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Teacher training in «multicultural» Sweden

Annika Rabo

Centre for Research on International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Stockholm University. Sweden

Annika.rabo@ceifo.su.se

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Resumen/ Abstract

This paper builds on the experience of the on-going, mainly ethnographic, research project called *Teacher training in' multicultural' Sweden. Class, gender and ethnicity.* In this multi-disciplinary project a number of scholars conduct research through participant observation in, and through the study and analysis of documents from, a number of teacher training colleges in Sweden.

In this paper I will use empirical material gathered from two teacher training colleges to discuss this basic issue. One college is situated in a suburb outside Stockholm and it consciously portrays itself as a college for 'multicultural' students who will later teach in 'multicultural' suburbs. The other college is situated in a small town and although 'multiculturalism' is seen as important in the educational system students with mainly 'Swedish' background are recruited. In the first college 'differences' are lauded and students are encouraged to ponder upon and develop their ethnic profile. In the second 'similarities' are more taken for granted. I will argue, however, that within these colleges 'differences' and 'similarities' are not only discussed but actually created against a backdrop of macro-constraints which are not much scrutinized within these colleges.

Palabras clave / Keywords: cultural diversity, educational rights, teacher training

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How can educational rights be addressed in Swedish suburban schools where children with more than fifty different mother-tongues are represented? How can teachers be prepared for schools that are culturally diverse due to migration? How should teacher training in Sweden be organized today when opinions about educational rights differ among residents?

This paper builds on the experience of an on-going, mainly ethnographic, research project called *Teacher training in' multicultural' Sweden. Class, gender and ethnicity.* In this multi-disciplinary project a number of scholars conduct research through participant observation in, and through the study and analysis of documents from, a number of teacher training colleges in Sweden.[i]

Teacher training in Sweden is part of the university structure and is found in more than twenty educational institutions. In 2001 a reform was instigated whereby the curricula and organization of teacher training was radically changed. [ii] In the parliamentary committee delineating this reform the 'new' multicultural Sweden and the impact of globalization was mentioned as important factors underlining the need for a new teacher training. The reform also gave increased opportunities for teacher training colleges to create their own profiles in order to attract students on an increasingly competitive educational market.

Sweden has been profoundly transformed through the impact of immigration. One in every ten resident has been born outside Sweden and one in every five has at least one parent who has born abroad. An increasing number of migrants maintain, or develop, strong transnational links to their country of origin. Some migrants are developing diasporic communities. Also an increasing number of 'ethnic' Swedes establishing more global links through studies, work and travel abroad. The Swedish parliament and all official Sweden institutions laud these links, and Sweden is officially declared to be a multicultural society where cultural diversity is said to enrich the country (and make it more competitive on the global market).

But 'cultural diversity' is not evenly spread in Sweden. While large parts of rural and small-city Sweden continue to be mono-culturally 'Swedish', it is the suburbs of the larger cities which have come to represent cultural diversity. And despite the official lauding of multiculturalism in Sweden, schools in such communities are faced with a number of very concrete problems. How should instruction be organized when children speak a great number of languages at home, and where many have been exposed to Swedish only recently, or not at all, before entering school? How should 'common values' – a cherished and central notion in Swedish curricula – be developed when the parents of the pupils have such vastly different social and political experiences? And, most challenging of all: how should the educational diversity in Sweden today be balanced by the equal access to 'good education' when neo-liberal ideas about market forces are spreading?

Teacher training in Sweden is thus facing new challenges. How should future teachers be trained and educated to serve the needs of all kinds of pupils? How should 'diversity' (or differences) and 'similarities' (or sameness) be understood? Is a stress on the similarity of pupils detrimental to their cultural and educational rights? Will a stress

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on diversity enrich education or will this lead to the creation of conflicts and tensions? In short: how should teacher education steer between the hazards of universalism and particularism?

In this paper I will use empirical material gathered in one teacher training college, as part of the project *Teacher training in' multicultural' Sweden. Class, gender and ethnicity*, in order to throw light on some of these issues. The college is situated in a suburb outside Stockholm and it consciously portrays itself as a college for 'multicultural' students who will later teach in 'multicultural' suburbs.[iii] Here 'differences' are lauded and students are encouraged to ponder upon and develop their ethnic profile. I will argue, however, that within this teaching training college 'differences' and 'similarities' are not only discussed, but actually created, against a backdrop of macro-constraints which are not much scrutinized within these colleges.

