

# An Inevitable Progress? Educational restructuring in Finland, Iceland and Sweden at the turn of the millennium

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**ABSTRACT** *The article discusses how current changes in the system of reasoning about education in Finland, Iceland and Sweden are characterised by culturally woven patterns where marketisation strategies, for instance budget reform, are introduced as technically effective devices both for educating the best and to increase inclusion. This system of reason presupposes that the neo-liberalist restructuring changes are inevitable global phenomena and that they are a progress compared with the old arrangements, but is silent about socio-economic issues and the equity goals of the 1960s–1980s. The article also argues that school-based self-evaluation as a practice and as a language is a normalising technique that ensures that school actors will identify the obstacles encountered in the restructuring transition so that neither state nor other authorities intervene.*

**Keywords:** *governance; inclusion; marketisation; system of reason*

## INTRODUCTION

The main focus in this article is on discursive changes in schooling in Finland, Iceland and Sweden. The analysis is based mainly on the Educational Governance and Social Integration/Exclusion (EGSIE) research project [1]. What characterises

the new governance structures of educational systems in the three countries will be summarised before focusing the discussion on changes that are materialised institutionally as different techniques of governance in the different countries. Secondly, the new governance discourse as it is produced in educational policy documents and interviews with politicians, administrators, teachers and other school level actors will be analysed. Thirdly, we go on to discuss changing subject constructions in the field of education, asking how the principals, teachers and students are constituted in the discourse found in the research material. Fourthly, changes in reasoning about governance and inclusion/exclusion, focusing on how current reform is introduced as inevitable and on the silence on socio-economic issues are discussed. In the fifth place focus is on what we identify as a paradigm change in the discourse, relatively uniform across the three countries. Lastly, the final section focuses on pointing out how the new arrangements and discourse have normalised methods and thoughts on governance into what Foucault (1979) describes as governmentality. Governmentality in this sense refers to the techniques and language that individuals as well as institutions (in our case schools) adopt as they had invented them (see also Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998).

## TECHNIQUES FOR THE NEW GOVERNANCE

Educational changes in Finland, Iceland and Sweden during the 1990s are most apparent in the ways that schools and educational systems are governed. Decentralisation, goal steering, accountability, managerialism, evaluation, choice, competition and even privatisation have moved onto the scene as key terms that have become a vital if not hegemonic part of Nordic education discourse, as well as in most other Western countries. In the international literature a curious convergence of neo-liberalist education policy has been noted by various researchers (see for example Whitty & Edwards, 1998; Ball, 2000). It does not seem to be an overstatement to even speak about a 'policy epidemic', as Levin (1998) does. Expressed at a general level, this policy epidemic is a kind of neo-liberalist education policy discourse that seems to dominate the discursive field and has its impact on the practices of governance. The policy epidemic appears, however, in national implementations that in some cases are the same arrangements, but not always.

As an orientation for a comparison between the three Nordic countries in the study, we shall contrast them by asking what kind of 'techniques of governance' are used. There are two levels of such techniques. One is the actual practices that are used and the other is the internalisation of the mindset that we witnessed. While it is not easy and straightforward to separate these two levels, we summarise the practices [2].

In traditional administrative areas, Finland, Iceland and Sweden seem to apply rather similar techniques. *Decentralisation* has been realised through moving the responsibility for compulsory schooling to the municipalities and schools by abolishing ear-marked money. *Deregulation* in these three countries means an acceptance of frame legislation and goal steering where school-based self-evaluation is one of the main mantras. The state level has renounced the traditional mechanisms of governance such as 'information steering'. *Managerialism* is applied in a similar way in these three countries: principals are seen as business managers, are given a strong

power position in their schools and are fully responsible for their enterprise to the municipality. One of the most interesting techniques of *individualising* in the three countries is the mechanism of systematically increasing the number of the students diagnosed as in need of special education. There are pressures to 'create' more of this kind of deviation due to the various supporting systems and resources available to the school level if they have this kind of student.

