How to Become Indispensable: Private Tuition and Policy Processes within Swedish Education System

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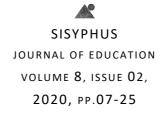
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ABSTRACT

During the 00s, the hiring of private tutors became a common and profitable practice in Sweden. The aim of this article is to illuminate educational policy space and policy processes through the case of private tuition practice in Sweden. The article offers a critical analysis and illuminates discourses that build up a private tuition network with shared ways of acting and talking, contributing to policy in the making. The data foremost consist of newspaper articles, interviews and websites and were analysed with network ethnography and the *What's the problem represented to be?* approach. The analysis shows a network involving human and non-human actors highlighting an education that is in a crisis – a message underpinned with assumptions that suit the network's needs, thus becoming indispensable for actions. The network occupies space, and through problematisation, determine what is considered to be significant in education and society, in Sweden as well as elsewhere.

KEY WORDS

policy; private tuition; problematisation; WPR analysis.

Como se Tornar Indispensável: Aulas Particulares e Processos Políticos no Sistema Educacional Sueco
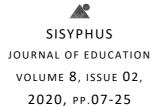
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RESUMO

A partir da primeira década deste século, a contratação de professores particulares tornou-se uma prática comum e lucrativa na Suécia. O objetivo deste artigo é pesquisar o papel das aulas particulares no espaço da política educacional sueca e os processos políticos que permeiam essa tendência. O artigo oferece uma análise crítica e aponta discursos que desenvolvem uma rede de ensino particular com formas partilhadas de agir e se expressar, e contribuem para a elaboração de uma política educacional própria. Os dados, obtidos principalmente a partir de artigos de jornal, entrevistas e websites, foram analisados através de uma etnografia de rede. A análise mostra uma rede que envolve actantes humanos e não-humanos, e que é resultante de uma educação que está em crise – uma mensagem fundamentada em suposições que atendem às necessidades da rede, tornando-se indispensável para as ações. A rede ocupa espaço e, através da problematização, determina o que é considerado significativo na educação e na sociedade, na Suécia e em outros lugares.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

política educacional; aulas particulares; problematização; abordagem WPR.

Cómo Ser Indispensable: Clases Privadas y Procesos de Política en el Sistema Educativo Sueco
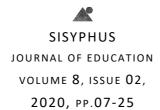
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RESUMEN

Durante los años 2000, la contratación de tutores privados se convirtió en una práctica común y rentable en Suecia. El objetivo de este artículo es iluminar el espacio de políticas educativas y los procesos de políticas a través del caso de la práctica de enseñanza privada en Suecia. El artículo ofrece un análisis crítico e ilumina los discursos que construyen una red de matrícula privada con formas compartidas de actuar y hablar, contribuyendo a la formulación de políticas. Los datos principales consisten en artículos de periódicos, entrevistas y sitios web, y se analizaron con etnografía de red y ¿Cuál es el problema representado? Acercarse. El análisis muestra una red que involucra a actores humanos y no humanos que destacan que la educación está en crisis, un mensaje respaldado con suposiciones que se adaptan a las necesidades de la red, por lo que se vuelve indispensable para las acciones. La red ocupa espacio y, a través de la problematización, determina lo que se considera significativo en educación y sociedad, tanto en Suecia como en otros lugares.

PALABRAS CLAVE

política educativa; clase particular; problematización; enfoque WPR.

How to Become Indispensable:
Private Tuition and Policy Processes within Swedish Education System

Anna Jobér

INTRODUCTION

The Swedish education system has rapidly and fundamentally changed over the last few decades, impacting both individual as well as structural levels. One observed change is the increase in private initiatives, such as companies that offer private tuition. The possibility to make use of private tuition services increased when the Swedish government opened up for tax deductions which then reduced the cost considerably. However, in 2015, the private tuition industry was forced to change. In August the same year, when a more left-wing government was about to abolish the possibility to deduct tax on private tuition, many representatives from the industry became worried. As predicted, the ability to deduct private tuition from taxes was removed, which caused costs to increase, and consequently, the industry faced difficulties. However, several companies overcame these obstacles and have become established. This paper takes these events as its starting point.

