Educational Policies, Lifelong Learning, and Social Diversity

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Abstract

In the chapter, the limits and possibilities of educational and lifelong learning policies in tackling educational equalities and social diversity are critically explored. The chapter furthers our understanding about the role of education and lifelong learning in the production of social inequalities in the decades after the Second World War. Research shows that the equalizing and liberating policies over past 50 years have not been successful in reducing educational inequalities and promoting social diversity, even though there are differences between welfare state regimes, countries and education systems in this respect. Since the 1980s, policies based on neoliberal thinking have further increased inequalities in all levels of education system including adult education and the institutions of lifelong learning in many countries. Many of the problems that education and lifelong learning are expected to solve have origins in global developments and the structures and power relationships of a society. While eliminating inequality of educational opportunities and promoting social diversity are stated aims across the world, the possibilities to achieve these aims through educational and lifelong learning policies are limited. When striving for egalitarian and pluralistic societies, larger societal and political reforms are needed.

EDUCATION POLICIES, LLL, DIVERSITY

Keywords: Education policy, lifelong learning, education systems, inequality, social diversity

In educational policies after the Second World War, the objectives of promoting educational equality have been adopted across the industrialized world. In the name of social justice and societal efficiency, the key policy aim has been to reduce the influence of privilege on individuals' educational attainment and life opportunities, by providing equal educational opportunities to all irrespective of gender, religion, ethnicity and cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. Alongside equality, social diversity has been emphasized in the educational policies of recent decades. A common denominator for both approaches is that they emphasize equal and just treatment of all individuals and social groups and have an agenda to improve the life opportunities and living conditions of disadvantaged and discriminated groups of a society. Similar policy aims can be found in the history of adult education and lifelong learning policies based on critical pedagogies, in which the highest goals have been to liberate individuals from oppressing ideologies and structures and empower them to engage in societal change, towards a society that serves citizens' rather than economic interests.

Nevertheless, despite all the equalizing and liberating policy initiatives and implementations from the past 50 years, research shows that the educational attainment gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged has barely been narrowed. Moreover, in adult education and various fields of lifelong learning, education tends to accumulate for those who have already acquired educational merits and human capital. However, although the positive association between one's social origin and educational attainment seems to hold true across the world, some systems and countries have been more successful in promoting equality and social diversity than others.

In this chapter, the limits and possibilities of educational and lifelong learning policies

in promoting educational equality and social diversity are explored. The first part of the chapter analyses the role of education systems in the production of educational and societal inequalities. In the second part of the chapter, educational and lifelong learning policies with the aim of tackling inequalities and promoting social diversity are examined. In the concluding chapter, the long-term impacts of these policies, as well as recent education and lifelong learning policy trends, are discussed from the points of view of educational equality and social diversity.

Education Systems and the Production of Inequalities

The last two centuries have been a period of rapid educational expansion, with education becoming a compulsory, universal institution closely tied to the ideas of the modern state, the modern nation and the modern individual (Meyer et al., 1992). The aim of universal educational enrolment is emphasized alongside national policies in the United Nations' (UN) Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to education, which should be free and compulsory (at least in its elementary stages; Article 25). Along with educational expansion, the organizational forms of education have become increasingly homogeneous (Boli et al., 1985). However, while sharing many common features, education systems also have significant path-dependent differences in the ways they are organized.

In scholarly literature, education systems are classified based on various criteria. An early example is an article by Turner (1960), in which—by using the education systems of England and the United States as ideal types—the aim was to show how the accepted mode of upward social mobility in a given country shapes the ways its education system facilities or impedes such mobility, directly or indirectly. At the end of the 1960s, Hopper (1968) was

already emphasizing the significance of the standardization and stratification dimensions, which in later studies have been recognized as key dimensions that can be used when comparing education systems across the world (Allmendinger, 1989; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). In this respect, standardization refers to the balance between centralized governance and school autonomy, and thus the degree that for example curriculum, school resources and school-leaving examinations meet the same standards nationwide. The level of stratification of a system, in turn, is determined by the degree of differentiation within given educational levels (i.e., tracking). In a highly stratified, selective school system, children are already allocated into different schools or programs according to their ability or interest in the early stages of education, and there are limited opportunities for mobility between schools or programs, which differ in curricula and prestige (Horn, 2009).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) distinguishes education systems at the compulsory level by using three dimensions of stratification: vertical, between-school and within-school (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020a). Since within-school stratification is challenging to capture in cross-national research, the impact of the educational stratification on educational inequality has been typically measured by using between-schools stratification as an indicator. In sum, based on the different classifications, the education systems can be divided into *stratified* or *differentiated* on the one hand, and *comprehensive* or *integrated* systems on the other.