'Sweden is a multicultural society'

In 1996 a Swedish state-commissioned report officially declared the country to be a multicultural society. According to this report, the shift from a mono-cultural and homogenous to a diverse and multicultural society was caused by increased international movement of people and ideas, and mainly by the significant number of immigrants, or citizens with at least one parent born in another country. The aim of the report was to put forward new policies towards immigrants. Although some members of Parliament had reservations about its conclusions, the report - *Sweden, the Future and Diversity* – was generally regarded as heralding the new political consensus on immigrants in Sweden.

In the 19th century Sweden was a poor country from which people emigrated, but from the second half of the 20th century it became a country of immigration. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s Swedish industries were in desperate need of workers. The Swedish authorities presumed that the majority of the foreign workers would return to their countries of origin after a few years in Sweden. Language training, for example, mainly took place with a focus on the working life. There was considerable outward as well as inward-migration, indicating fluidity in the workforce. Gradually, however, it became apparent that many labour migrants had become permanent residents in Sweden. Family members joined them and settled in Sweden and the presence of 'foreigners' took on a more permanent feature. The Swedish authorities, political parties and trade unions began to ponder on the role and position of immigrants.

At the turn of the century about 10 per cent of Sweden's citizens and permanent residents had been born outside the country, and about 20 per cent had at least one parent who had been born in another country.[iv] The geographic roots of people who have migrated to Sweden since the 1950s are extremely diverse but the general trend is clear. In the decades of intensive labour migration people came primarily from the Nordic countries (mainly Finland), southern Europe and Turkey. From the 1970s when labour migration became restricted, the Nordic group continued to grow due to the free labour market between the Nordic countries. Since the 1980s the share of people from Asia has steadily grown, and most have come from the Middle East as asylum seekers. Although the asylum policies in Sweden, as in the European Union in general, have become much more restrictive in the past decade, there is considerable in-migration through family unification. Swedish schools continue to receive children who have a

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mother tongue other than Swedish. In the suburbs around cities like Malmo, Goteborg and Stockholm there are schools where there are more than 50 different languages spoken in the homes of the pupils. Although there is an official lauding of this linguistic richness, it is also seen by many teachers, parents, pupils and politicians as a pedagogical problem in a number of schools. Poor results and a high drop-out rate in the 'multicultural' suburbs is a hot topic of discussion in the media. 'Multiculturalism' in schools is quite often blamed as causing social exclusion and failing to promote integration.

In the parliamentary proposition to launch the teacher-training reform of 2001, the 'new multicultural' Sweden is a given. The text simply states that (the Swedish) society has become 'increasingly multicultural which leads to an increased demand for understanding and respect for different cultural identities. More people move across national borders. An increasing number of Swedes will, during a period in their lives, live in another country, and at the same time more persons in Sweden are born abroad or have parents who are.'(Prop. 2000:6). Future teachers have to be trained to function and work in multicultural educational institutions (ibid. 9).[v] Multiculturalism and diversity are thus variously lauded, contested or simply taken for granted.

Teacher training in a 'diverse' Swedish college

Teacher training, and hence also schools, are today asked to enhance both 'similarities' and 'differences'. Teaching in all schools must, according to the law, rest on the so-called 'basic values' on which Swedish society rests. Such ideals as the equal worth of all human beings, equality between women and men, the freedom and integrity of each individual, and solidarity with people in need stress the similarity between human beings, and the right to be treated in a similar fashion, regardless of sex, age, or ethnic, religious or social background. At the same time 'the task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby actively participate in social life by giving of their best in responsible freedom' (Lpo 94:5).[vi] Teacher-training institutions are thus faced with a dual task. They must train the future teachers simultaneously to respect and enhance similarities and differences. But how, when, and why are people perceived to be 'different' or 'similar' within teacher education (and thus in schools, as well as society at large)?