The focus throughout this paper is privately owned tutoring companies, meaning companies that provide, as Anne D'Arcy-Warmington (2015) explains, "Academic assistance rendered outside the education institution for a monetary fee" (p. 43). However, it is not accurate to talk about 'outside' and 'inside' education in Sweden anymore, as the public and private sectors have become increasingly intertwined in Sweden (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2018; Reimers & Martinsson, 2017) as is the case elsewhere [see e.g. Hursh (2016), Lawn (2014), and Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, (2016) and for illustrative examples from Chile, Netherlands, Spain, the UK and the US]. This is neither something new nor unique for Sweden; however, what is new and unique at this point is "the organisation of schooling for profit" (Simons, Lundahl, & Serpieri, 2013, p. 419). Sweden is one of the few countries in the world where private actors can profit from publicly financed welfare (SOU 2016:78). The entanglement of actors acting in and through education is thus not something new; however, pairing this with the possibility to profit on public welfare makes Sweden an exceptional case and all the more important to scrutinise. Given that the policy throughout the history of Swedish education has been the publicly funded Swedish model, these processes therefore offer an illuminating and interesting case when trying to understand what happens when frames, spaces and intentions (i.e. policy) change (Ball, 2016; Player-Koro, Jobér, & Bergviken Rensfeldt, 2019).

The aim of this article is to illuminate and analyse educational policy space and policy processes through the case of private tuition practice in the Swedish educational landscape. This is done, scrutinizing actors and discourses in a number of texts (interview transcripts, web-sites and newspaper articles). Therefore, the article offers a critical analysis of private tuition and makes visible not only the networks and its actors but also what builds up this network through shared and common discoursers who influence ways

of acting, intentions and decision-making (i.e. policy in the making). The article thus further aims to understand how thoughts become inscribed into society (Popkewitz, 2008) through educational processes and to understand policy as an exercise of power and a process of prioritising values (Clarke, 2012).

Influenced by Williamson (2017), Peck and Theodore (2010), and Ball (2009, 2016) this study takes as its starting point actors (humans and non-human) that become *networks* (i.e. a networked view on policy and policy processes). The paper is also highly influenced by Bacchi's (2009, 2012a) way of analysing policy, 'reading' discourses and policy processes, using the term 'problematisation' and the *What's the problem represented to be?* (WPR) approach. Both approaches direct attention to mobile and heterogenous discourses, relations and connections, and in addition, direct attention to power structures of policy-making processes and ways of producing the 'real' (Bacchi, 2012a). This article therefore uses a perspective on policy and policy processes as something socially produced through for example discourses (Ball, Maguire, Braun, Hoskins, & Perryman, 2012), where discourses stand in relation with societal conditions and changes. From this aspect, language (in a broad sense) acts as an agent in a discursive construction of (power) relationships and can reveal how e.g. texts and their authors represent and constructs the world (see e.g. Fairclough, 1992).

The article starts off by contextualising private tuition and the Swedish educational landscape. It is followed by a clarification on how the theoretical frameworks are used as a methodological and analytical tool. Thereafter, the data collection and the data are presented followed by two result sections, which includes a network ethnography and a WPR analysis. The paper concludes with a discussion on the political dimensions in educational policy processes, returning to arguments on policy as an exercise of power and a process of prioritising values.

PRIVATE TUITION

Private tuition is not an area in the education landscape that has been well researched, and few studies can be found. The effects of tutoring are thus not clear, as longitudinal research is missing (D'Arcy-Warmington, 2015) and the results are disparate regarding how effective tutoring is in raising grades (Ireson & Rushforth, 2011; Mischo & Haag, 2002; Smyth, 2008). Moreover, the existing studies are conducted in different cultural contexts and with different theoretical frameworks, which makes comparing hard. Another problem in earlier research is the many ways in which private tutoring is labelled: private tuition, coaching, shadow education and parallel education. D'Arcy-Warmington (2015) defines some of the different ways the definitions are used; for example, some Asian countries have in place large machinations of tutors helping families, while other countries have banned private tuition altogether. In other countries, such as France, three types of tuition are the most common: private lessons, coaching and after-school support. The after-school support is often provided by non-profit associations, and it concentrates on homework. This type of support is often situated in working-class areas with no fee and may be funded by local grants in some cases. In this paper, the opposite of this way to conduct private tuition is in focus. Here, the focus is on tuition often performed by a tutor. The tutoring sessions are often conducted in homes, and the parents – the customers – usually pay an hourly fee.

According to D'Arcy-Warmington (2015), the use of private tutoring is closely related to family circumstances such as the household income, the student's situation and the school environment. Judith Ireson and Katie Rushforth (2011) show similar findings – that parents with higher qualifications were more likely to employ tutors to help their children with important examinations, which are viewed as the gateway to higher education and future careers. For both students and their parents, one important reason for using private tutoring was to perform well on tests and examinations. According to Ireson and Rushforth (2011), this is especially evident when students compete for secondary school places. Ireson and Rushforth add that mathematics is the most popular subject for tutoring, followed by English and science.

