

A Marxist Analysis of the Value-based Education Portrayed in the Swedish Curriculum for Upper Secondary School



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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the Swedish national curriculum from a Marxist perspective. I aim to examine how a Marxist reading can aid in our understanding of not only the document itself and the ideological views portrayed in it, but also the implications this has for English teachers in Sweden today. The schooling which takes place in classrooms, as well as outside of them, is political by its nature and the knowledge taught has the potential to influence future political decisions of learners. The reasoning for using a politically charged focal lens is to achieve a more thorough analysis by showing known information in a new light and thus gaining new insight into the national curricular documents. In order for teachers to work with and to feel their teaching is supported by the national curriculum, analysing the curricular document is vital. The purpose of this paper can therefore be said to further our understanding and familiarity of the national curricular document along with providing new perspectives on the ideological standpoints that are shown in these. The results showed that the view portrayed in the Swedish national curriculum of what is considered a democratic necessity differ from that of educational Marxist theory, nor is the student's influence over their own education as great as Marxist theorists propagate for. Whereas Marxist education sees education as a tool in the creation of tomorrow's society, the Swedish curriculum focusses on the dominant values of today.

Keywords: Curriculum, Educational Marxism, Ideology, Citizenship formation, Democratic values

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Introduction

If text produces ideology (Khaghaninejad, 2015, p. 94), it is necessary for us to realise that it is not objective. Similarly, neither education nor educational texts can be apolitical and fully neutral as they by their nature are impossible to separate from the ideologies within the surrounding society (Apple, 1979, p. 2). Education, Apple writes, is intimately linked to the organisation of a society, the social and cultural control, along with the economic role it ultimately plays as the educator of labour. Despite this, the ideal stated in the curriculum of a democratic yet non-political school and the values that are being taught, could be said to seek to school students into a political system through acceptance of the ideology as neutral and unquestionable (Sarup, 1978, p. 138).

Although the Swedish curriculum states the transferring of values and norms as one of the schooling's main tasks (Skolverket, 2011, p. 6), the National Agency for Education, Skolverket, also claims the necessity of objectivity: "Teaching should be objective and encompass a range of different approaches. When values are presented, their source and status should always be made explicit." (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4). Which knowledge is legitimised and for whom, the way it is being taught, along with the pervading values and principles is governed by the national policy documents and neither they nor their scientific foundation are created within an ideological vacuum. The aim of this study is to analyse and critique the Swedish national curriculum from a Marxist perspective and to examine how a Marxist reading can aid in our understanding of not only the documents themselves and the ideological views portrayed in these, but also the implications this has for teachers in Sweden today. Because the source document, the curriculum, was read in English and this paper written within an English course, some remarks regarding the implications the results of this paper has for English teachers will be discussed as well.

The curricular aim

One of the main missions for the educational institution within the liberal society is to act as a neutraliser of background and to make sure education is accessible and equal for everyone, providing opportunity for social mobility due to its meritocratic function (Apple, 1979, p. 18-19). Though there have been several studies and articles discussing the Swedish national education policies and several have even discussed the democratic values and ideas surrounding citizenship formation written into the Swedish curriculum, few have chosen to treat and analyse the curriculum as a literary text and therefore chosen to analyse it using literary analysis. When the new curriculum for Swedish upper secondary schools was created, this was done under a centre-right government with a Liberal being the head of the education department. To analyse the curriculum from a Marxist perspective may therefore be helpful in determining hidden ideology within the policy documents as Marxism is often in direct opposition to Liberalism and Liberal ideas on the worker. Therefore, I have chosen to perform a qualitative inductive Marxist literary analysis on the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school using curricular theory. Furthermore, this paper focusses especially on the portrayal of the ideal citizen and the ideology of citizenship formation from a Marxist perspective.

This introductory part of the essay begins by explaining and defining relevant terms within Marxist theory, before a shorter discussion on educational Marxism. Following this will be the analysis where the Swedish national policy documents for English are read from a Marxist perspective using Marxist literary analysis theory. The paper will conclude with a discussion on the implications these findings have on the teaching profession in Sweden with an emphasis on the role of the English teacher.