In the autumn of 2005 I did fieldwork among newly admitted students in one teacher-training college close to Stockholm. This college offers a great many courses, and although the teacher-training programme is said to be important, its students make up only about 400 of the around 10, 000 students at the college. The college has a very determined and conscious 'diversity' and 'intercultural' profile. It has a special mandate to recruit – and thinks it recruits – from the 'ethnically diverse' and 'scholarly impoverished' suburbs south of Stockholm. The teacher-training is fairly new and started with a profile of intercultural pedagogy,[vii] based on an understanding and appreciation of 'difference'. As future teachers, students are supposed to respect and enhance their pupils' unique personalities, shaped by their ethnic backgrounds, their gender, their sexuality and – at times- their physical traits. This college also believes

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that the teachers they train are especially suited for, and easily find jobs in, schools in the 'ethnically diverse' suburbs around Stockholm.

Every year about 180 new students are admitted to the 4.5 or 5.5-year-long teacher-training programme. These days all students who apply to any teacher-training programme will be admitted, and even late-comers may be admitted in order to fill all the available places. Teaching is no longer a profession with high social esteem in Sweden and students with well below-average grades are admitted to the various teaching-training programmes all over Sweden. Like other teacher-training programmes, the one I followed is heavily dominated by women, but perhaps less so compared with other colleges. The majority of the students in this teacher-training programme have never studied at university or college before and many come straight from secondary school. [viii]

The new reform has dramatically increased the diversity in the way the teacher-training programme can be organised, as noted above. In this college the first semester is one in which all students take exactly the same courses in the same order. All students start off with a month-long course on 'intercultural pedagogy'. There are lectures, but mainly a lot of seminars and workshops in which the students are encouraged to be active. The teachers in the programme put great effort into coaching (and coaxing) the beginners to get into the habit of studying, reading and writing. Smaller groups make up a core of 'mutual aid'-students who work together in close cooperation. This is also supposed to reflect 'real life' practice, where they will work in teams with other teachers. The atmosphere in this first semester of the teacher-training programme, that I followed, was very caring and supportive. The students were gently nudged to be on time and to submit their tasks on time. They were not corrected or questioned, but were made to feel at home in the college. They were encouraged to ask questions, even during the lectures when most of the students were present.

They were furthermore trained to be 'reflective and reflexive' in their learning process and to use 'ethnographic' methods in their learning. Their personal experiences and their own way of thinking about them provided an entry into this reflexive mode. Students were encouraged to keep a 'log-book' for making notes on their observations in class and questions about the literature. This was supposed to help them reflect on their own learning experience. In this way students were encouraged to use themselves as both subjects and objects for reflection and to utilise their own experiences as a starting-point for the learning process (cf. van Zanten 2004). The ethnic or national background of the students was often highlighted by the students themselves. Students who identified themselves as ethnically Swedish were a minority. Although many students found the initial writing-tasks they were subjected to quite difficult, they said that they liked the programme. Some dropped out after a few weeks but many claimed that they liked the warm, caring atmosphere of the college and the teacher-training programme.

All Swedish teacher-training programmes include a large dose of practical training in schools during the course of the programme. The beginners I followed spent a week in a school already after their first month in college. To organise this in-school training is a daunting task for all teacher-training programmes. Because of the extreme decentralisation of the new programmes, as well as the school system, all colleges have to develop their own contact schools in order to get their students accepted for in-house training. In the Stockholm area there are an enormous number of future teachers from

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various colleges who need placement. The beginners were obviously quite nervous about their first week of in-school training. They were placed rather haphazardly and seldom according to the age-group they planned to teach in the future. This first week was just a taste of school life, and the students were only supposed to make 'ethnographic' observations about interaction in the classroom and the school-yard as well as 'back-stage' among the teachers and other personnel.

I listened to a number of students discussing their 'ethnographic' findings. They had been asked to observe the interaction between girls and boys. It was striking that most of them reported that the pupils in their schools played with, talked to and associated mainly in same-sex groups. It was also striking that many students had very little positive to say about their future colleagues! Some students had been coached by 'nice, warm' teachers, but most said they had not liked the teachers very much. They took sides with the pupils in the school and compared their own grievances from their own school-days with what they saw now as budding teachers. All the students I listened to expressed faith in themselves as future teachers, but were highly critical of their schools and the way they were organised. 'I will have no or little problem in handling the pupils', they typically said. One student had applied to this college in order to become a teacher of young children, but realised, once she was admitted, that the college did not offer that particular stream. She had been placed with young teenagers during her first in-house training and claimed that she was convinced she would be able to handle that age as well.

