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1. Early school leaving

Early school leaving affects lives in many ways. It is a problem for individuals and society from many points of view, such as democratic participation and citizenship, health outcomes and other social outcomes. Research results at group level show that early school leaving negatively affects health, also mental, and contributes to social problems. According to a Swedish study, low education even, in general, means eight years shorter life expectancy¹.

Early school leaving is more likely to lead to low-paying job or unemployment which, in turn, affects the financial and social situation in a longer term.

2. Malmo commission

- Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmo
- "many people lack the fundamental conditions for good health, such as work, education, acceptable housing conditions and economic and social resources"

<http://bit.ly/VjSvyD>

Malmo is a city in the south of Sweden with 300,000 inhabitants located in a rather small geographic area with no actual suburbs. It is a global city with an industrial past. Nowadays, its youth unemployment rate is the highest in Sweden (compared to other large Swedish cities).

Inspired by the Marmot report (provide link) the Malmo Commission started their work a year ago. The intention is that the Malmo Commission will give suggestions to the Malmo politicians how to create a socially sustainable Malmo. In order to do that 30 research reports on different issues have been conducted. One report about early school leaving, entitled 'Secondary School - not for all?', is a research overview and conducted by me.

The 30 research reports are written in Swedish. However, some information about the Malmo Commission is published in English. The Malmo Commission will finish its work in December 2012 and will present its final report. At the moment, the commission prepared an interim report (provide link).

3. Swedish school system - a short overview:

- pre-school: 0-5 years of age
- at the age of 6: class 0 (so-called 0-class)
- from the age of 7: 9-year compulsory school
- from the age of 16 to 20: upper secondary education. It consists of six national programmes that prepare for higher education, or 12 vocational education programmes (which can also be taken as apprenticeship education), or five introductory programmes

[More detailed information about the Swedish school system](#)

5. Attending secondary education

- all young people are entitled to a three-year upper secondary education;
- education is free of charge and voluntary (but still 98% of young people choose to attend it);

¹ Folkhälsorapport, Socialstyrelsen, 2010

- schools are both public and private owned. Regardless of whether the school is private or public, it must comply with the legislation concerning schools:
 - Education Act (adopted by the parliament) which contains general provisions for all education tracks; and
 - upper secondary school ordinance (*gymnasieförordningen*, adopted by the government) which contains more detailed provisions on school organisation than the Education Act.

In Malmö, there are twice as many secondary schools that are private owned than public owned.

6. Pupils not eligible for national programmes

- five Introductory programmes
- should lead to a PP or to work
- don't provide an upper secondary diploma
- about an average 14 % from compulsory school, school year 9 - are not able to apply because of low grades
- huge differences between cities and between schools within cities
i.e. Malmö: in some schools less than 50%, but in some almost all of them continue to NP

7. Definition of low education

Those who do not achieve enough rates and never attend NP and those dropping out from secondary education = early school leaving

In average, about a third of a year-population of youth in Malmö, are recognised as early school leaver. This is somewhat higher than average on a Swedish level. This is a trend. A year ago the new Education Act and the new Ordinance were established and the changes will make it difficult in the future to compare with previous data. However, the demand in the new Act on the amount of achieved results in compulsory school or in the Introductory programmes, to be able to get a study place in secondary NP, will (or maybe will) in the future lead to an even larger group of early school leavers than before.

In Malmö about 1/3 of last year-population is attending the Introductory programmes.

In the Introductory programmes the youth group of cause is highly heterogenic. It differs a lot according to school result, those who only need to prepare one subject and those who did not achieve at all in compulsory school.

For those who have immigrant back ground, important factors are school background and residence in Sweden. I.e. those who arrive in there teens sometimes have started secondary education in previous county and some do not have any schooling background at all and have to start learning to read and write.

8. Profile of early school leavers

- working class background
- living in a poor family
- living in a family in receipt of social benefits
- living in foster care

A structural perspective shows that school as an organisation do not manage to close the gap - family background and education level. Significant results show that children get low education when their parents have low education. Early school leaving is transferred over generation. Of course you can talk about some mobility but in general that is not the case.

If the family income is small and regarded as poor, this risk-factor is stronger and specially if the family is on social benefits, financially supported from the city.

That is the case in all European countries.

In a European study and from its website www.epasi.eu you can download information about 14 countries school policies and about categories that are recognised being disadvantaged in education. It also consists of a database with interventions/projects in the study regarded as Good Examples.

If a child is living in Foster home, research result shows that they in general are early school leavers. Research result also shows that compare to other children/youth with equal cognitive capacity, cognitive capacity is not a factor that explaining this. Many of those children are living in Foster home for a long time and until 18 years of age.

What about immigrant pupils? Being 9 years in compulsory school in Sweden their result do not differ from Swedish born.

9. Risk factor

“ If the parents themselves have low education and are living on social benefits is the highest risk factor for pupils to get low marks in compulsory school and to drop out from secondary education. (Sjögren & Svaleryd, 2011)

10. Girls as well as boys

i.e. Malmoe:

Equal number of girls and boys not eligible for NP (2008)

Equal number of girls and boys in “ungdomsuppföljningen” - school leaver 2011 (16-20 of age)

Girls do better in school than boys showed in many research studies, international as national. Perhaps our eyes are blinded and we sometimes do not recognize that this is not the case for all girls. In Sweden, in average, only somewhat more boys than girls are early schoolleavers.