The most important societal functions of modern education systems are related to the production of knowledge and skills needed in a given society, cultural integration of the citizens, and the selection of individuals to positions in the labour market and social hierarchy. What follows from the selection function, however, is the fact that not everyone can succeed at school equally (Labaree, 2012). From the point of view of educational equality, the key issue is how a fair education system operates when allocating individuals to

social positions. Conflict theorists such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have argued that instead of being fair, education serves the interests of privileged groups by rewarding the cultural capital (i.e., certain cultural and linguistic competences and dispositions) of the children of upper classes, and devaluing the cultural capital of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is manifested in the cultural demands school as an institution sets for the students, as well as in institutional practices, such as the selection of students into hierarchically different tracks providing unequal opportunities for further education. From this point of view, the education system is embedded in the production of inequalities. Furthermore, since individuals are allocated to the positions of the societal hierarchy based on their educational attainment and credentials, education is also a crucial mechanism by which inequalities are legitimated (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The ways education systems are organized play a significant role in how equality is promoted and inequalities generated. In their review of the comparative literature on national-level educational institutions' impact on educational inequality, Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) conclude that countries with a more strongly differentiated (between-schools stratification) educational system tend to have higher levels of inequality of educational opportunity by social class and ethnicity. Likewise, countries with a more standardized educational system have lower levels of inequality of opportunity. This evidence points to the fact that decreasing institutional differentiation and strengthening the standardization of a system are beneficial policy measures to promote educational equality. Moreover, in many other studies, a stratified school system – containing parallel schools or programs that differ from each other in terms of prestige and opportunities for further education – has been found to be connected to low educational equality (Ammenmüller, 2005; Hanushek & Wössmann, 2005). The key elements here are how academically advanced the track curricula are and the degree to which the tracks prepare students for higher education. Erikson (2020) summarizes

the connection between education systems and educational inequality, stating that the most persistent observation of education systems' characteristics is that early tracking goes together with a greater degree of educational inequality. One reason for this is that, in practice, a division of students according to ability means a division by social class.

Educational Policies with the Aim of Tackling Inequalities

In educational policies following the Second World War, the ideology of educational equality was adopted across the industrialized world. Two oft-cited reasons for the importance of reducing educational inequality are social justice and societal efficiency (Erikson, 2020). With the aim of reducing the influence of privilege, the objective has been to provide equal educational and, hence, life opportunities to each member of society based on the fundamental principle that all individuals are equal irrespective of gender, religion, ethnicity and cultural or socioeconomic background. The efficiency argument, in turn, rests on the assumption that if children are not allowed to develop their abilities (in full), societal development will be impaired (Erikson, 2020). This argument is closely connected to Davis and Moore's (1945) argument advocating the necessary nature of social hierarchies and differentiated rewards. They argue that differential rewards are necessary to motivate the most able people to occupy the most important and demanding positions in societies. Because the tasks in these positions contain vital functions in a complex, industrialized society, differentiated rewards are necessary to motivate people to perform the duties of the positions. Thus, both stratification and unequal reward systems are justified as a necessity for the functioning of complex societies.

While political objectives related to educational equality have been widely shared,

there has been debate on the meaning of the concept of *equality*, as well as its relationship with neighbouring concepts such as *equity*. In his famous article, Coleman (1968) examines the concept of equality of education historically, in terms of what the concept has meant at different times, starting from pre-industrial Europe and ending with the United States of the late 1960s. Coleman's analysis shows how the different meanings and interpretations given to the concept lead to different policy initiatives and implementations. By using Coleman's article as a starting point for his own examination, Husén (1972) analyses the changing conception of equality of education by making a division between conservative, liberal and radical conceptions of equality. The main difference between the conceptions is that the radical conception includes the most critical view on the possibilities of education policies to solve the problem of educational inequality. Both Coleman (1968) and Husén (1972) conclude their analyses by stating that to achieve equality in education and occupation, remedial action must be taken in the wider context within which educational institutions are operating – that is, the society at large. In other words, educational reform is not enough. A larger social reform is also needed to achieve educational equality.

Since the early conceptual analyses by Coleman (1968) and Husén (1972), a number of controversies have arisen from the discussion around *equality* and more recently *equity*. There has been not only disagreement among scholars and politicians about the meaning of the concepts, but equality and equity have also been used as if they were interchangeable. Those who have differentiated between the concepts usually associate equality with sameness in treatment of individuals and social groups; equity, on the other hand, is typically associated with fairness or justice in the provision of education, so that individual needs, abilities, effort and social circumstances are taken into consideration. Further, prerequisites for the fulfilment of equity are more challenging than they are in the case of equality. From the equity perspective, it is not enough to concentrate on analysing what happens within the field of

education. Instead, the key issue is to ensure that individuals with similar academic achievement and degrees will obtain similar job status, income and political power (Espinoza, 2007).

Power (2012) has compared educational policies of recent decades in terms of the domains of injustice they address. She starts her analysis from the premise that while the majority of policies can be seen as attempts to make education more equal, the ways in which this is to be done embody different assumptions about what counts as an equal education system and the obstacles that prevent this from being realized. By using England as an example, she shows how educational policy orientation following the Second World War has changed: from a politics of redistribution to a politics of recognition and, in recent years, to a politics of representation.