This first course was clearly focused on training the students to become students, and to learn methods for talking and discussing in groups, for reading and analysing texts and for writing about their own observations. Later on in the term, the courses widened the perspective of the students. One course focused on the social organisation of and in schools, another on the political organisation of education. I observed these widening perspectives on pupils, school and education and also took part in other courses on more advanced terms. Yet this did not change my impressions gleaned from the very first course. First of all, 'diversity' typically stood out on its own without a discussion on 'similarities' or an analysis of how 'same' and 'different' mutually constitute each other. Differences due to ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual preferences, etc. were simply 'natural' and there, and were not discussed as formed by specific social trajectories or by discourses. There was talk of the need to respect differences but not a word about how similarities can be shaped as well.

Secondly, although this was a college lauding diversity with a profile of intercultural education, the staff expressed no consensus on the understanding of diversity or of interculturalism in practice. The staff members with responsibility for the general 'pedagogical' courses were more dedicated to 'diversity' than those regarding themselves as teachers of specific disciplines. The latter, it seemed, thought that the diverse student body created the profile. They had a multicultural college by virtue of having recruited 'multicultural' students. For others it was important to liberate the 'ethnically diverse' students by giving them tools to regard themselves in a favourable light. Teacher training would be a sort of compensational education. Students were, for example, encouraged to read 'subaltern' novels in which they could find objects of identification. The students should learn to be proud to identify themselves as 'a Kurd'

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or ‘a Turk’ or ‘a Syrian Orthodox’. Some dedicated staff admitted that when the diversity of all the students came to the fore it could sometimes clash! Not all students, I was told, tolerated the ‘diversity’ of others. Some students from a ‘non-Swedish’ background did not express themselves ‘correctly’ about gender equality - the Swedish way - or the equality of all, regardless of race, religion or sexual inclination. Such students would have to learn the correct expressions during the course of their training, and experienced staff said that this was an interesting and important challenge.

Thirdly, the ‘reflexive’ mode of the training made the future teachers filter all courses in the light of ‘themselves’. ‘How do you feel about….? What do you think about….?’ was a salient theme in discussions. The students were trained to look ‘within themselves’ to answer the questions. They were not given instruments to look at teaching, education and school as first and foremost a social activity shaped by a particular history. When I discussed this with some teachers in the programme they agreed, but one of them countered. ‘In teaching, teachers are their own instruments. They have to know themselves in order to be prepared to handle and understand others. They have to be firmly rooted in themselves first. That is why we start this way’. I find this comment very revealing. It underlines that teaching is regarded as first and foremost an individual endeavour in which the teacher must look inwards to find strength and sustenance. The ‘personality’ of the teacher is crucial, and the training must help future teachers to learn about themselves in order to meet and handle other personalities. Teaching is not regarded as a mainly social practice in which pupils, teachers and others together shape everyday school life. Nor is it regarded as a practice in which different actors have different interests and concerns.

A paradox of this teacher-training programme is that, despite its intercultural profile, it probably promotes what I would call boxed-in identities. All teacher-training programmes, as discussed, have to pay attention to the so-called new, multicultural and diverse Sweden. Most programmes also have students who can be classified as ethnically non-Swedish. Research shows how such students are typically singled out and (all well-meaningly) asked about ‘their home countries’ and treated as if they have not lived in Sweden perhaps all their lives (Aberg 2006). These students are constantly made into non-Swedes. In the programme I followed ‘Swedes’ were a minority, but the result was the same. No student was singled out to represent specific countries or ‘cultures’, but all were regarded as specific representatives of some unique background or experience. This was not ‘decided upon’ by the academic staff, but the students were encouraged to regard themselves in such a light and to ‘choose’ or ‘express’ an identity. In such kinds of identity work, ‘differences’ rather than ‘similarities’ are, of course, produced and reaffirmed.

I thought it interesting that students could very quickly visualise themselves as future teachers, but that they identified very strongly with the pupils when they were having in-school training. Some of the programme’s lecturers and teachers told me that this is typical of the beginners. Since many come straight from school, they feel closer to the pupils than to their future colleagues. Many had played truant, I was told, and did not like school, and now they were carried forward by a wish to become more caring than their own former teachers. Others had worked with children in need of special support, and had thus developed a sense of responsibility towards such pupils. Teachers in the programme said that students would start to identify more with their future colleagues later on in the programme. Research, however, does not support such a view.