Curricular theory

“What should be taught to whom for which purpose in which circumstance?” (Dillion, 2014, p. 346) is perhaps the most central question(s) within curriculum studies. The evaluating question is described in Dillion’s scheme of questions used for the evaluation and realisation of curriculum which will be used in the analysis described in this study, with the most essential question being what the final aim of the Swedish educational policy documents is. Much like a reader may ask what the message or goal of a book is, it is of interest to curriculum theorists what purpose the curriculum serves and the connection between society and the role of education (Börjesson, 2016, p. 46). Although the curriculum states what policy writers intend for students to gain knowledge about, within curricular theory the term *hidden curriculum* is used to describe what is learnt inadvertently (McCutcheon, 1988, p. 191). The hidden curriculum is “transmitted through the everyday, normal goings-on in schools”, through interactions between teachers and students or by the text books, (McCutcheon, 1988, p. 191).

It is vital to note that due to the unintentional factor of the hidden curriculum, it may go against what is stated by the official curriculum. From the standpoint of this essay we seek to analyse both the official and hidden curriculum from a Marxist perspective with the help of structuralist curricular theory to determine if there are examples of hidden ideology at play in the policy documents. Structuralist curricular theory, like Marxist educational theory which will be developed further below, examines the connection between educational policy and economic changes in society. It can be said to focus on how schools are affected and subordinate the requirements of the labour market and thus the economic needs of the society it operates within (Börjesson, 2016, p. 47).

Educational Marxism

Marxist theory makes it clear that literature is a man-made product and as such is produced within a social context and therefore reflects the society and its dominating ideologies it is created within (Balibar & Macherey, 1996, p. 4). Thus, according to Marxist thought, one must look at the context of the policy documents which prescribe what is being taught in schools in order to fully understand them and the function of the institution which they govern today. Furthermore, this contextualisation may serve to further our understanding of who the knowledge and values taught in schools benefit (Apple, 1979, p. 16). Apple (1976, p. 6) goes on to explain that the relationship between the institution of knowledge and the political and economic hegemony is easily taken for granted, yet knowledge and the distribution of it cannot be apolitical as it is determined by what knowledge is legitimised and for whom, by the dominant culture within society.

In keeping with Marxist tradition, nature is shaped by man rather than the other way around, meaning that no knowledge can be fully neutral (Sarup, 1978, p. 114). The institution of education serves to supply the economy with educated labour and may therefore act as a producer as well as preserver of economic and cultural capital alike. That is to say, writes Apple (1979, p. 3), the function of schools allows “social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination”. In short, schools serve an ideological function which within the liberal society results in the reproduction of inequality due to its emphasis on “ability” and by ensuring that only those students that may help the economy through the maximisation of profit will go on to higher education. The liberal idea of meritocracy, where a student’s academic success is seen as solely due to individual capability rather than heavily influenced by social background, is heavily criticised within educational Marxism, yet prevalent within the Swedish educational policy documents (Börjesson, 2016, p. 50).

Alienation

Much as production is seen by Marx as being an act of dehumanisation within the capitalist economy, education is within a liberal society one part in the enormous economic production system which in turn becomes a tool of alienation in the hands of the dominating class (Sarup, 1978, p. 117). The aim of education is not the schooling itself, but rather the means it serves as a way to provide future labour in order to ensure economic development. For the individual student, her work is a means to satisfy future monetary needs for survival which according to Marxist thought leads to alienation from herself, her work, and her fellow students, due to the emphasis on the individual within Liberalism (Sarup, 1978, p. 117). Another reason for the alienation from other students is the stratification of students, as it makes their future schooling opportunities and occupation the main characteristic she is defined by (Sarup, 1978, p. 119). Sarup therefore concludes that the differentiation of students sort pupils into social classes which do not interact and do not feel a belonging.

Hidden ideology

Hidden ideology is a Marxist term for the dominating values and norms within a society, which is a way for the hegemonic group to legitimise inequality and unbalanced power structures. Like literature, knowledge and especially what is seen as worthwhile knowledge for students to learn is not absolute but instead dependent on context and which society the education takes place within (Sarup, 1978, p. 55). In other words, knowledge, and by extension education, is by its nature ideological, although we may not recognise it as such due to our own bias. Schools convey this ideology through the values that are being taught, as well as through which words are used, and which knowledge is considered relevant and for whom. The fact that this ideology is hidden is vital within Marxism as this ensures that the ideology is not negotiated but can instead reproduce the norms and values of the dominant group without non-dominant groups realising the oppression. Through the use of the ideology

of equal possibilities and meritocracy, structural inequality is legitimised and accepted as neutral and natural in the Swedish society (Börjesson, 2016, p. 55). As a result of this legitimisation, norms and behaviours are internalised through a reward system of attitudes such as passivity and obedience, attitudes which are also beneficial within a capitalist society (Sarup, 1978, p. 166). Sarup continues, explaining that this allows the students to become self-monitoring of their own attitudes, the obedience to an external authority of historical education systems has become internal and through the “reproduction of the consciousness” (Sarup, 1978, p. 168), society at large is reproduced, ensuring the continued dominance of the dominant group.

