Power, Citizenship & Individual Development Plans

Individual Development Plans (IDP) are plans made by teachers, parents and children to target specific parts of the development of an individual child. The plans should not be confused with grades, which children in the Swedish education system do not receive until the age of fifteen, in future possibly from the age of seven. Rather IDPs are aim oriented plans and strategies to stimulate the development of the child. IDPs are compulsory according to the Swedish Compulsory School Ordinance from 2006.

The aim of the study is to describe and discuss how power relations between teachers, parents and children work within the processes of the formulation of IDPs. Also, how these plans could be understood against the background of the education for democratic citizenship of children.

Before 2006 children did not receive any grades before the age of fifteen. Instead they had individual development talks which over the years have been framed in different ways. They could be called parental talks, ‘quarter of an hour talks’ or individual development talks, but the overall aim of these talks was to discuss the development of a child between teacher and parent or between teacher, parent and child. Usually these talks were in the form of information about the previous development of a child from the teacher to the parents and the child. With the introduction of Individual Development Plans the idea was to produce plans which did not only assess but also formulated aims for the future development of a child. It also involved ideals of a possible influence of the child and its parents in formulating these aims. Power relations became thereby in focus in a different way from before.

Earlier there was a very specific view upon the ways in which the development of a child could be described, discussed and stimulated. That is, not by means of grades formulated in terms of figures or letters but rather by means of lengthy information through words and narratives. Despite the form of a talk, this was in practice often a one-way information from the teacher to the parents and their child. What happened with the introduction of IDPs was the strengthening of an ideal in which teachers would have less of a say and parents and notably children would gain more influence in these talks. Also and more importantly, the plans are more future and goal oriented than the previous form of talks. In practice this has not always worked out. This is where our research comes in.

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