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In 2002 Finn Calander looked at newly admitted students in three different teacher-training programmes to analyse their pedagogical ethos and views on central aspects of the teaching profession. He found that many of them had no particular opinion about, or were somewhat negative towards the drastic changes in the way schools are run in Sweden today (Calander 2004:9). He divided these changes into four different aspects. First of all, many claim that school-leaders must learn from private companies, and it is not necessary for such leaders to be trained as teachers themselves. Secondly, schools should foster 'the new pupil' who is able to take responsibility for her/his own learning. Thirdly, there are strong tendencies for parents to be more directly involved in the running of the schools. Fourthly, education is seen as a market where parents have the right to choose freely a school for their children. Although a fair proportion of the future teachers endorsed the idea of a school-market, many, paradoxically, did not like the idea of parents' increased influence over schools. Calander stresses that the professional ethos of future teachers in Sweden is highly divergent, and concludes that the students wanted to become teachers but that they did not know why! The college I studied did not provide the students with instruments to develop a professional ethos, because the starting point for the teacher-training programme was the development and fostering of a unique identity in each student. Is this a general consequences of the teacher-training reform of 2001?

The consequences of the 2001 teacher-training reform

When the first steps towards a unified and mandatory education were taken in Sweden, about 150 years ago, the country was very poor and the population was mainly rural. Sweden was an officially mono-linguistic and mono-religious country. Minorities like the Sami and the Finns were supposed to become good (Lutheran) Swedes. There was a well-functioning central power which allowed little room for the cultivation of regional specificities. Unity, rather than diversity, was hailed and educational reforms were both a mechanism for and an expression of this. During the course of the 20th century Sweden became one of the richest countries in the world, with, among other things, massive spending on public education and increased welfare spread to cover most citizens. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, this model is crumbling. The welfare state has come under ideological and economic attack from within and outside the country. Ideals of unity have created too much educational uniformity, critics have said. Can ideals of diversity be seen as a response to this critique?

The new teacher-training reform of 2001 (Prop.199/200:135) was launched in Sweden only a few months after the Swedish Parliament had passed a Bill - which was implemented in the 26 universities and colleges which train students to become teachers - doing away with the diversity in initial or early specialisation among students. Now there is only one named 'degree' for teachers, compared with eight different teacher 'degrees' before the reform. One reason stated for this reform was to foster and develop a common professional teacher identity. Teachers specialising in various subjects and for different school levels were thought to be unable to communicate fully for common tasks in school. In the future there is a great need for flexible teachers, able to integrate different perspectives, it was said. Now, after the reform, students who want a teaching

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career apply to a college or university with a teacher-training programme, and only later – often through the choices of courses they take – decide what kind of teacher they want to become.

Yet there is an enormous diversity from another point of view. Sweden has gone from a centralised and rather uniform system of higher education (and schooling as well) to a decentralised and diverse one. This diversity has been enhanced and cultivated by the authorities. It can be seen as part of a general shift from an ideology lauding 'sameness' and 'similarity' (and solidarity, one might add) to an ideology of 'choice' and 'empowerment' and a lauding of 'diversity' and 'competition'. Now teacher-training education looks very different from one college, or university, to another, and every future teacher may take a mix of courses which is unique for that very student. Future teachers will furthermore be faced with an enormous diversity of schools in their future labour market. Schools are no longer under the direct authority of the state, and money for schools is directed through a price-tag for each pupil. Schools today compete to get pupils to enrol, just like universities and colleges are supposed to compete for teacher-training students. 'Public'/local council schools now compete with a plethora of so-called 'free schools', to attract pupils (or rather their parents) by stressing a variety of 'profiles'.[ix] Church and state have been separated since a few years ago, but there are 'free schools' with Christian, Islamic or Jewish religious profiles. The schools with an Islamic profile typically stress that their schools help to integrate Muslim children into Swedish society. Yet, despite all this diversity and all these differences, every pupil should receive the best possible help and support for her/his specific needs. The pupil should be treated as a unique learner. There are, however, limits to how 'diverse' diversity can be, and limits to how freely pupils and parents can make their choices (cf. Apple 2005, Raduntz 2005).