The school within the capitalist society

The reproduction of values is reinforced through the curriculum’s insistence (Skolverket, 2011, p. 6) that all staff must distance themselves from anything that conflicts with the core values. Despite the fact that the taught values and norms are to be the same as make up the ruling ideology of today’s Swedish society the teaching is also meant to be objective. However, within Marxist thought this is not possible as the reproduction of values and thus the society at large is political and benefits certain ideologies and groups but not others (Sarup, 1978, p. 138). Through a reward system, grading, schools are able to promote certain values as right while demonising others, as such, schools play an important role in the institutionalisation of hidden ideologies. Schooling, in other words, can be used a tool for the dominant class to reward those who agree with or do not act against their policies.

Institutionalised values can become a device used to control the population while political ideologies which would see the foundation of the society changed along with the norms, such as Marxism, are undermined or even seen as threatening (Dahlstedt & Olson, 2014, p. 12). A Marxist criticism of value-based education which does not seek to equalise citizens and to create a communist society, is that the education is not meant to free citizens or to serve as an

equaliser, but rather to create passive labourers who do not criticise or rise against the dominant class and its ideology but merely aid in their accumulation of capital (Sarup, 1978, p. 139; Cole, 2008, p. 30). The schools within the capitalist society and the education which takes place within their classrooms play a key role in the reproduction of economic inequality, hierarchical social structures along with our society. As a result, the commodification of students results in alienation from themselves as the main goal of their schooling is to find a job and make money to consume goods, rather than freeing themselves of the chains of repressive ideologies and structures.

Swedish Educational Policy

The national curriculum for upper secondary school

The 2011 curriculum was implemented by a centre-right government to improve students' results and strengthen the link between the school system and the labour market (Carlbaum, 2012, p. 176). The diversification of the national programmes for upper secondary schools is intensified while simultaneously the focus on upper secondary school as a conveyor of democratic values is downplayed compared to earlier curricula (Ledman, 2014, p. 21). In previous curricula, the general core subjects had been seen as a democratic tool through which all citizens had access to the same basic knowledge and these subjects part of a socialisation process. However, the vocational programmes were considered to have become too theoretical when the centre-right government, and as a result the general subjects were reduced on these programmes in the new curriculum (Ledman, 2014, p. 38). As a result, graduates from the vocational programmes are no longer eligible for higher education. Ledman proceeds to explain how the vocational programmes instead have come to more heavily feature profession-specific subjects as the general core subjects did, despite their democratic value, not increase the students' employability.

Carlbaum (2012, p. 220) describes the new curriculum as a “school for the labour market” and a return to a former social order by highlighting how words such as flexibility and freedom of choice are emphasised in the national policy documents at the expense of terms like equality and democracy in an effort to ensure employability and economic growth. Carlbaum (2012, p. 230) continues by noting how the idea of class and socioeconomic background is less explicit compared to during previous reformation processes, and goes on to explain that it is instead gender equality that is given prominence although to a lesser extent than before. The Swedish school system has a long tradition of value based education and the latest version of the curriculum for upper secondary schools from 2011 is not an exception. However, as the Swedish society and the world at large has changed and moved from a social democratic to more liberal, so has the emphasis on which values and norms that are seen as ideal and which the school system is supposed to convey. Today the fundamental values according to the national guidelines mainly concern democracy and human rights, especially regarding gender equality, multiculturalism, and the freedom of the individual (Skolverket, 2011, p. 5).

Citizenship formation

To foster responsible and actively participating citizens became vital for the Nordic welfare model, both for the economic and democratic gain (Lundahl & Olson, 2013, p. 201). The role of education is therefore not merely to educate children in Maths and Language, but also to create ideal citizens for the current and future society through promoting certain ideals and values. Citizenship formation is summarised by the Swedish researchers Olson and Dahlstedt (2014, p. 10) as the schooling to form ideal citizens to maintain the society the educational institution operates in, although this is not to say that the citizenship formation is contained within the classroom. As such, citizenship is not seen as

something the individual is born into, but rather something that is constructed and created. Through civic education, the Swedish school is commissioned to convey a belief in a predetermined set of values in order to ensure democratically capable citizens (Skolverket, 2011, p. 5).

