

Education, globalisation and social change: the experience in Norway

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Abstract:

All through the twentieth century, Norwegian education was regarded as an important means of nation building. Therefore, it was paramount to develop a democratic education system, by which every child and young person should be given good instruction and training and have the same opportunity to utilise and develop his or her learning potential. The ideal has been that school and education should contribute towards reducing social, cultural and economic gaps, thus gradually producing more equal and equitable living conditions in our society.

The Second World War caused a setback in these endeavours. The teacher resistance movement played a marked role. The post war period saw renewed and increased efforts, first to rebuild what had been destroyed, then to further develop and expand education. Compulsory education was extended, and increasingly larger proportions of the population were given the opportunity to get higher education. Through most of the century, these developments have in particular been associated with the growth of the labour movement and the Labour Party. It is, however, of interest to note that there has been widespread agreement across political parties lines about major features of these policies.

The present situation is different. Marked orientation, competition and effectiveness have, to a large extent, replaced the equal opportunities thinking as the fundamental rationale for education. The concept of globalisation is essential in this respect. We are faced with the challenge not simply to fight any form of globalisation but instead to utilise its potentials while avoiding the pitfalls. Easier access to knowledge about other cultures and languages, and more cooperation between countries, should provide ample opportunities to improve education and. The danger, obviously, is that globalisation will lead to standardisation of education dictated by the economic interests of dominating multinational companies. The challenge that all of us are faced with is to be able to take good care of our own culture, language, values and identity at the same time as we are open towards other peoples and cultures, beliefs and values, so as to contribute to the development of a pluralistic society, in which there is room and opportunities for all.

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