The teacher-training reform of 2001 created a number of very diverse teaching-training programmes, in the sense that all the programmes have to develop their own profiles and their unique way of putting courses and in-school training together. The student cohort is also quite diverse, in the sense that colleges are actively hoping to recruit students from a variety of backgrounds and interests. The student body in the programmes is also diverse in the sense of professional ethos and commitment. Yet, looked at from another angle, there is a surprising amount of similarity in this diversity. All these possibilities of creating diverse programmes have instead resulted in an over-arching similarity. First of all, there is similarity in how diversity is perceived. 'Diversity' is mainly a trait brought into the programmes by the students themselves. There is very little diversity in how the teaching is done in the colleges or in any kind of curricular development, 'multi-cultural' or otherwise. Many courses which could benefit from a revision due to the enormously changed world, are still taught from an amazingly 'Swedish' and traditional perspective. Post-colonial or subaltern perspectives are only the frosting on a cake which is similar to the cake of yesteryear. There is similarity in the lack of vision in the future role of formal schooling. Finally, there is similarity in how each teacher regards herself/himself as a unique instrument in teaching.

But could it be otherwise? Educational institutions can, of course, change society in many ways, but they also mirror the society of today. Education is a field with strong symbolic value, and teacher training has always been too important to be left to the devices of the profession, or to the staff in the colleges. There have always been tensions and conflicts in the teacher-training programmes concerning the organisation of the education. There have also been different views on the mix between teacher-specific

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knowledge and discipline-specific knowledge, and there have been conflicts and tensions between different kinds of pedagogical philosophies. These conflicts still exist, but new ideas and ideals and the organisation of similarities and differences have added new tensions. These ideas, ideals and organisation reveal that the market – in which the students, the future teachers, the pupils and the citizens at large all buy and sell their unique personalities - has become a hegemonic metaphor through which experiences of similarities and differences, unity and diversity are both expressed and exposed. Research results in the project *Teacher training in' multicultural' Sweden. Class, gender and ethnicity* confirm that teacher training colleges in Sweden lack a coherent social analysis of education and their own practice. There is much 'reflexion' on 'feelings' but little analysis of the role of education and schooling in the contemporary world. I find it interesting- and rather distressing – that an 'ethnographic method' in teacher training colleges is used mainly as a tool for the personal identity formation of the future teachers rather than as an instrument for a social analysis of education.

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[i] The project – running from 2005 to 2007- is financed by the Educational Committee of the Swedish Research Council.
[ii] The 100-page proposition (Prop. 199/2000:135) – *A renewed teacher education* – was handed over from the Ministry of Education to the Swedish Parliament in May 2000 and the reform was rushed through and implemented in 2001.
[iii] Material from this college has been more fully discussed in Rabo 2007.
[iv] The official definition of a 'migrant' in Sweden is a person who, born in another country, has moved to Sweden, or a person born in Sweden with both parents born outside the country. 'Ethnic' or 'national' affiliation is not allowed in official Swedish statistics.
[v] My translation of the original text.
[vi] The so-called 'fundamental values' were formulated in the curricular reform of 1994. Earlier curricula for various school levels had also included preambles of over-arching ideological importance, but the reform of 1994 linked this ideology to 'ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism' (Lpo 94:5). At that time Sweden had a coalition government of the centre-right parties. Many were - and are - upset by this stated link and many educational researchers have debated the very concept of basic values in schools. For views on this debate linked to issues of 'Swedish ethnicity' and ethnic diversity in Sweden today, see Linde (2001).
[vii] It is not easy to pin down the exact meaning of this concept in a Swedish context, or in the context of this particular teaching-training college. But it has to do with an ability and willingness to confront the cultural preconceptions of oneself and others in a teaching or educational environment. See Lahdenperä (2004). For an international overview see Woodrow et al. (1997). For a critical approach to 'culture' in intercultural and multicultural education see Mahalingam and McCarthy (2000).
[viii] There is no formal requirement in Sweden that students in the teacher-training colleges should have prior work experience or experience of other higher education.
[ix] The so-called 'free schools' in Sweden are not run by local councils but they are publicly financed. See Kjellman (2001) for a critical analysis of 'free' choice of schools.

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