Through the examination of Swedish educational policy documents, Olson and Dahlstedt found the ideal citizen to be understood as formed by and adjusted to the contemporary society through the reproduction of norms and values rather than their creator (Olson & Dahlstedt, 2014, p. 11). As a result, the norms and ideals being pushed, especially regarding democracy, tolerance, and independence, are seen as unnegotiable (Cote et al., 2013, p. 223). The role of citizenship education is mainly to prepare the students for their future in contemporary Sweden and is heavily student-centred, as opposed to focused on the well-being of the nation or loyalty to the state (Cote et al., 2013, p. 226). This is a development that is closely connected to the neoliberal opposition of the state-centred education of the Swedish earlier school systems, which focused on the community and society as opposed to the individual (Börjesson, 2016, p. 51).

Analysis

Reproduction of democratic values

The Swedish school has always strived towards educating students regarding citizenship. Although the emphasis on citizenship formation and democratic values has increased starting from the leftist movement towards the end of the 1960's (Börjesson, 2016, p. 25), the role of schooling as an equaliser and a tool to combat social inequality in an effort to realise the full potential of each individual student has long been at the core of the Swedish school system. Indeed, this is still clearly distinguishable in today's curriculum where the

ideas of democracy and values of everyone's equal worth is emphasised, although Börjesson (2016, p. 20) concedes that this emphasis has lessened in later curricula. The Swedish National Agency for Education, Skolverket, states one of the main goals of the Swedish education system to be to "impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based" (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4), which highlights the school's mission as a reproducer of values already present and dominant within the Swedish society.

According to Marxism, a capitalist society with inequality at its core does not allow schools to counteract the oppressive foundation as long as it benefits the dominant group (Sarup, 1978, p. 166) and secure their ability to accumulate. Sarup (1978, p. 167) states that because the capitalist society, and therefore by extension its schools, is governed by capitalist institutions which by their nature are autocratic, the workforce schools supply the labour market with is thus stratified and divided which hinders the establishment of class consciousness. This is not to do with the nature of schooling itself, but rather the society it operates within as the school's main mission is to prepare students for their future lives within that society. That is to say that as the Swedish school system is currently operating within a capitalist society, the schooling is likely to legitimise capitalist ideology and values. This may be done both through which knowledge is considered relevant and legitimate (and for whom) as well as by rewarding behaviours which are also beneficial within a capitalist society (Sarup, 1978, p. 166). Through incorporating capitalist values into the curriculum, Sarup argues that the schooling produces a workforce which has internalised these ideals. This, along with the legitimisation of the same, might increase the risk of students seeing capitalism and its supporting ideas as the unnegotiable truth.

The democratic values that are being referred to are mentioned as “The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people” (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4). Of especial interest to this study is how the term *equality between men and women* specifies that it is a certain kind of equality that is singled out, gender equality, as opposed to equality between people in general. Neither equality between races nor economic equality is mentioned. It may be argued that the usage of the term *equality between genders* suggests that other concepts of equality need not be mentioned and are not considered as democratically relevant. Although it is important to note that this formulation does not exclude other definitions of equality, it centralizes a limited scope of what this equality may entail. As Marxism is particularly interested in the conflict between classes and economic equality, it is from this perspective especially interesting to question why the authors of the curriculum have chosen to leave out other types of equality or even why a certain form is mentioned specifically and not all forms of equality. As Marxism states that economic equality and a classless society is not possible within capitalism, it may be argued that the inclusion of these terms would not be compatible with curriculum which does not actively seek to overturn capitalism. Instead, it may appear to the reader of the Swedish curriculum that complementing concepts of equality beyond gender equality are optional and less relevant for democracy to take place within today’s Swedish society.

The explicit meaning of the following term regarding *solidarity between people* is not further explained. The curriculum does however mention solidarity at several points and it is then specified that the education should allow students to develop “international solidarity” (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4) and a sense of “belonging, solidarity and responsibility towards people outside the immediate group” (Skolverket, 2013, p. 1). The idea of international solidarity is echoed within educational Marxism which is a field which often

criticises the capitalist society for not emphasising solidarity and cooperation enough (Sarup, 1978, p. 117). According to Marxism, a capitalist society by definition does not allow for economic equality nor therefore the upheaval of social class (Femia, 1993, p. 13). This would render it impossible for the Swedish curriculum to state equality as one of the education's core values unless the aim is to radically change the Swedish society into a classless one. Through solidarity it may instead be possible to bridge the gap between social groups only to a certain degree and, as the curriculum (Skolverket, 2013, p. 10) states, experience "a sense of belonging" across this social division while keeping its foundations intact. Unlike equality, instilling *a sense of* solidarity does not require social change or action and is therefore possible within the current society. This could be seen as reinforcing the curriculum's statement that the democratic values the education is to emphasise, are those which the Sweden of today rests upon, which is neither classless nor economically equal.