Until recently, private tuition was not common in Sweden; however, this changed during the 00s. In 2007, under the right-wing government, private tuition became subject to tax deductions. Students in compulsory education (aged 7–16 years) were now able to buy tuition for approximately half the usual price. Like other tax deductions, the government funded this through public funding. In 2013, this tax deduction was extended to also include students in upper-secondary level, (aged 16–19 years) (Björkman, 2014, 21 November). This gave the tutoring industry the possibility to grow. The turnover for the four largest private tuition companies increased by 80 percent, and the companies employed hundreds of new tutors. During the most successful years (2013–2014), the five largest companies had a combined turnover of nearly 10 million Euros.

No statistics are available from the Swedish Tax Agency about who makes use of this possibility to deduct tax; however, some statistics indicate a significant contrast between municipalities. For example, in 2013, in the Stockholm municipality of Danderyd, one of the wealthiest municipalities in Sweden, 19 percent of its residents deducted private tuition from their taxes. Danderyd was followed by Lidingö and Täby, which are municipalities also known for having high average incomes. The lowest proportion of users of the tax deduction in the Stockholm area were found in Botkyrka and Södertälje, where only three percent of its residents made use of the same opportunity. Botkyrka and Södertälje are among the municipalities with the lowest average income (Jemini, 2014, 8 August). From this perspective, private tuition does not seem to contribute to closing the socioeconomic gaps that have increased in Sweden (The Swedish National Agency of Education, 2016). This has also been noticed in research; Eva Reimer and Lena Martinsson's (2014) claim that, rather than decreasing socioeconomic gaps, this form of private tuition contributes to the widening of gaps. They argue that this type of tuition requires well-paid parents who can cover the costs, which further increases the gap between the wealthy and the poor.

In 2015, the private tuition industry in Sweden was forced to change. When a more left-wing government took power in August 2015, it considered abolishing the tax deduction option, worrying many representatives from the private tuition industry. Many newspaper articles were published, and representatives and the media reported and discussed what would happen if the tax deduction option was abolished. Despite this, the possibility to deduct tax was taken away and the price of private tuition increased. According to the CEO of one of the largest companies, they lost many customers and other smaller companies were forced to close down (Nyman, 2016, 3 January). However, several companies overcame the difficulties and was able to continue with their businesses, one company is even listed on the Swedish stock market. These events as well as some of the historical backdrops to these events will be scrutinised in this article using the following theoretical frameworks.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The aim of this article is to illuminate and analyse educational policy space and policy processes through the case of private tuition practice in the Swedish educational landscape. The claim is that private tuition policy processes can be used as an illuminating case and make visible not only the networks and its actors but also the discourses and stories that build up this network. This will be performed with *network ethnography* followed by the WPR analysis, clarified below. The forthcoming section will also outline why I make use of network ethnography *and* the WPR analysis.

NETWORK ETHNOGRAPHY

In the analysis of the policy processes and the space these processes occupy, I employ a networked view strongly inspired by Ball's (2016) network ethnography. This entails the identification of the making and remaking of policy in "paths and pipelines, and nodes and activities through which policy moves, and the discourses and culture which articulate the policy community it represents" (Ball, 2016, p. 552). Therefore, this study explores spaces of policy and its actors, both human and non-human, that enable such a network space (Ball, 2016). Acknowledging that there are many metaphors that could be used, for example, assemblage as in actor-network theory studies (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005), I claim the network metaphor is of particular interest in this study. It acknowledges (likewise ANT) various components or actors, and these can be social or material, but they can also come in the form of discourses, practices, technical solutions, websites or policy documents. It also addresses nodes and relations, rather like the hubs and threads of a spider's web. A network analysis therefore studies paths, nodes and actors as though they are nets and shows how they (net-)work together (Williamson, Bergviken Rensfeldt, Player-Koro, & Selwyn, 2019). The network metaphor is also chosen to address the complexity of policy processes (Peck & Theodore, 2010) and the need to go beyond "conventional political-science understandings of 'policy transfer' typically posit the transferring policy knowledge and technology from A to B" (Peck & Theodore, 2010, pp. 169-170). This perspective therefore forces the study to move from categorising structures and binary shifts towards more reciprocal, circular and orb-like understandings. However, it should be stated that whatever concepts used, for example, network, assemblage, etc., none are sufficient in capturing the multidimensional 'social lives' of policies (Peck & Theodore, 2010).

