DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE SWEDISH UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOL

SIXTEN MARKLUND

This country report is devoted to the “Upper secondary school” introduced in Sweden in 1971, whose creation is the most radical reform attempted in Europe. It strives to integrate study-related and occupation-related education in higher secondary education. A brief explanation of the new concept is followed by a discussion of the structural and curricular characteristics of this school type, with emphasis on the importance of “general subjects”. In the final section the didactic principles of differentiation and integration and their implications for the organizational structure are juxtaposed and their interdependence is investigated.

Dieser Länderbericht ist der seit 1971 in Schweden eingeführten “Gymnasialschule” gewidmet, welche die in Europa radikalste Reform darstellt, in der eine Integration von studienbezogener und berufsbezogener Bildung in der Sekundarstufe II angestrebt wird. Nach einer knappen Begründung der neuen Konzeption werden die strukturellen und curricularen Qualitäten der Gymnasialschule erörtert, wobei die Bedeutung der “allgemeinen Fächer” unterstrichen wird. Im letzten Abschnitt werden die didaktischen Prinzipien der “Differenzierung” und “Integration” (mit ihren Auswirkungen auf die Organisationsstruktur) einander gegenübergestellt und ihrer wechselseitigen Abhängigkeit untersucht.

Until 1971 Sweden had a large number of schools for the post-compulsory ages 16-19 years. These schools could be grouped as follows:

- upper secondary schools (the academic “gymnasium” for pupils aged 16-19)
- continuation school (two year courses in social, economic and technical studies for pupils aged 16-18)
- vocational schools, schools of agriculture, schools of forestry, rural schools of home economics (courses for those aged 16 and upwards, of varying length).

According to a decision taken by the Swedish Parliament (“Riksdag”) in 1968 these schools ceased to exist as three distinct types of school with separate organizations and objectives. They were replaced by a single, integrated upper-secondary school.

This new school is a natural continuation of the compulsory comprehensive school, which the students complete at the age of 16. The integrated upper-secondary school offers twenty-two lines of study, to be pursued for either two or three years. In technical studies there is also a four-year line. Most of these are divided into sub-alternatives, while some of them include optional combinations of subjects, or “variants”. There are also a number of special courses of varying duration.

The range of lines and special courses varies from district to district. The directive issued for planning work on the upper-secondary school system laid down that efforts should be made to include the majority of study alternatives in every upper-secondary school area, but it would not be possible to provide the full range everywhere.

The strategy for the introduction all over the nation of the new integrated upper-secondary school clearly differed from the earlier strategy for the introduction of the nine-year comprehensive compulsory school. This reform started in 1950 and it took Sweden two decades to introduce the new comprehensive school. The last school districts joined it in 1969.

The comprehensive school reform for compulsory education (age 7-16) comprised a gradual and complete abolition of the old “folkskola”, “realskola” and other types of lower-secondary schools and their total replacement by the new comprehensive school.

Contrary to this strategy the post-compulsory school reform meant a merging of already existing schools. Most of them were not abolished.