Discrimination and values

The school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise. No one in school should 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. All tendencies to discrimination or degrading treatment should be actively combated. (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4).

Tying in to the previous discussion regarding the emphasis on gender equality rather than other forms of equality, the anti-discrimination section of the curriculum clearly states *gender* as the first possible basis for discrimination to be discouraged and counteracted. Although the grounds for discrimination are not said to be ordered by importance, by mentioning gender first, this distinguishes it from the following discrimination criteria which

may be interpreted as giving *gender* a certain sense of importance. The distinction of gender is made especially obvious as it is separated from *transgender identity* and despite the clear connection between the two they are not written together. The choice to disjoin two such related words could potentially give the reader the impression that the terms are written in an order of importance, or perhaps in the order of which type of discrimination is thought by the authors of the curriculum to be most likely to occur.

It may also be of interest to note that the Swedish original talks of *gender non-conforming identity or expression* (Skolverket, 2011, p. 5) [My translation] rather than *transgender identity and its expression* as is the case in the English translation of the curriculum. It is unclear why the translator has chosen this translation of the term and what implications, if any, this may have for students and school personnel who identify as gender non-conforming but not transgender. As translation theory and gender studies lie outside the scope of this essay, I therefore welcome further discussion in the teacher community and future research on what possible implications this may have for the anti-discrimination efforts in Swedish schools.

It is from a Marxist perspective interesting to note that class is not included in the enumeration of grounds for discrimination to counteract through the education and the surrounding work. The Swedish Education Act states that “Everyone should, independent of [...] social and economic conditions, have equal access to education in the school system [...]” (Skollag 2010:800, ch.1, §8). Despite this, we know that class plays a role in students’ education; it is for example seen as a contributing factor to students’ likelihood to enrol in and graduate from higher education as well as their perception of the same (Grant, 2016, p. 3). The Swedish classroom is a place where students from different backgrounds are able to meet and therefore plays an important part of the socialisation and integration of the future generation into the current society, yet working class students are less likely than their peers

with a different socioeconomic background to continue onto university. As previously expanded on, Marxist theory states that this is because of the hidden ideology that the school system is part of, aiding in the reproduction of society (Cole, 2008, p. 30). Because of this reproduction, students of all class backgrounds are more likely to follow in their parents' footsteps. In the light of this, socioeconomic background may be argued to be a form of discrimination and should therefore be mentioned explicitly in the curriculum along with other factors for discrimination.

The fact that class and socioeconomic background is not mentioned may be part of a hidden ideology in which, through ignoring its significance in favour of other forms of discrimination, class background is seen as less relevant and less pressing as it seemingly need not be mentioned explicitly, unlike the ones listed. It may therefore even be questioned whether socioeconomic background is included at all in the anti-discrimination passage. This touches upon the previous discussion on equality and the reproduction of society. Marxist theory states that certain groups stand to benefit from the oppression and silencing of the lower class and that these groups may therefore seek to counteract class consciousness in an effort to reproduce the current society with themselves as the continued dominant group. They in other words stand to gain from the omission of class as a factor for discrimination.

Knowledge for whom?

Which knowledge is considered relevant and legitimate and for whom in a capitalist society? The 2011 curriculum, as previously mentioned (see also Ledman, 2014), features a decreased amount of hours and courses in the general subjects which are not directly profession-related for students on the vocational programmes. It is not seen as strictly necessary for the vocational students' future work life to study theoretical subjects to the same degree as students in the academic programmes. Ledman (2014, p. 31) notes that the

government bill the 2011 curriculum is based on, unlike those of previous years, does not state the general subjects for all upper secondary school programmes as a democratic tool. Instead, vocational students are mainly taught in subjects which strictly relate to their future professional lives. A possible interpretation of this curricular decision is that it has been taken in order to make the vocational programmes more time-efficient (Ledman, 2014, p. 26) when less time is dedicated to subjects not strictly necessary for the students' future professional lives. From a Marxist perspective however, this could potentially serve to undermine democracy as capitalism and economic growth may appear to be prioritised over educational equality which plays an important part within educational Marxism in creating opportunities for active citizenship necessary for democracy to take place (Apple and Beyer 1988, p. 4).