With network ethnography, as well as other ethnographic studies, I explore a phenomenon, in this case, the phenomenon of private tuition policy processes and 'write' the culture of the ongoing performance, e.g. what becomes talked about in the network, what become taken-for-granted. In line with Peck and Theodore (2010), I will use methodological registers that embrace the tracking of policy networks, norms, and actors. When performing the network ethnography, the focus is not the distance between nodes in the network but rather the form and function of the network and the space the network occupies, as in, its topography (Ball, 2016). Therefore, like when visiting a new place, I will try to figure out its prerequisites, and inspired by Ball (2016), Peck and Theodore (2010), and Williamson (2017), will follow the stories, conflicts,

money, relations, activities, histories and situations as they travel along paths and connections and build up the network. It includes how stories are told and pitched', how commitments are made, and how new arrangements and relationships become established. With inspiration from Ball (2016), "The 'who's' and 'what's' but also the 'where's' of policy" (p. 552), and Peck and Theodore (2010), and Williamson (2017), I have turned their way of working into five analytical questions as guidance when studying the topography:

- Who? Who are the actors? Who is active? Who is taking space? Who are the drives, catalysts, accelerators and intermediaries forging and/or stopping agendas?
- What? What are the actors saying, doing, pitching? What unites and what defuses them?
- When? When in time do different agendas and actors align or diverge?
- Which? How? Which paths and connections are used? Which paths and connections join-up or conflict actors?
- Where? Where do the stories, conflicts, money and discourses go?

However, to extend the policy analysis, which also falls in line with Clarke's (2012) approach to 'shine additional light on the workings of education revolution as an instance of neo-liberal education policy' and the invitation from Peck and Theodore (2010) to extend the methodological registers of policy analysis, I will take the analysis a step further into the *What's the problem represented to be?* (WPR) perspective established by Bacchi (see e.g. 2009). Also, when performing the first step of the analysis, the network ethnography, it became clear (as is described in the first result chapter later), that there was one commonly repeated voice regarding a specific problem, and that is of a school in crisis. After the first step of the analysis, it seemed impossible to not scrutinise this problematising further, and thus ask why "only part of a story is being told" (Bacchi, 2009, p. xii) and what the problem represents. This is also the reason why this paper uses the WPR analysis rather than a critical discourse analysis on arguments on such as a school in crisis or narratives connected to international large-scaled assessments (ILSA) testing such as PISA.

PROBLEMATISATION: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE?

If network ethnography is of a more descriptive character, the WPR analysis steps into the *What?* question, 'reading' the policy and policy process (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). Furthermore, if network ethnography describes topography, then the WPR analysis describes the geology of the landscape – digging into the ground, analysing the soil, the formula and the formulation of the problem – not at least to understand the backdrop of the effects of global policy on national educational reforms (and in some cases, vice versa).

In short, the WPR analysis aims to make politics visible, turning attention towards the discourses that address not only the changes but also *what* causes changes. As Bacchi (2012b) states, the WPR approach starts "from the premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change)" (p. 21).

For example, Bacchi (2012b) explains, "If forms of training are recommended to improve women's status and promotion opportunities, the implication is that *their lack of training* is the 'problem', responsible for 'holding them back'" (p. 221). However, the actual problem here might not be *their lack of training* rather others lack of challenging norms, which means that the WPR analysis deduces what is really being represented when somebody says something is a problem. The WPR approach is often analytically employed through a set of questions posed to the material. Thus, the analysis in the second step will be structured around this chart of six questions:

- · Q1: What's the problem (e.g. of a school in crisis) represented to be in policies (e.g. in policy documents and web content)?
- · Q2: What presuppositions or assumptions (e.g. about the school in crisis) underlie this representation of the problem?
- · Q3: How has this representation of the problem come about?
- · Q4: What remains unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?
- · Q5: What effects (e.g. in terms of organising school and knowledge) are produced by this representation of the problem?
- · Q6: How and where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been, and/or how can it be, disrupted and replaced?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the question derived from the theoretical framework, I have, like Peck and Theodore (2010), worked on data from different sources: four in-depth interviews with tutors, three company websites, and ten newspaper articles. The aim has been to stay close to practice (Ball, 2016) without losing the sight of how, for example, global actors can govern from a distance (such as e.g. OECD; compare with e.g. Ball, 2016). The data used all concerned private tuition and privately owned tuition companies; thus, tuition performed by, for example, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were not included.