In the politics of redistribution, which was the dominant policy approach in England until the 1970s, economic maldistribution between social classes was seen as the main obstacle to educational equality and justice; the policy objectives were targeted at removing financial barriers and reallocating the resources, so that the working class children could have access to education beyond the compulsory level. As the 1970s progressed, and it became clear that the politics of redistribution had not succeeded in tackling the inequalities, a different kind of policy response was established. Instead of emphasizing the economic disadvantage, the origins of educational inequality were seen as stemming from cultural injustices. The new policy strategies were implemented to dissolve the categories that create group differentiation, which leads to misrecognition; and to reallocate respect to previously marginalized and stigmatized identities, groups and cultures through affirmation (Power, 2012).

In contrast to the politics of redistribution and recognition, the politics of representation speak more clearly for individual rights (Power, 2012). One example of this

policy approach is the free school choice policy adopted in many countries in recent decades, which has increased parents' power to choose a school (as well as certain educational tracks within a school) for their children. While policies designed to promote parental choice have been defended based on the equality argument – making the same kind of choices available to disadvantaged parents that were available to advantaged parents (Power, 2012) – evidence shows that promoting parental choice has actually amplified educational inequality in many countries (Berisha et al., 2017; OECD, 2012; Thrupp, 2007).

Promoting Social Diversity in Education

Alongside equality and equity, social diversity has been emphasized in the educational policies of recent decades. Generally, the term 'social diversity' refers to the coexistence of different social groups within a given society or institution. In this respect, the ultimate aim of social diversity policies is an open, pluralistic society where individuals of different gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, geographical location, age etc. are treated equally so that all individuals can feel a sense of belonging and bring their knowledge, skills and experience for the benefit of the common good. However, while the common idea of social diversity emphasizes the differences between individuals and social groups, under the surface it is also related to social stratification, inequalities and power relationships. The idea of social diversity is also in contradiction with the historical aim of public education, which was to change diverse people into a united group of citizens.

Social diversity discourse has its roots in the rise of social movements among people who experience oppression based on group belonging. In the United States, this can be traced

to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. At that time, foremost attention was given to Black Americans with the aim of opening up avenues for fair treatment, legal protection, equal opportunity and redress stemming from the historical harm of racist discrimination. Affirmative action was initiated with the goal of promoting equal opportunities, fighting discrimination and helping minorities to gain better positions in employment and education (Vertovec, 2012).

Subsequently, there have been identity-based movements and struggles with an emphasis on social diversity in many countries. These movements have been conceptualized as 'identity politics' – a term first used to refer to the activism of people with disabilities to transform both self- and societal conceptions and understanding about people with disabilities. Many of these movements have emphasized inequalities stemming from cultural differences and have thus differentiated themselves from class-based movements, which saw class-based inequality as the fundamental source of exploitation and oppression (Bernstein, 2005). At the same time, there has been a theoretical shift from the simplistic race or gender focus towards the idea of intersectionality as multiple disadvantages. This increasing complexity includes not just recognizing more identity-based groups and dimensions of individual difference, but acknowledging their convergence in intersectional forms of discrimination (Vertovec, 2012).

In recent decades, diversity discourse has found its way to public and corporate language, as well as to policy statements and documents of various kinds. To promote social diversity, principles of non-discrimination and minority protection have comprised core features of numerous international statements and agreements of international organizations, such as the UN and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In Europe, diversity mainstreaming has emerged as a key policy idea, throughout member states of the European Union (EU). Across the EU, one can see the rise of diversity policies at all

levels of government and administration. Promoting diversity can be found as a policy aim in core documents aimed at immigrant integration and social cohesion (Vertovec, 2012).

Due to global migration in particular, the population is becoming diverse, which has been reflected in educational policies over the course of recent decades. Every education system is challenged to cope with differences among students and to create a balance between the right to be treated equally, yet individually. As a consequence, each system must create institutional arrangements to deal with the tensions that result from these potentially conflicting purposes (Werning et al., 2008). In educational policy, promoting social diversity has traditionally meant aiming to make education accessible to disadvantaged or deprived groups of society, such as women, ethnic or language minorities and individuals from poor economic backgrounds. In many settings, such as in U. K. higher education policies, diversity has replaced more traditional conceptualizations of socioeconomic inequalities, and has shifted from being about ethnicity/race to one of 'widening participation' or 'fair' access to higher education, including social class, disabilities, gender and age (David, 2009).

In the PISA studies, the concept of social diversity is used when analysing social segregation across schools. Social diversity is understood as a heterogeneity of schools' students in terms of their socioeconomic background and ability. The interest lies in finding out whether organizing students into homogeneous or heterogeneous learning groups based on the above-mentioned diversities better promotes their learning and thus the efficiency of the school system (OECD, 2019). An underlying reason for promoting social diversity is thus – in the context of PISA – more related to societal efficiency than social justice.

The trade-off in diversity policies is that while they recognize the importance of social differences, they may also reinforce normativity, with the White, male, able, heterosexual person as the model from which the others are different. It may also shift attention from inequality, placing emphasis solely on the differences. In any case, societies are becoming

increasingly diverse (e.g., in terms of ethnicity, multiculturalism or gender identity), and it is not only the school and formal education that need to recognize diversity to combat new emerging inequalities (Jackson, 2011). Diversity also brings big challenges in working life and to workplace learning.

