that of the 1960's with the student population demonstrating more heterogeneous characteristics in terms of cultural, ethnic and socio-economic contexts. Social cohesion, emotional bonding and educational belongingness within and across diverse groups is crucial in current educational systems. A lack of this could create undue demands on school staff who are not adequately equipped to deal with disadvantages in education system.

Both students involved in the debate said that schools struggle to manage the ever-growing number of students and class sizes. This is not only a practical challenge but has also a negative effect on the individual's position in the classroom. The teaching approach focuses on attention and feedback to groups rather than on the individual. Consequently, meeting the individual student's needs can be a monumental task for teachers. T. Kronståhl, member of the Swedish parliamentary Committee on Education highlighted the increasing need to be better at meeting the student's individual needs on a local level and in schools with more homogenous student groups. Resource allocation could be adjusted to the degree and scale of the challenges that each individual school meets. "If resources are provided as needed, the outcome will be different", he said.

Student K. Ibrahim believes that schools should be a place for creativity. It should be an environment for personal development designed to support learning for each student. M. Sandlund, business manager schools NCC Building, explained that one must create a school that is varied; schools should contain a variety of learning and teaching environments which are relevant for the students.



F. Lindgren, CEO for Kunskapsskolan, highlighted the importance of decision-making in the planning process on where to locate new schools. Strategic planning of the school location at the intersections between different living areas could potentially be a key factor in decreasing housing segregation.

Also, the importance of involving key stakeholders at the early stage of planning to build these learning and teaching environments was discussed. The broader discussions on the quality of urban development may improve by capturing expertise, knowledge and experiences from various stakeholders and by developing strategic partnerships.

Student and community involvement in the process of creating new school buildings and the learning environments in it is key according to J. Oljeqvist, CEO and Head principal of Fryshuset Schools. F. Jama Nur, student, also said that "Instead of talking about young people, decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders should talk *with* young people. Fryshuset presented an example of this involvement when building Fryshuset School in Husby, Stockholm. By involving the community, they even provided employment opportunities to local residents and thereby actively contributed to tackle poverty and social exclusion in one of the socioeconomic vulnerable areas in Sweden."

Lastly, from a political perspective, the suggestions for improvement are realistic and the ideas achievable, according to T. Kronståhl, member of the Swedish parliamentary Committee on Education. Politicians should further create conditions, but it is up to all professionals and students to ensure that they create schools that are relevant to them and fit the social context.

Conclusions

The following recommendations were made:

- Politicians must accept that the social contract on which our Swedish schooling system is based is no longer relevant. They need to see society with a fresh look as the sociocultural and economic demographics have considerably changed.
- Price should no longer be the key driver for public procurement, making it easier for actors to include social requirements.
- The resource allocation system is the most important in order to create equity in schools.
- Glorify the teaching profession so that more skilled teachers prefer to work in school. Emphasize where you place teachers and focus on improving teacher-pupil relationships.

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- Clarify each individual school's goals and monitor progress continuously in order to be able to offer timely supportive measures in place quickly and efficiently.

Way forward

Participants will follow up on the discussions after the NRT. Meetings to discuss possible collaboration to tackle the challenges identified will be scheduled during the fall of 2019. For example, NCC Building wants to develop a process involving the local students, the teachers, the cleaners, etc. Also, participants will work jointly to further discuss the topic in other forums they either get invited to through their networks or organize themselves.

Follow up

At Fryshuset, we work for society to take young people's opinions and ideas seriously since we are convinced that this contributes to a creative and solution-orientated climate that dares to think differently. We provide young people with opportunities to exert influence and encourage them to participate in order to help them develop their full potential and improve their health. By involving youth in different processes and providing them with tools and knowledge we promote their empowerment in helping them shape their own future. Fryshuset works for and with young people within the social context in which they live. This means that the Fryshuset is always strongly committed to bring different stakeholders together to create the best conditions for young people. Fryshuset's expertise in youth participation will be supportive for the building of new schools according to the vision of young people.

Continuity with the NRT 2018

The NRT highlighted a different perspective on the negative development for equal access to education in Sweden. Last year, the NRT raised awareness on increasing school segregation in Sweden which specifically affects children and youth from socioeconomic vulnerable backgrounds. The 2019 NRT focused on another aspect that contributed to unequal access to quality education, affecting the same target group in a negative way, namely learning and teaching environments.

In this way, this NRT 2019 followed up on the overall theme and a number of concluding points for the way forward for equity in Swedish schools that can be distilled from the NRT organized in 2018. This year's NRT aimed to ensure that these conclusions are acknowledged and acted upon. This, among other things, is to be achieved by active involvement of youth in the NRT and other relevant stakeholder groups at national, regional and local level.



Challenges

Fryshuset did not encounter any difficulty in organizing and/or implement the NRT. Almedalen is an annual political summit held in Sweden and an important platform for Fryshuset for influencing policy makers. Fryshuset's engagement in Almedalen is always to talk about important issues that affect young people in society, especially concerning those who are at risk or already face exclusion. We highly involve young people in different seminars we organize ourselves and are being invited to. Last year we struggled to organize the NRT in time due to a last-minute change in plans. This year, we set the date for the NRT well in advance giving us time to plan, prepare and organize the seminar. Also, we failed to register the audience signatures. The seminar was open to all to listen in, thereby we failed to perform this task. The seminar has been documented through photos and video-recording.



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Participants

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Name	Organisation/ institution	Position in organisation/ institution
<i>POLICY MAKERS</i>		
Tomas Kronståhl	The Swedish Parliament	Member of Swedish parliamentary Committee on Education
<i>TEACHERS, TEACHER-TRAINERS, SCHOOL-LEADERS OR OTHER SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES</i>		
Johan Oljeqvist	Fryshuset	Head principal of Fryshuset Schools
Fredrik Lindgren	Kunskapsskolan AB	CEO
Linda Skogsby	Fryshuset	Trainer
<i>PARENTS- AND STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES</i>		
Faisa Jama Nur	Borlänge gymnasieskola	Student
Kawsar Ibrahim	Flen gymnasieskola	Student
<i>OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS</i>		
Anna Trane	NCC	Moderator
Marcus Sandlund	NCC Building Schools	Business manager