11. Why do the drop out from secondary school?

According to pupil: (SCB 2007/4)

- Tired of school (what does that mean?)
- Somatic or Mental health problems
- Lack of support from school (more girls than boys)
- Wrong programme (immigrants)

An interesting study conducted by SCB showed two main reasons, according to responding pupils: Tired of school and Somatic or Mental health problems.

What “Tired of school” actually means is of highly interest and a key issue. It is an “empty concept”. I have not found any research study, at least no Swedish, that out of pupils perspective have investigated the concept “tired of school” in trying to understand it and to establish it as a theoretic concept. “Tired of school” can mean a lot of things depending on different experiences and the researcher own interpretation. It does not necessarily mean tired of education.

Tired of school was the most common main reason given by pupils in the study for leaving school and also in combination with other reasons i.e. lack of support.

The second most common replay was Somatic or Mental health problems. Both serious somatic diseases and less serious were reported. This result has also been shown in a recently published study from Uppsala. I have read the overview but not seen the whole report. It shows the same result as in the SCB study about problems with somatic and mental disorder. Another report shows that in successful schools a cooperation between teachers and health- and social workers within school is of importance in successful schools.

Girls more often than boys reported lack of support from school in the SCB study. Many of them answered that if they had more support in school they would have stayed and not dropped out.

More often girls and boys with immigrant background than pupils with Swedish background meant that they had chosen the wrong program. Some meant if they could have changed program they would have stayed.

But did they not leave school because it was too difficult to manage the subject? More often those who dropped out in year 3 than in year 1 or 2 replayed it was because the demands to achieve approval was too difficult.

12. Why they drop out

- According to other perspective:

Not motivated and do not care

School do not give enough support

Support comes too late

School organisation; lack of time, mentorship do not work

Family culture

Perspective - dreams - discrimination

What other perspectives are common and what answers do they give to the question - why pupils leave secondary education.

The first - not motivated and do not care. It is a result showed in a study based on information from headmasters. The study seems to be too small and the results could therefore not be generalized but it shows an interesting why on how you could look upon drop out from school. It focuses only on the responsibility on the pupils. I would say it individualises the problem. According to this perspective - the school has nothing to do with early school leaving.

A lot of studies focus on support. According to the Education Act support should be given to every pupil in relation to his/her needs and how and in what way should be discussed and decided in dialogue teacher-pupil.

However, studies show that this in general is not the case. From teacher perspective there is lack of time to fulfil this obligation. Time to write documents about support and the pressure to have written documents, leads according to teacher to less time for support to pupils.

Mentorship does not, in general, work because it does not fit in into the school organisation.

In secondary education teachers do not normally meet parents. Cooperation with home is therefore seldom the case.

When pupils grow up in families with unemployment and experience discrimination in every day life and school, it affects their views about their own possibilities in the future and according to some research studies, if it is any point to study.

13. School leaving process

- Most of them drop out after two years in school have low points, 40% of the girls and 20% of the boys had less than 750 when they dropped out (2500 should be achieved after three year to get a diploma)

- It is interesting because it was unusual that those who dropped out in school year 1 or 2 said it was too difficult. That was the case for 10% of them who dropped out in school year 3.

- Absent, a great number of pupils had been absent from school before dropping out, 20 % from all lessons (they fade away, an expression given by the Norweigen Myklebust 2007)

If one look on early school leaving as a process and not as a straight line from pre-school to secondary education it give opportunities to influence the process.

A process is a complex sort of road with many points or rather turning points. Turning points consists of situations and persons that influence the pupil in different ways and affect the school process.

Dropping out is not a straight process but unsteady, winding and possible to change.

14 Canadian study

Community Health Systems Resource Group. Early School Leavers. Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School. Final Report, Toronto, Canada, 2005. Can be downloaded from the internet.

Their recommendations:

- Be proactive when youth start to disengage from school
- Provide sufficient and appropriate resources for assessment, counselling, and needed interventions
- Develop better communications with parents and seek ways to increase parent involvement in schools (especially immigrant parents)
- Improve teacher skills at monitoring student understanding/progress
- Create inter-sectorial partnership to support poor and troubled youth (i.e. those with mental health problems, substance abuse issues, involvement with the law, family difficulties, or in the care of child aid agencies) to stay in school
- Encourage a culture in which youth feel they "belong" within schools
- Find ways to use school facilities for homework help and mentoring

And they write, I quote "Perhaps most important of all is the need to recognize, support, and build upon youths own hopes and aspirations. Despite the multitude of risk factors faced by these young people, with very few exceptions, they constructed a future for themselves that included being in school." (p.40 Final report)

I will stress one part of a sentence -//... they constructed a future for themselves that include being in school, and another// feel they "belong" within schools. The first is about pupils and the latter about school as an organisation. It is important that school as organisation and teachers make it possible for children - from the very first school year and further on - to experience that they belong within school. It is a major challenge but necessary, according to research.

Individual school processes are complex processes:
Including structural factors as well as individual pupil factors but also school factors.

15. 16-20 and not in education nor at work

Political priority

Clear structure of responsibilities

Resources

Municipal Action Plan

Statistics and Records

Cooperation (between

Dedicated employees

Evaluation

According to the Education Act the city must have a clear picture of what each youth between 16-20 who are not in secondary education is doing. The city is forced to seek out and to contact all of them. Ask questions about: what do they do, their need of support, to motivate them to study, look for a job, and to inform them of possibilities to support.

According to an evaluation of intervention programmes with early school leavers these recommendations could facilitate the work.

Thank you! Please contact me if you have questions or comments of any kind.

Margareta