Adult and Lifelong Learning and the Diversity Issues

Education targeted at adults is an important part of lifelong learning policies. In many countries, these policies are related not only to updating the skills of the labour force but to the aim of promoting educational and societal equality. In Nordic countries, for example, this aim is manifested in internationally high participation rates in adult education and training, wide public provision of adult education and a long tradition of liberal adult education systems built on egalitarian values (Rinne et al., 2020; Tuijnman et al., 2001). However, also in countries with high participation rates in adult education, all kinds of education tend to accumulate for those who have already acquired high educational merits and human capital (Rubenson, 2006; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009; Tuijnman 1991). Studies on participation in adult education recurrently show that the accumulation of education is the most persistent regularity in adult education, and that the reverse side of this accumulation are large, non-participating sections of the population who feel that participating in adult education would not benefit them socially or economically (e.g. OECD 2013). Thus, in countries with ample opportunities for participation, the main reason behind non-participation may be the low level of expected rewards (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

In the history of adult education, there are a variety of philosophies and pedagogies aimed at serving the educational needs of the excluded and disadvantaged groups in society.

The most influential of these is arguably the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, articulated by Paulo Freire (1971, 1994). Freire has a strong following in the form of various critical pedagogies further developed for example by Stephen Brookfield (2005), Henry Giroux (2011), bell hooks (1984) and Peter McLaren (2000).

To place the ideas developed by Freire in one paragraph, it is worth citing Giroux (2010):

> What Paulo [Freire] made clear in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his most influential work, is that pedagogy at its best is about neither training, teaching methods, nor political indoctrination. For Freire, pedagogy is not a method or an a priori technique to be imposed on all students but a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy. Critical thinking for Freire was not an object lesson in test-taking, but a tool for self-determination and civic engagement. According to Freire, critical thinking was not about the task of simply reproducing the past and understanding the present. To the contrary, it was about offering a way of thinking beyond the present, soaring beyond the immediate confines of one's experiences, entering into a critical dialogue with history, and imagining a future that would not merely reproduce the present. (p. 716)

In most critical adult pedagogies, the highest goal of education and learning is liberating individuals from oppressing ideologies and economic structures, and empowering them to engage in social change – that is, not only to acquire skills needed to adapt themselves to changes in economy and labour market, but to raise awareness and capabilities to change the capitalist economy and society to more genuinely serve the interests of citizens.

Besides targeting education to various disadvantaged groups, ideas have emerged that pro-diversity education should also be targeted to people who have access to resources, information and power that can either block or help facilitate change. Because people from privileged groups perpetuate oppression through individual acts, as well as through institutional and cultural practices, they should be educated to be more aware of the consequences of their behaviour. Goodman (2011) explains the logic of promoting diversity by widening the target groups of critical pedagogies:

> People from privileged groups who are allies can influence decision-making, allocate funds, share needed skills and knowledge, and be role models for other dominant group members to support equity. It also helps to have people from privileged groups as part of the change effort. Even though more people from oppressed groups are likely to push for greater social justice, as people from privileged groups join in the struggle, it increases the critical mass needed to affect change. (p. 3)

However, the lifelong learning goals promoted through national and international policies, in particular within the EU and the OECD, are mainly based on serving the needs of the capitalist economy and economic growth. The fact that adult education is increasingly integrated into the labour market and employment policies of governments poses a challenge to the recognition of diversity in adult education. Zepke (2005) has emphasized the importance of future perspective in developing adult learning systems based on the recognition of diversity:

> Diversity in its many guises is strongly championed in the adult education literature. To conceive a future for adult education that is not diverse and does not try to address the needs of diverse learners seems absurd. -- To conceive of a future for adult education that is unitary and universal, that does not recognize the needs of diverse

learners, is untenable. (p. 165)

Today, it is obvious that the economic discourse of lifelong learning is in a hegemonic position, especially in the developed world, and international organizations have a strong hold on defining the underlying philosophy and contents of lifelong learning. According to Biesta (2006) ‘we might even say that in the current scheme economic growth has become an intrinsic value: it is desired for its own sake, not in order to achieve something else’ (p. 175). Nevertheless, lifelong learning is ‘constructed as an unconditional good – for individuals, nation states and globally. It is described as though it is apolitical, ahistorical and uncontestable, with little understanding of the ways in which learning is differently experienced by different groups and individuals constructed through gendered and other inequalities’ (Jackson, 2011, p. 2).

Individuals in different social and economic positions perceive and feel quite differently the demands for lifelong and life-wide learning. While middle-class employees feel comfortable in their individual self-development practices, many disadvantaged groups have a hard time in trying to cope with the concerns and anxieties caused by the hegemonic discourses of lifelong learning (LLL) and the learning society (Järvensivu & Koski 2012). Especially since the 1990s, the idea of individuals actively developing themselves lifelong and life-wide has become the normative mindset to be adopted by all citizens. The necessity to assess one’s deficiencies and to continuously learn and develop one’s skills and attitudes has become a truth. However, making judgements on proper mindset and proper learning also excludes a great deal of learning as unnecessary, inferior, useless or even dysfunctional.