To give the first background picture, the initial network ethnography uses conclusions from earlier research on the marketization of the Swedish landscape from a number of researchers, for example, Dahlstedt and Fejes (2018), Reimers and Martinsson (2014, 2017), and Dovemark and Erixon Arreman (2017). Most of the data that underpin the rest of the network ethnography was collected from a particular period in time, namely, in August 2015, when a more left-wing government considered abolishing the tax deduction option and many representatives from the industry were worried. When this was being proposed, a number of actors and arguments became visible, and during 2014–2016, many articles and debate pieces in Sweden concerned tax deduction and the private tuition business. These articles serve as the main sources of this study, and they come from four of the largest newspapers in Sweden, *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen* and *Svenska Dagbladet* with a time span selected to find illuminating statements regarding private tuition. The newspapers were searched with the word '*läxhjälp*' (Eng. 'help with homework'; in Sweden, this means help often organised outside of formal education), which was the most common word used in Sweden at this

point when talking about private tuition. Many articles were found, but in the end, ten articles that clearly focused on private tuition were chosen. In addition, two excerpts from interviews with four tutors were used. The interviewees were between the ages of 19 and 25, and here, they are anonymised with the coded names Martin, Carl, Behar and Sarah, with Sarah having had experience with tutoring services during her school years. Finally, a number of websites from the largest private tutoring companies in Sweden were selected. They were found through Google searches (2016–02–03), and their ranking and primary function as education companies were checked on websites (www.solidinfo.se and www.allabolag.se) monitoring and spreading information about companies in Sweden. Websites from the following companies were finally selected and included in the study: My Academy, Smartstudies, and Allakando. The produced data was in Swedish, and all the quotations were thus translated into English and thereafter analysed with the above analytical questions.

Acknowledging that this project does not allow a full-scale network ethnography (similar to e.g. Ball, 2016) and has its limitations, I nevertheless claim that the above data can give illuminating examples, with the two-step analytical procedure contributing to this as well. The two forthcoming sections describe the results of these steps.

NET-WORKING POLICY PROCESSES

The Swedish school system was previously characterised by central rules and regulations, and the main source of funding for education came from the state. In practice, private schools and private tuition did not exist nor did the public request them. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, the 'Swedish model' was criticised and politicians, cheered on by a number of actors, began to transform the system with, for example, a school choice reform, decentralisation and changed curricula. The discourse of a school in crisis exposed Swedish education to reforms, which resulted in a market-like system where the private actors became important players as e.g. providers of educational solutions and/or schools. Thus, public and private actors had to share the stage, they became actors in the same play, increasingly intertwined and with a distributed responsibility. These actors and events could therefore be described as initial nodal points and threads to an initial network – a network that becomes even more visualised when applying the analytical questions, *who?* (actors)*, what?* (e.g. stories), *when?* (in time), *which/how?* (connections, paths) and *where?* on the data.

In 2007, under the right-wing government, private tuition became subject to tax deductions. Students in compulsory education (aged 7–16 years) were now able to buy tuition for approximately half the price. Like other tax deductions, the government funded this through public funding. In 2013, this tax deduction was extended to also include students at the upper-secondary level (aged 16–19 years) (Björkman, 2014, 21 November). This gave the tutoring industry the possibility to grow. The initial network was therefore built and nurtured with policy reforms which resulted in a market-like system where it was possible to profit from public funds. The companies that entered the arena were in turn nurtured not only by benefits such as tax deduction but also by the discourses of problems and a 'school in crisis'. In other words, actors such as political parties, new tax laws, and shared discourses were connected, and these established the private tuition network.

In 2015, the private tuition industry in Sweden was forced to change. When a more left-wing government in August 2015 considered abolishing the tax deduction option, many representatives from the industry were worried. A number of issues can be observed and analysed: Firstly, different actors pitched a similar story that schools do not do enough to help students and that schools in Sweden cannot give sufficient individual help. These actors were customers (i.e. those buying the service) and CEOs (company owners). In early June 2014, when they realised that their business was threatened, two competing company owners joined up and argued in a debate article that private tuition was the way forward due to its possibilities 'efficiency and individualization' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014, 24 June). The customers voices were heard in, for example, a newspaper article where Elias, who is 14 years old, and his grandfather were interviewed. Elias has dyslexia and receives help via a distant tutor, and he states, '[m]y teachers at school have been a little bit fiddly' but claims that, in contrast, the tutor has helped him. According to his grandfather, school has not been able to support Elias (Nyman, 2016, 3 January). In other words, paths and connections between competing companies were created, and arguments were strongly put forward – arguments that later spread and were found among the customers. Secondly, and in line with the previous argument, what was also brought forward in autumn 2014 was that parents did not seem able to help their children enough. In a newspaper article, one company's representative states that '[i]t is often then [at the upper-secondary level] that help is needed. It is there that the knowledge of their mother and father drops off' (Jemini, 2014, 8 August). Later that autumn, one parent stated in a newspaper that '[w]e felt that it would be good with someone other than us [helping], and we are really pleased' (Ekström, 2014, 3 October). Other similar arguments were brought forward by two different actors pitching the same argument regarding parents, building up a network of repeated arguments and discourses.