The critique of schools and curriculums as undemocratic and promoting capitalism is not new. Already in the beginning of the 20th century, Socialists criticised the American school system for “preparing (or not preparing) groups of children for their role in the struggle to eliminate economic inequalities” (Teitelbaum, 1988, p. 35), and therefore the opportunity to ensure further democratisation of the American society. Teitelbaum argues that this was done through the promotion of capital interests, passivity, and the acceptance of social inequality while counteracting working-class interests. Instead of aiding in the creation of a Socialist society, the American curriculum of the time was therefore seen as “hardly sympathetic to the forces of reform” or even hostile to organised labour (Teitelbaum, 1988, p. 35-36). The students were said to be susceptible to the criticism of the working-class movement which might be brought forward in the classrooms and having their minds “perverted to capitalist purposes” (Teitelbaum, 1988, p. 35). The competitiveness and act of pitting students, whether foreign or domestic, against each other was seen as especially dangerous with Socialist curriculums instead highlighting the importance of cooperation and social awareness.

Furthermore, Marxist critics such as Freire have long propagated for a more equal relationship between teacher and student, where both parties together are responsible for what is taught or realised within the classroom through a dialogue (Posner, 1988, p. 90). Results of this can be seen in the Swedish curriculum as it emphasises students' right to influence their own schooling. However, this level of cooperation between students and teacher does not reach the level suggested by Marxist educational theorists as the students may only "exercise influence" (Skolverket, 2013, p. 11) within the by Skolverket and policymakers given framework. Instead, limiting students' opportunity to control their own schooling may increase the likelihood of policy decisions being influenced largely by political ideologies which do not necessarily seek to liberate the people, such as educational Marxism puts as the goal for education (Posner, 1988, p. 91).

Discussion

While the purpose of this essay is to analyse the values and norms which are stated in the Swedish national curriculum as the aim of the Swedish school system, it is impossible to separate this theoretical analysis from the more practical side of teaching. Therefore, the following section discusses the possible implications the findings of this study may have for educators in Sweden, paying especial attention to teachers of English.

Advice and implications for teachers

No text, as previously mentioned, is fully neutral and free from ideology and this includes the policy documents provided by the National Agency for Education. The reason for this is twofold; the national curriculum explicitly states the aim of the Swedish school as teaching students certain values. This shows an ideological stance on the function of schooling and, as a result of this positioning, the document states which values that are to be

taught and which are to be discouraged and actively countered. The national curriculum is thus not written with the intention of being a neutral, objective document but a political one, to be seen for teachers and school personnel as a guiding hand on which education is to take place within Swedish schools, especially regarding which values are to be taught. While it is up to teachers to follow the national policy documents, this does not exclude the need to deepen the understanding of the documents and therefore also one's work through a critical reading of these. The curriculum points out the necessity for students to partake in critical thinking and to critically examine everything they are exposed to, then teachers may be expected to do the same and to be aware of the ideologies, hidden or overt, that are to be found in the material used in their daily work. The Marxist term hidden ideology makes this issue even more relevant as teachers, if not students as well, are expected to understand the role their work plays in the society they operate within.

This raises the question if curricular studies should have a permanent place within teacher education in Sweden. The above mentioned question of "What should be taught to whom for which purpose in which circumstance?" is a way to put one's role as a teacher in a bigger perspective and view the work one performs as affecting not just the individual students in the particular classroom, but society as a whole due to the moral fostering of pupils one is expected to carry out. Naturally, a bigger emphasis on curricular studies may not only prove beneficial regarding the teaching of norms and values but also the subject knowledge as well as source evaluation. The curriculum guides the teacher through their planning of their teaching, and a deepened understanding of the document may aid in this endeavour. It is therefore not only teacher candidates who can benefit from actively analysing school policy documents using curricular theory, but active teachers as well.

Part of the intention behind this analysis is to raise awareness of the political nature of the policy documents. It must not be forgotten that these documents are not neutral

and apolitical, but written within a specific context in a society where certain values are legitimised, as well as being written with a political intent. The exact message may differ from one curriculum to another and from one country to the next, however this does not change the need for the text to be contextualised and viewed in the light of an ideological tool serving a purpose. The role these documents can play in determining future generations' values and norms can be argued to have a bigger impact on future society than the knowledge itself which students are taught by the teaching. This as the values, according to the theory of hidden ideology, are internalised and therefore inseparable from the beliefs the student would otherwise hold.