Lifelong Learning as a Second Chance

An important difference between the education systems is related to the lifelong learning opportunities each system has to offer and how pupils and students are prepared and motivated to use these opportunities later in their lives. That learning today is not limited to what happens in schools and classrooms, but takes place in the various fields of human life and during the life course, emphasizing the significance of lifelong learning in opening and closing the life opportunities available (e.g., Jarvis, 2007, 2009). Although there have been changes in what is understood by the term 'lifelong learning', in policy discourses the concept refers mainly to adult learning and to adult education and training, some of which are organized formally within the education system and some informally in workplaces or for instance by non-governmental and non-profit organizations.

When evaluating adult and lifelong learning from the point of view of diversity, two criteria are of utmost importance. First, how well do education and training provision reach different groups and populations (i.e., how equal are the participation rates in education of different social and cultural groups)? Second, how well do education and training benefit the diverse disadvantaged groups of a given society (i.e., how equal are the learning outcomes and/or socioeconomic benefits of the provided education and training)? In the background of these two criteria is the empirical fact that adult education tends to accumulate: As noted earlier, people who already have high credentials and long experience in education attend education and training during their work career and life span; and indeed, most of this, in various forms of personnel training, is paid and provided by their employer. Thus, much of adult training is a fringe benefit for the employee, and the unemployed and short-term employees are structurally excluded from these opportunities.

While adult education and training is quite a common activity in many countries, it is

far from universal. Varied findings on overall participation rates for populations aged 16 to 65 indicate that countries fall into four groups (Desjardins et al., 2006):

- A small group of countries have overall participation rates of about 50% or more. The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) share a strong cultural tradition of supporting adult learning, and large publicly funded sectors of adult popular education belong to this group.
- A group of countries of Anglo-Saxon origin (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States) have overall participation rates of between 35 and 50%. A few of the smaller northern European countries, including Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, are also among this group.
- A group with overall participation rates between 20 and 35% features the central European countries of Austria, Belgium (Flanders) and Germany, as well as eastern European countries (the Czech Republic and Slovenia) and some southern European countries (France, Italy and Spain).
- A group of countries with the lowest overall participation rates – below 20% – include the remaining southern European countries (Greece and Portugal), as well as some eastern European countries (Hungary and Poland).

The grouping of countries based on the level of participation in adult education is a straightforward way to present differences in the provision of learning opportunities for adults. One limitation of these kinds of typologies is the lack of statistical data and the fact that countries may have different definitions of measuring participation. Country-wise, the provision of adult education and training can be a scattered and non-systematic whole, with a variety of providers and organizations, administered and funded by public, private and volunteer actors. Furthermore, there are substantial differences between countries related to whether (and if so, how closely) adult learning opportunities are connected to the formal education system, or to the labour market and workplaces. Green (1999) has separated five primary models of education and training systems, which is also a useful classification from the perspective of the equality of and participation in adult education (see Table 1).

Table 1

Typology of Education and Training Systems From the Perspective of Lifelong Learning

	Japanese model	German model	French model	Swedish model	U.K. model
Countries	Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan	German, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands, Czech, Slovak, Hungary, Slovenia	France, the 'Latin Rim' states, Bulgaria, Romania	Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland	England, Wales, Baltic countries
Role of the state	Government of the market providing investment and strategic leadership	State intervention to regulate labour markets and coordinate the roles of social partners	State-centred concepts and political membership	Social democratic state, active labour market measures for unemployed and redeployed adults	
Characteristic features of skills formation	Cultivation of specific technical skills less important; in-company training	Standards-based occupational qualifications act as the crucial exchange mechanism	Externally assessed, state-validated certificates play an important role	Strong traditions of liberal adult education	
ETS: general organization and principles	Generally highly centralized; strong emphasis on the development of group cohesion and conformism	ETS is organized on a regional basis	Strong central control; emphasis on civic education	Substantial devolution of control since the 1990s to local or municipal levels; strong emphasis on equality and social solidarity	Limited state control in education; competitive, quasi-market relations introduced in education and training
Adult education and training		Less developed, participation comparatively low	Less developed, participation comparatively low	Prevalent, often subsidized by the state	Relatively widespread, unevenly distributed
Relationships between firms and ETS	Standards-based qualifications not important; recruitment based on recommendations, company assessment tests and reputation of the institution	Strong company commitment to training	Qualifications play an important role in job recruitment and promotion and play levels; many firms unable to deliver extensive in-company training		
Skill formation: level of skills		Intermediate level of skills	Intermediate level of skills	High aggregate level of skills	Moderate aggregate level of skills
Skill formation: skill polarization		Skills quite evenly distributed	Signs of skill polarization	Skills more evenly distributed	High level of skill polarization

Note. Source: Saar and Ure (2013), based on Green (1999; 2006)

Much of the characteristics of adult learning practices and policies are rooted in national culture and the history of a given country. The role of the state in governing adult and lifelong learning policies varies between countries, and therefore the role of systematic promotion of adult learning and training varies between different 'models'. Rees (2013) articulates the discrepancy between political discourses and actual development of adult learning practices by saying that 'despite the almost hegemonic influence of ideas about the knowledge-based economy, it remains the case that there are significant differences in the strategies adopted by national governments towards adult learning and in patterns of

engagement with the learning opportunities that are made available' (p. 200).

