Challenges in Education in a Contemporary and a Historical Perspective

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Education has faced, and is still facing, a lot of different challenges. Challenges in education are caused by a variety of reasons, which have affected not only teachers and pupils, but also the school community as a whole. Challenges in education have also changed over the course of history. According to Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological model, all existing ecological environments with micro-, meso-, exo- and macro- levels are interconnected, and affect each other and human development “… over the life course across successive generations, and through historical time, both past and future” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793).

For example, challenges in education have been caused by policy decisions, as is presented in the case study of Mats Lundgren and Ina von Schantz Lundgren. Their paper – When a rural school closes down – a case study of a conflicted process of closure – aims to contribute a better understanding of the closure process of a rural school when the justification is based on economic terms rather than educational ones. The paper takes as its point of departure a conflict between local politicians and a group of parents who actively tried to resist the closing down of the school in question. The reasons for doing this were first and foremost economic; hence, the pedagogical motives played a subordinate role.

Challenges in education also reflect existing problems in society. Margareta Stigsdotter Ekberg, Lars Fonseca, Mats Ander-
berg and Mikael Dahlberg highlight, through the prism of Bronfenbrenner’s theory, the specific school problems of adolescents with alcohol and drug issues in Sweden. The conclusion of their paper – Adolescents with alcohol and drug abuse problems, and their perception of their difficulties related to school – is rather positive, seen from an educational point of view. That is to say that the majority of these adolescents are still enrolled in school, and that several of the school problems mentioned in the study are solvable by way of an educational and a social support network that encourages their connection to the school.

Further, globalization and increasing pluralism bring significant new challenges for processes of democratization in society. For example, these challenges emerge in dialogue concerning controversial political and religious issues at school, in which the teacher has a significant role. In the paper Dialogue and democratization – Deliberations on the role of the teacher in dialogue concerning controversial political and religious issues, Janicke Heldal Stray and Emil Sætra state that it is vital that pupils are able to acquire dialogic competence for democratic participation at school. Therefore, teaching through dialogue puts high demands on the teacher, who must be able to make pedagogical judgements based on the situation.

The final paper of this issue – Look to Britain! – takes a historical perspective, regarding challenges both in society and education. The author, Merete Roos, takes the reader back to the mid-19th century in order to discuss the extent to which Great Britain was a role model for enlightened public thought in Norway in the 1850s, from different angles: economic development, citizenship, the societal function of schooling, as well as the fact that Britain was not entangled in the continental tendency for revolution.

We hope that the challenges in education presented here will inspire deeper insight in the readers, and encourage them to look for effective, alternative and innovative solutions to educational issues. Enjoy reading!

Reference