However, the above argument regarding a school in crisis does not happen in a void. During this period, the story of a Swedish school with problems was cheered-on by results from global international large-scaled assessments (ILSA) testing such as PISA. ILSAs attract much attention and competition with other countries is developed globally through, for example, the PISA test (Lindblad, Pettersson, & Popkewitz, 2017). Over many years, Sweden's place in the rankings fell, which created pressure on politicians and policymakers to change education to suits the goals of ILSAs. The latest results from PISA show that several trends were broken. However, by this point, when private tuition began to be taken for granted, Sweden was already strongly influenced by the narrative of a school in crisis (Lindblad et al., 2017). PISA and ILSAs thus became actors in the becoming of the network. This discourse on failing students in Sweden is shown in arguments from the two company owners who, in another article in late June 2014, emphasised 'how serious the situation is regarding Swedish pupils' results in school'. They also claimed that, to solve this, 'we need to draw on all good forces to change the trend' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014, 24 June). The discourse makes its way onto the websites of the private tuition companies, bringing forward arguments that private tutors can increase the possibilities for students to get better test results and arguing that private tuition makes one '[w]ell prepared for the final test'. This story of a school in crisis seems to be adopted by parents, and it is noticeable how it highlights the work of the tutors. One of the interviewed tutors, Martin, states that 'especially before national tests, then there are lots of requests' and Sarah, another interviewed tutor, makes similar statements. In other words, the discourse of a school in crisis with students that fail tests becomes pitched by different actors when the private tuition industry is threatened.

ILSA as an actor that connects into the private tuition network is shown in other ways: Mathematics and Natural Sciences are two subjects tested in PISA and also two of the subjects most common in tuition companies, according to earlier research (Ireson & Rushforth, 2011). This is also underscored by the tutors in the interviews. Testing on a national and international scale is thus an actor that not only nurtures the continuity of private tuition companies but also epistemologically orients students towards certain subjects. This process is probably mutually beneficial, as the companies emphasising the importance of Mathematics and Natural Sciences are precisely those that hire university students with math and science as their main subjects, which is sometimes marketed on their websites.

The fear of deepening the crisis of the Swedish school becomes visible when further analysing the data. In one debate articles, two company owners assert that 'a fat wallet should not be needed in order to get effective support to increase your results'. Therefore, they argue, the cost of private tuition should be reduced significantly instead of raised. According to the two CEOs, public administrated tuition risks increasing the gaps between students and that this kind of public administrated tuition 'often works poorly for those with the greatest need and those in need of individual attention in the large groups of 25–30 students, which is often the case when schools themselves organise homework assistance' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014, 30 June). Not only does this enhance the narrative of a school in crisis, which then becomes a discourse that builds up the network, but also it locks out actors and actors such as public administrated tuition or NGO alternatives (such as The Red Cross), who thus cannot share the argument or become a part of the solution.

Whilst some actors are locked out, others are locked in. Private tuition companies hire university students, and this is hailed as something positive for the labour market, thus locking labour arguments into the private tuition net-working. The company owner states that many young people need this kind of work to cope. The two CEOs are afraid that if they are not able to continue their business, this will result in young people not having a salary nor merits. A tutor claims in one reportage that 'we will not continue because it is not profitable. … It has helped me a lot, both for my CV and as an income while I study' (Nyman, 2015, 12 August, 21). The same viewpoint is put forward by a CEO in another debate article: 'For students, where many live on a loan and lunch box, it means an opportunity for the CV and to moonlight. It may be the few hours that enables one to manage those poor years as a student' (Omni, 2015, 15 June). In another debate article, CEOs argue that they have found a model that provides thousands of young people with job opportunities while giving pupils higher results in school, and in addition, 'The [tax] deduction opportunity for private tuition has also contributed to thousands of new jobs for young adults. It has created a strengthening of the economy for university students …' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014, 24 June). These examples show how two different actors, CEOs and tutors, unite in a similar argument and create a thread between each, thus strengthening the policy network.

To conclude, the initial network was performed with policy reforms which resulted in a market-like system where it was possible to profit on public funds. The companies that entered the arena were in turn nurtured by benefits such as tax deduction as well as by the discourses of problems and a 'school in crisis'. This problem was later cultivated by new actors and stories that were pitched and reinforced by ILSAs, parents, tutors and CEOs. The network ethnography shows processes where intentions and arguments were produced and where actors became locked into the network space, becoming powerful in their capacity to translate and nurture each other and their space (i.e. policy in the

making). The main story that was pitched in paths and connections by different actors was that of a school in crisis – a school with problems. What does this problematisation entail? The next section examines this further.