From the diversity perspective, the following question is crucial: How do adult and lifelong learning systems address the situation of the low educated and the unemployed, and the possible polarization of skills in the adult population. As is known empirically, a lack of or low level of education, as well as recurrent spells of unemployment or long-term unemployment, tend to be associated with migrant background, ethnic minorities, working-class women, the disabled and other marginalized groups in society. This brings us to the core of intersectionality and to the question of how to best serve people with multiple disadvantages. Countries have different priorities in policies, especially related to dealing with inequalities with educational measures. Along with their traditional liberal adult education systems, Nordic countries – as part of active labour market policy – have created labour market training systems by which an extensive number of unemployed people get annual vocational training free of charge (Desjardins & Ioannidou 2020).

As an OECD- and EU-driven project, lifelong learning policy (and learning society) has its foundations and primary functions in contributing to and working for the competitive economic area (be it the EU or a nation state). What a thriving and prosperous economy needs is a hard-working labour force willing to constantly evaluate its own deficiencies and skill shortages, committed to developing itself by means of learning in every sphere of life (work, leisure, home etc.). This, in short, is what *pedagogization of life* means in economic terms (cf. Ball, 2009). This logic behind the lifelong learning policy may seem quite reasonable for the political and economic elites in charge of governing political systems and economies. The problem is that the logic does not make sense for all people. The concept of pedagogization of life is where social class, governing and lifelong learning come together. The hegemonic concept of lifelong learning is built on the interests of the economy and the middle-class way of life – it is therefore unable to take social and cultural diversity into

account seriously enough. This means that diversity is not at the core of mainstream lifelong learning policy, but is instead served by a plethora of short-living training projects in the margins of the learning society.

Total average participation rates hide much variation (e.g., between occupational, socioeconomic, age and ethnic groups and genders). In a country with a high average participation rate, the difference between working class and middle class can be quite wide. However, Rubenson and Desjardins's (2009) findings on barriers to participation in adult education explain much of the observed national differences by the educational and social policies countries have implemented. Using a theoretical perspective based on bounded agency, taking into account the interaction between structurally and individually based barriers to participation, Rubenson and Desjardins show that the nature of 'welfare state regimes can affect a person's capability to participate through the way it constructs structural conditions and helps individuals overcome both structurally and individually based barriers' (p. 203). The comparison between different types of state regimes show that the state can be capable of fostering broad structural conditions favourable to participation; and constructing policy measures targeted at reducing structural and individual barriers for disadvantaged groups in society.

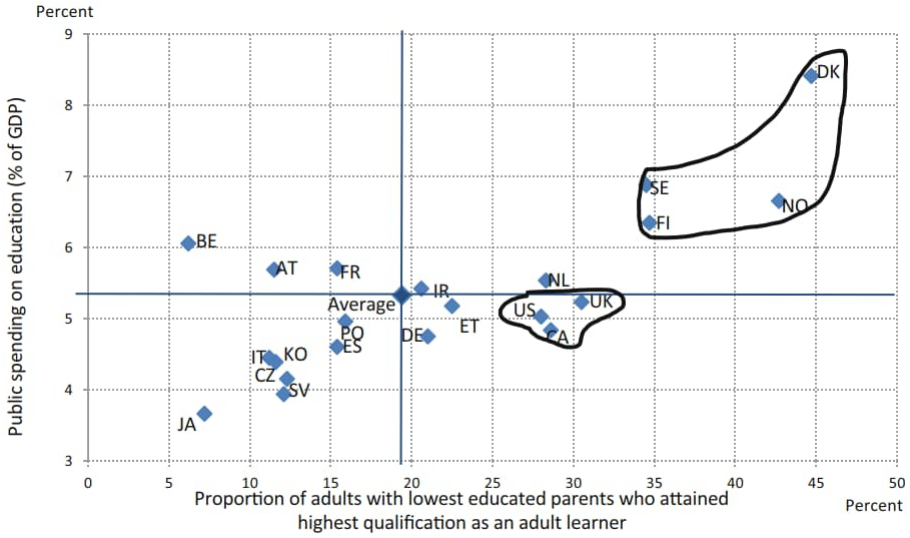
An analysis by Desjardins and Kim (see Desjardins & Ioannidou, 2020) shows that the overall growth of organized adult learning has narrowed the inequality in participation between various socially disadvantaged and advantaged groups (i.e., between young and older people, between people with low and high socioeconomic status, and between the low and highly educated) in most countries, including market-led regimes like the United States and the United Kingdom, which have caught up with the state-led models of Nordic countries. One can say that lifelong learning policies have had an effect not only on average participation rate but also on narrowing the participation gap between advantaged and

disadvantaged groups.