The school's mission as a moral fosterer and transmitter of values and norms undeniably raises questions regarding the assumed objectivity of education (Skolverket, 2011, p. 6). Unfortunately, the answer to these questions lie outside the scope of this essay: Can the schooling which follows a political document with a political purpose be completely "objective and balanced" as the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011, p. 6) demands, how are teachers to approach this seeming contradiction? Educational Marxism, as previously discussed, does give an answer to the question of whether teaching in itself can be neutral by looking at teaching as a text. As a text by its nature is a production of ideology (Eagleton, 2006, p. 64) education cannot be completely objective and decontextualized and teaching can thus by its very nature not be a neutral enterprise.

The National Agency for Education and teachers can be said to be in a position of power and authority which serves to legitimise the values, whether explicitly stated by the curriculum or part of the hidden ideology within the same, transferred through education. As pointed out by Cote et al., (2013, p. 223) as well as Sarup (1979, p. 166), these ideals may as a result come to be seen by students as the unnegotiable truth. Educational Marxism raises the issue of students who disagree with either the core values or the behaviour the current school

system promotes and may therefore see themselves punished for their rejection of these (Sarup, 1979, p. 166), creating an undemocratic school environment. Furthermore, as mentioned above there is undoubtedly a risk that it is not always clear to students who exactly is behind the values supposedly conveyed through the education, especially concerning the hidden values. However, there is also no guarantee that teachers are aware whether their own teaching includes hidden ideologies which they have thus not notified the students of, making the education biased and raising potential concern for the assumed democratic spirit of the education. Teachers may therefore be advised to be critical of how values are portrayed in their teaching and to make certain to follow the curriculum which states that the education should be objective and to make explicit the source behind discernible values (Skolverket, 2011, p. 4).

It is not only teachers who may benefit from critically examining school policy documents, but students as well. The national curriculum states the need for students to develop critical thinking and to view what they see or hear, be it on the TV, in a novel, or in a videogame and to think about what hidden ideology might be portrayed in media (Skolverket, 2011, p. 60). Yet this is no guarantee that students are also taught to critically examine the information and education they are given by their teachers and other school personnel. Instead, there is a distinct possibility that due to the policy document explicitly stating the neutrality of the education, that students are unaware of the political nature of the teaching. Indeed, the curriculum's expressed sentiment that "When values are presented, their source and status should always be made explicit." (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4), suppose that this also includes the document itself, invites teachers to encourage students to analyse school policy documents and discuss the values expressed within them. Although the curriculum does not state which teacher this falls onto, one might expect that this would be of especial interest for language teachers as it allows for students to learn how to analyse the use of language and the

meanings behind certain words while keeping the content very much relevant for their own personal lives. In other words, it is not merely the material language teachers use, such as novels or films, which could benefit students by being thoroughly discussed and analysed. It may also lie in the interest of the students to actively discuss in the classroom why certain material has been chosen and other texts excluded from the official schooling.

Of course, this can also serve to further the understanding of not only the society the pupils live in, and allow them to view themselves as an active part of it, but also to put the texts and possible interpretations of the material used in the education in a new context. One such discussion about language is the use of the word democracy and the possible interpretations of this one word which is to be found throughout the curriculum. One could also use the curriculum as the foundation for a discussion on objectivity and what is considered to be objective in today's Sweden and if this might change with time and place. This has the possibility to allow students to critically examine how their own political views might be influenced by what they are taught in schools, and to perhaps see the teaching in a new light, considering what the political intent behind what they are taught, and how, might be. Teachers of English might here find themselves in an advantageous position to discuss this as one can use curriculums from other places around the world to bring up how schooling and culture differ from place to place as is stated by the national syllabus for English in the upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2012, p. 1).

From an English teacher's point of view, it may also be of interest to let students compare the English translated document to its Swedish original and discuss potential cases where there may be a different interpretation in the English version due to the translation. In an earlier section of this paper, I noted that the translator of the Swedish curriculum has chosen to translate *gender non-conforming* as *transgender*. Although the meaning of the two is similar, the terms may not always be considered perfectly interchangeable. That is to say,

not all people who are transgender may not always identify as gender non-conforming and vice versa. For students, it might be interesting to get a chance to find these instances and discuss whether they change the meaning of the sentence which may lead to a discussion on how to go about translating a text, especially in regards to what counts as a translation of a word.

Conclusion

This essay has presented one possible interpretation of the value-based education portrayed in the Swedish national curriculum for upper secondary school. Through analysing the national curriculum as a literary text and by the use of Marxist literary and political theory, this essay has sought to deepen our understanding of the Swedish school policy documents. Furthermore, by contextualising the source document within the current Swedish society this showed possible examples of hidden ideology while also providing a discussion of the values and norms explicitly stated in the curriculum. Applying Marxist theory of hidden ideology within a school context might raise awareness of the potential bias their teaching may hold, and to identify that this is not solely due to the teacher's personal views and opinions but can partly be explained by the ideological nature of education. Educational Marxism highlights this subjectivity and claims that because the role of education is to prepare students to become citizens within the current society, schools act as a reproducer of the dominating values and norms within the same.