TRACING BACKWARDS INTO THE PROBLEMATISATION

As seen in the previous section, there is a discourse about a school in crisis that becomes repeated throughout the networking process and thus occupies a large space in the network. In Bacchi's view, what does this represent?

Addressing the first question in Bacchi's framework, *What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?* the problem seen through the network ethnography is thus a school in a crisis. Addressing the second question, this problem is underpinned by a number of presuppositions and assumptions. It is not explicitly outspoken in the network that the particular crisis will be worse if the private tuition business cannot continue with its work; however, these arguments build up a picture where a number of students in the Swedish school system will not cope without the private tuition business. One example of such an implicit argument that I claim underpins the crisis argument is expressed by one company owner: She/he stresses that children with special needs will not get the help they need if they were forced to lock down. One newspaper reported on the Swedish Radio (*Sveriges Radio*) programme, *Ekot* (lit. 'The Echo'), that one tutoring business claimed that '[a] private tuition company owner from Dalarna [a county in Sweden] assured that at least 90 percent of her customers had children with special needs. Now, the entrepreneur was worried about what would happen to the poor children after New Year' (Persson, 2014, 11 November). This assumption was emphasised when Swedish Radio asked 15 companies to state how important they are in regard to this: '[a]bout half of the children use the service because they need special support', they explain (Björkman, 2014, 21 November). Another assumption in the network (that underpins the crisis) is about a school that is insufficient. Elias, who is 14 years old, and his grandfather were interviewed in one article regarding the help he receives via a distant tutor. He states, that school was 'sad in supporting' him (Nyman, 2016, 3 January). Similar arguments are found when two CEOs claim that private tuition can give 'a completely different efficiency and individualisation' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014, 24 June). In line with this argument, some actors emphasise, as we have seen earlier, that school is insufficient and increases socioeconomic gaps. Two CEOs put forward in a debate article that publicly administrated private tuition risks increasing the gaps between students and that this kind of public administrated private tuition 'often works poorly for those in greatest need and those in need of individual attention in the large groups of 25–30 students, which is often the case when schools organise homework assistance themselves' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014 , 30 June)*.* There is thus an assumption that increased private tuition will decrease socioeconomic gaps (i.e. it helps a Swedish school in crisis, where the broadening gaps are a common dilemma). There is also a belief that parents do not have sufficient knowledge, this is for example expressed regarding the parent to students at upper-secondary level (Jemini, 2014, 8 August). In other words, there are a number of assumptions regarding, for example, how school and parents are insufficient as well as assumptions regarding what will happen if they cannot carry-on

with their work. They inscribe assumptions into the network, namely, that of a school with even larger problems if they cannot continue.

The third question in Bacchi's analytical framework deals with how the representation of the 'problem' comes about. My claim is that this representation of the problem came about in and through the network, as previously presented. However, it spreads throughout time, as the network can be traced from the past, and it may spread into the future and influence forthcoming changes. The network has neither clear boundaries regarding time nor strict boundaries: the crisis metaphors are used elsewhere in the educational landscape, and in the data, glimpses of new policy processes that connect into this network can be found. For example, many of the large tutoring companies lost many customers when the tax deduction was taken away. However, digitalisation and the possibility to reach students through computers and distance learning seemed like one opening for the tutoring companies. When the tax deduction was taken away, the CEOs of two of the largest companies asked for the tax rules to be adapted 'to a modern and digital reality and ensure that the deduction option also includes the new forms of direct and individually adapted homework assistance via the internet' (Johansson & Åvall, 2014, 24 June). What happened is particularly interesting: Later, after this data was produced, the curriculum was changed in one of the fastest reforms in Swedish school history. These reforms have reinforced an EdTech industry and increased the number of digitalising educational companies (see e.g. Player Coro). A new educational landscape has been created, with new policy processes that influence the educational landscape (Ideland, Jobér, & Axelsson, forthcoming).