In another important study, Desjardins and Ioannidou (2020) analyse the relationship between level of public spending on education and probability of participating in adult education of individuals whose both parents have less than an upper secondary education. As Figure 1 below shows, countries with higher public expenditures on education have been successful in providing qualifications for the disadvantaged adults who have attained their highest qualifications as adult learners, or 'non-traditional students' in the education system. The countries that are most successful in extending organized adult learning opportunities to the most disadvantaged feature the highest levels of welfare state expenditures in general, and expenditure in education especially (upper right quadrant). A range of countries in the lower left quadrant of the figure spend less on average on education and have low levels of participation in education among the most disadvantaged adults.

Figure 1

Public Spending on Education and Proportion of Adults with Lowest Educated Parents who Attained Highest Qualifications as an Adult Learner



Note. Source: Desjardins and Ioannidou (2020).

However, it is not only the amount of money spent but how the measures are targeted that matters. For example, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States spend less on public education compared to Belgium, Austria and France, but are more successful in boosting the participation of the most disadvantaged. Countries with higher participation of non-traditional students also have formal education systems that are more open to adult learners. As Desjardins and Ioannidou (2020) conclude:

> Policies related to customization, targeting and outreach are an indication of active policy making that seeks to boost the level and equitable distribution of organized adult learning. Targeting and outreach, especially for adults with little or no qualifications, are crucial tools for tackling inequality and disadvantage. They imply non-market-based solutions, based on state aims related to equity and social justice, not necessarily market or narrow stakeholder interests. (p. 162)

The Limits and Possibilities of Equalizing Policies in Education and Lifelong Learning

EDUCATION POLICIES, LLL, DIVERSITY

The fundamental feature of education is that it is one of the main causes of societal inequalities whilst simultaneously seen as the key solution to these same inequalities. This poses a challenge for equalizing educational and lifelong learning policies, with the aim of narrowing the gap in the educational opportunities and attainment between the privileged and disadvantaged, globally and nationally.

As research shows, the policies of the past decades have not been successful in their task of reducing educational inequalities, even if there are differences between welfare state regimes, countries and their education systems in this respect (Erikson, 2020; Van de Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010). Although education has also expanded rapidly in developing countries, there are still remarkable differences in educational enrolment and completion between the wealthier and the poorer parts of the world. While the primary school completion rate is 99% in Europe and North America, the equivalent figure is 63% in Sub-Saharan Africa. The global inequality is even greater at the level of lower secondary education, with completion rates being 98% in Europe and North America and 38% in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019).

The effectiveness of equalizing policies can also be evaluated by looking at the long-term changes in the association between one's social class position and educational outcomes within a country and how this relationship varies between countries. This has been a key research interest in sociology of education since the 1960s. Research shows that in the post-war period, there was first a decreasing trend in the connection between one's social origin and educational attainment, mainly because of the strong economic growth, increased affluence and significant improvement in living conditions, due to which an increased proportion of children from the working class continued in school beyond the compulsory level (Barone & Ruggera 2018; Erikson, 2020). This positive trend, however, appears to have

stalled at the end of the previous century. In their analyses of five birth cohorts in 26 European countries between 1930 and 1980, Barone and Ruggera (2018) show how virtually all European countries experienced some educational equalization in the first decades after the Second World War, after which this equalizing trend flattened out in most European countries in the 1970s. Moreover, this stagnation continued and was still evident in the transitions of those belonging to the last cohort of the study – that is, individuals born between 1965 and 1980.

Despite the general, long-term, decreasing trend in the inequality of educational opportunities, the result that the educational success and failure of students depends on their social origins is one of the most permanent research findings in the field of sociology of education (e.g., Reay, 2010; Sirin, 2005). According to Erikson (2020), regardless of which origin factor is used, the association between one's social origin and educational attainment is positive and this holds true for all societies where it has been associated. Not only one's class position, but also other identity categories (e.g., gender and ethnicity) – and their interconnectedness, in particular – are important to notice when the impact of policies on educational equality and social diversity are discussed (Smooth, 2013). Over the 20th century, inequalities between men and women in their educational attainment has declined remarkably (Breen et al., 2010). The faster growth among women than men in participating in higher education has reversed gender inequalities in tertiary level educational attainment in almost all OECD countries. At the same time, however, there is a strong segregation in terms of field of study, with women being overrepresented in the fields of education and health and welfare, while men still predominate in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. From the point of view of equality, it is crucial to note that whatever field of study women choose, their earnings still lag behind men's in all OECD countries, referring to persistent inequality in educational outcomes between women and men (OECD, 2020b).