The national curriculum partly gives Marxism right in this when it states that the core values which inform the schooling are the same values the Swedish society is built upon. As Marxist thinkers view both the society that is being reproduced as well as the school system and schooling itself as being unequal and undemocratic, they do not agree with the National Agency for Education that the education which takes place is democratic.

Furthermore, it may even be argued that educational Marxism sees the current Swedish curriculum as aiding in the legitimisation and reproduction of capitalist ideals, which by the same theorists are stated to be in direct opposition to a democratic society. While Marxist theorists agree that educational institutions operating within capitalist societies prepare students to work and live in the same, they argue that schools should have as its main goal to liberate the people, therefore necessitating that the curriculum prepares students for the future society rather than the current. The risk of the ideals and value which are seen as democratically relevant by policy writers becoming non-negotiable truths in the eyes of the students and therefore influence the political opinions has been highlighted both by Marxist critics as well as educational researchers.

Studying hidden ideology and hidden meaning or intent in novels and film is a common activity in Swedish schools, but perhaps, as this paper discusses, it is even more important to analyse texts we normally consider objective and factual. This could potentially give students the tools to analyse their own schooling and the society they live in might aid in students' ability to develop their own views and to be critical of the information they are given, also when the source of this is an authority figure such as a teacher. Especially open for criticism from a Marxist perspective, is the omission of a general term for equality which includes equality between classes as well as the choice to not mention class background as a potential factor for discrimination. Instead, Marxist theory stresses economic equality which is not mentioned in the Swedish syllabus, nor is socioeconomic background as a ground for discrimination.

As economic equality is not a reality in today's Sweden, its exclusion from the list of values which are to be taught in schools may also be part of the reproduction of the dominant values within the current Swedish society. Whereas economic and educational equality is a democratic necessity within Marxist theory, this may not necessarily be the case

within the economically Liberal Sweden. By not specifying which equality is being referred to, it is possible that some teachers might have interpreted the term to encompass also economic equality or even classlessness, which is not considered realisable within a capitalist society such as Sweden, according to Marxism. It may be argued that the curricular authors have instead chosen to include the less radical term solidarity which does not require social change but rather sympathy or even cooperation between social classes, rather than the upheaval of the class-structures. From a Marxist point of view, the choice to leave out class as a factor for discrimination may be argued as objectionable as socioeconomic background does indeed factor into student results and educational choices. Much like the omission of economic equality it is possible, using Marxist literary analysis, to see the choice to leave out socioeconomic background as a comment regarding its relevance as a democratic necessity. According to Marxist theory, the exclusion of these terms add to the dominance of the ruling hegemony and may even be said to counteract class-consciousness and therefore benefit the dominant group, the bourgeoisie, in Sweden.

In an effort to make the vocational programmes more effective, students of these programmes do not study certain subjects to the same degree as students of academic programmes. While former government bills spoke of educational equality and mentioned this as a democratic tool, this is not the case in the current version. In Marxist educational theory, this is a missed opportunity to create a more equal society, which is seen as the ideal, along with allowing students, especially those studying in vocational programmes, to become more active citizens. In the Swedish curriculum, student democracy is cited as a method to teach active citizenship, yet not to the degree of Marxism. Where some educational Marxist theorists speak of teacher and students cooperating and being equal in the creation of the curriculum and the schooling which takes place within the classroom, the Swedish curriculum limits students' influence of their education as the framework is already given by the national

policy documents. This difference is suggested by the curriculum's statement of the need for the education to give students opportunities to exercise influence, compared to the Marxist educational theorists who speak of a curriculum developed by students and teacher together.

As this paper has shown, the main difference between the ideal Marxist curriculum and the current Swedish national curriculum can be explained as the result of differing views regarding what is necessary for democracy to take place. The stated democratic values of the Swedish curriculum do not include economic nor educational equality, nor is the students' ability to influence their education as great as would be ideal according to Marxist theory. The curriculum itself states that the education should be objective and reported values clearly sourced. Thus, bringing awareness to the ideological standpoints of the policy documents and encouraging critical thought and analysis of the same is thus not only advocated by the national curriculum, but can, as this paper has hopefully shown, also play a part in aiding in students' understanding of their education and the society they live in.

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