In the analysis of the representation of the problem, I turn to the fourth question set: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently? When analysing the network and its actors, there are a number of things that do not seem to be addressed or are left unproblematised. This is in regard to, for example, the arguments about children with special needs. The presupposition that a large number of the children who use private tuition are children with special needs can be questioned. If this argument is accurate, then there are many students with special needs – a number well above average – in these rich areas. As far as I can see in the general statistics, this is not true, and thus this argument is left unproblematised in the network. What is also left out in the debate is that many schools recruit specially trained teachers when working with children with special needs, and on the whole, schools recruit certified teachers. It is rather the opposite when it comes to private tuition. The CEOs repeatedly claim that university students are suitable as tutors. Another example concerns the argument about decreasing income gaps. In an interview, Martin, a tutor, explains, 'Typically, Swedish white people have used [private tuition] …. and fairly high socioeconomic status, I would say, mostly. Nothing below middle class, you could definitely say'. Like earlier arguments, there are reasons to believe that this assumption, namely, that private tuition will bridge economic gaps when reaching students from families with low incomes and low socioeconomic standards can be questioned. Private tuition is most common in wealthier families due to the cost, which means, according to Reimers and Martinsson (2014), that it has become a market product which requires well-paid parents who can cover the costs, which in turn further increases the gap between the wealthy and the others. According to one debater in a Swedish newspaper, there is a risk that abolishing the tax deduction (i.e. risking increased tuition fees) will not primarily affect pupils in need of support and pupils from low socioeconomic backgrounds because, as the debater argues, 'their parents' wallets made it never applicable to them' (Björkman, 2014, 21 November).

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Another additional argument that is left out or unproblematised is that the discourse of the failing school is built up by facts from OECD, and these are not aligned to the Swedish curriculum. To conclude, important arguments that are left out or arguments that are not problematised remain. I claim that these arguments could have had the possibility to change how we thought about the problem.

The analysis of the data does not give a clear answer on the fifth set of questions: What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'? In addition to what has already been acknowledged and the base for this study – that private tuition is now a taken-for-granted practice in the educational market – there are no clear effects to be seen. However, I claim that a number of potential effects could be seen. As the problems to some extent are built up by false or irrelevant arguments, there is a risk that a disproportionate and fabricated picture of Swedish school and its students are portrayed. There is also a risk that this renders wrong decisions regarding a number of related issues, including children with special needs, tax laws and the use of public funds.

Finally, addressing the last question, this representation of the 'problem' was produced, disseminated and defended by a number of actors in the network. I argue that the network ethnography shows this clearly. However, one example is left out in the network ethnography, as it is not visible. It regards the *defending* of the problem. One could argue that one important actor in the network is the reform which made it possible to profit from public funds in the first place. During the last decade, this reform has been defended by all the political parties except one. To this day, there is no political majority or drive to stop private companies from profiting from public welfare.

To conclude, the network builds up and is built up by the problem of a school in crisis. When dismantling the problem in this particular case, it becomes clear that the assumptions building up the argument are to great extent not accurate and/or relevant. Despite this, the network of private tuition becomes the problem-solver and is thus indispensable, becoming the salvation in further actions.

BECOMING INDISPENSABLE

What I have tried so show is that a network is created; it occupies space, and through problematisation, sets the agenda of certain ideas and values. I have also shown that those who lodge and nurture the problematisation also become those who want to solve the problem. Problematisation thus becomes a framing mechanism, as not only do the actors become the problem-solvers but also, they determine what is significant and what is left out of the considerations (Bacchi, 2009). As Bacchi states, we are governed through problematisations, and in line with Bacchi's approach, I argue that not only must we challenge this problem-solving paradigm but also the network that lodges and nurtures the problematisation.

What I argue here is therefore *not* first and foremost that private initiatives within education should banned but rather that we need to challenge the problem-solving paradigm and the network that lodges and nurtures the problematisation, wherever it is. I have shown that there are discourses and actors that are not part of the network, and I claim that one of the important actors lacking in the network is the political dimension (i.e. the critical discussion, the process of decision-making within a democracy).

When private initiatives and their networks are left without a transparent decision-making process and without critical voices or any possibility to scrutinise arguments, democracy is set out of play. This process is probably equally important for both private and public initiatives and networks. In addition, I claim that this is important for the international research field to scrutinise in an era when global policy making influence national educational reforms that regards the core of democracy issues (see e.g. Verger et al., 2016).

Among many others, Labaree (2008) asserts that "The grammar of schooling is not only an expression of the organisational inertia of the educational system but also a mechanism by which it shapes society" (p. 460). As Labaree further states, schools and educators are both major actors in the story – the story of society. In other words, what becomes indispensable to education also becomes indispensable in society. Therefore, my firm belief is that the political dimensions in education must be kept alive.

Politics concerns the very core processes of prioritising values, and like Clarke (2012), I argue that educational policy and politics are inseparable; thus, the political dimension could not be placed in the background. The question is what will happen if educational policy processes becomes even more depoliticised through, for example, opaque network processes and problematisations? For example, what will happen if a group of students are not profitable enough? Will students with low exchange value fit well into an educational landscape that has become depoliticised?

Acknowledgements

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