EDUCATION POLICIES, LLL, DIVERSITY

There are remarkable differences between countries concerning participation in adult education. While in the Nordic countries the overall participation rates may exceed 50%, the participation rates in some southern or eastern European – as well as South American – countries, are below 20% (Eurostat, 2021). However, total average participation rates mask differences for example between socioeconomic groups or between males and females. In adult education, as in all education, those who take advantage of educational opportunities are the ones who have already acquired high educational merits and who belong to the advantaged groups of society. In countries with high average participation rates, women tend to participate in adult education more actively than men (Eurostat, 2021).

Since the 1980s, in many countries educational and lifelong learning policies have undergone remarkable changes towards a neoliberal direction, leading to an increase of educational inequalities at all levels of the education system (Berisha et al., 2017). The characteristic features of these policies have been decentralization, bringing market mechanisms to public education as well as emphasizing competition, excellence, evaluation and individual's freedom of choice. In the neoliberal policy framework, the conception of educational equality has also changed. Instead of being based on the idea of universal rights, equality is fostered in the name of individual freedom. In this framework, the policy objective is to protect the right of each individual to choose between educational alternatives based on their wishes and ability (e.g. Kauko, 2019).

Simultaneously, the institutions of adult education and lifelong learning have been subjected to the needs and requirements of the economy, working life and competitiveness. Instead of placing the emphasis on promoting equality and social diversity, the objective of the current lifelong learning policies seems to be promoting and strengthening individuals' employability and competitiveness in the constantly changing late-modern labour markets (Jørgensen et al., 2019; Rinne et al., 2020).

Not all effects and consequences of lifelong learning policies are intended, and therefore the unintended consequences also need to be taken into account. Individuals in diverse socioeconomic positions in society are not equally resourced and motivated to adopt the requirements for continuous learning promoted in current lifelong learning policies. Individually felt pressures for learning and self-development are a part of the landscape where lifelong learning policies meet the diversity of agents: As a result of this encounter, a variety of actions and reactions of individuals in different class positions with different cultural features, mental capacities and attitudes towards self-development can be identified – ranging from self-doubt, anxieties and neuroses to systematic self-development with intrinsic value of learning (e.g., Brooks & Everett, 2008; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013; Isin, 2004).

Like in the case of equality, the conception of diversity has changed.. The discourse on social diversity has entailed a swing from ascribed, group-based attributes to self-attributed, individual characteristics that can be changed, such as education and work experience (David, 2009). Since the 1990s, in the business world, the concept of diversity has expanded beyond demographic characteristics like gender, age, ethnicity and disability to include a wider range of attributes (including differences in values, beliefs and cultural styles) that differentiate people (Oswicj & Noon, 2014). From a business point of view, diversity is seen as an essential requirement, a must-have for companies and their public face. Thus, social diversity policy has turned into a normal business practice. The assumption is that a socially diverse workforce enhances the creative, productive and competitiveness of a company. By understanding, valuing and respecting differences in the workforce, companies can capitalize on the benefits that diversity brings to them (Vertovec, 2012).

Whilst the concept of social diversity has lost its original meaning, the intersectional thinking of multiple identities and disadvantages has found its way to scholarly discussion, particularly in the fields of political and social sciences. When it comes to intersectional

policy approaches, however, it is argued that for politicians, it has been challenging to frame issues as intersectional problems requiring intersectional solutions; according to Smooth (2013), even well-intentioned policies fall short, in that they often assume all inequalities share the same ontological history and internal logic; the policies thus ignore the historical and contextual realities of differing types of inequality.

Despite the fact that intersectional thinking has also recently received more space in educational policy, the question of diversity has fallen under the mainstream policy thinking that still appears to be based on the idea of the homogeneity of citizens. At the same time, there is strong faith in the possibility of education to provide solutions to even conflicting societal problems. European educational and lifelong learning policies have been designed and implemented to meet the challenges of improving economic growth whilst guaranteeing social inclusion and thus the social cohesion of a society (Parreira do Amaral, 2020). In this context, the policies have to balance between the aims of educational equality and efficiency. If policies and educational systems are successful in terms of educational efficiency, the same policies and organizational features of the system may have a negative impact on educational equality and vice versa (Jørgensen et al., 2019; Van de Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010).

One must remember, however, that education as a societal institution operates in interaction with other societal institutions, such as the economy, political systems, families and the institutions of working life. Many of the problems that education is expected to solve have origins in global developments and the structures and power relationships of a society. While eliminating for instance educational inequality is a stated aim in countries across the world, the possibility to achieve this aim through education policies is limited (Erikson 2020). The wicked problems of our times cannot be solved by education alone; thus, larger societal and political reforms are needed when striving for global justice and egalitarian and pluralistic societies.

Educational institutions themselves can be seen as mini-societies. The values, norms, inequalities and power relationships of a given society are reflected in the organizational forms and everyday practices of schools and other educational institutions. From this point of view, educational equality is possible to reach only by removing all the social structures and practices that reproduce societal inequalities. However, as Gorard (2010) has stated, we can think that schools and other educational institutions, in their structure and organization, can do more than simply reflect the society we contemporarily have. Instead, we can think of education as a means to create the society we wish to have in future.

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