There are, however, important differences. *Parental choice* has been applied in Sweden and Finland in a 'Nordic way', where free school choice is limited by the right of every child to the neighbourhood school, while in Iceland (at the compulsory level) the only options other than the local schools are the few private schools. Elevating the right of attending the neighbourhood school above the right of free choice leaves the field open for political decisions where the intake area for each school will be decisive: some schools have room for 'outside students', while others must acquiesce in their neighbourhood being the intake area. In the area labeled *privatisation* Sweden has established the so-called 'free school', a kind of a private school. In 2001 they were attended by around 4% of compulsory school students (Skolverket, 2001). In Finland and Iceland the proportion of formal and informal privatisation schooling methods is still small, but increasing. *School autonomy* and techniques of *competition* come close to free choice: the schools should be transparent in their qualities to make possible rational choices by the parent-customers. In Finland and Sweden schools are encouraged to make themselves more attractive by means of profilisation. In *performativity* Iceland utilises the strongest technique of control of the three countries. Nationally centralised testing is carried out in Grades 4, 7 and 10 [3]. Iceland publishes the scores in 'league tables', where the schools are ranked according to their test scores of achievements. In Sweden national testing in Grades 5 and 9 is realised in a decentralised form, including evaluation done by teachers at the local level. Some communities in Sweden present league tables in the newspapers and comparisons between schools are available on the website of the National Agency of Education [4]. In this area Finland is the most 'underdeveloped': the national sample studies in different school subjects and standardised 'task banks' voluntarily available to Grade 9 teachers have until now been enough for state level control of performativity.

## RESTRUCTURING THE DISCOURSE

In the national cases discussed here the chief rhetoric in terms of what is to be restructured is the importance of making schools financially and educationally responsible. To that purpose, budget reforms have been implemented at the state and local levels aimed at making schools accountable for using public money wisely and effectively. Furthermore, and more than ever, education is to be governed by increasingly detailed goals in national curricula along with centralised assessment, rather than by, for instance, state-approved or state-published textbooks. Related to this is the movement towards a greater emphasis on school-based self-evaluation. This has not taken place in exactly the same way in the three countries. The

similarities, however, in the restructuring discourse are strikingly greater than the dissimilarities.

Most budget reforms are aimed at minimising the use of public money, often related to the use of new methods of resource allocation, such as providing schools with lump sums of money and allowing them to build up funds by attracting private money. In all of the countries the practice of schools defining the needs yearly either seems to have already been abandoned or has become very unpopular with local and state authorities.

Among the most influential budget reforms we witnessed is a movement to have the municipalities finance the schools. In accordance with the 'new public management', supported especially by the OECD, the lump sum method of budgeting has abolished the 'ear-marked' money delivered by the state for schooling, allowing the municipalities to set their own preferences in local services. The chief line of arguments says that it is necessary to decrease the central decision making power and move it closer to the public.

The chief steering term in each of the countries translates into English as 'management by results' [5]. Management by results is to be secured with budget contracts, in which the educational services of the school are defined. The chief 'service' of the school is, of course, teaching students so, not surprisingly, the greatest amount of money comes through that. Management by results is possible by using the goals and the objectives defined in the national curricula as the basis for the evaluation of students' progress. According to official rhetoric, the budget and the curriculum are to be connected into a technical system by which it would ultimately be possible to evaluate how well a school performs. Focusing on the discourse there are two main techniques that seem to be the most emphasised vehicles in management by results: centralised assessment and school-based self-evaluation.

Centralised assessment appears very differently in the three countries. Our investigations tell us that an interest in centralised assessment with national tests has been debated for decades in various degrees in these three countries. For instance, Iceland has recently introduced more centralised examinations in compulsory schooling, while Finland only implements a national task bank that teachers can voluntarily use. Nevertheless, the mantra of evaluation and also rumours of testing are quotidian in Finland. In Sweden steering by goals and results is vital in the restructuring of education. National tests are important in Sweden as well.

School-based self-evaluation, on the other hand, is gaining more and more ground in all three countries, both as a practice mandated by law and as a discourse. In Finland one might even claim that this term is one of the magic words of restructuring. The school legislation makes self-evaluation a formal responsibility of every school. Self-evaluation is also a key word for the rational development of both teachers and students. In the Icelandic school legislation there are requirements that each school must adopt methods to evaluate how the school deals with the curricular goals as well as how well it performs the financial and administrative procedures. The evaluation is to be based on each school's adaptation of the national curriculum in the school curriculum. Every five years the ministry of education scrutinises these

methods. This technique was so new when the Icelandic interviews were undertaken that most of the school interviewees did not have much to say about it. However, reading government documents about school-based self-evaluation tells us that it is considered an easy thing to apply. In Sweden the only prescribed thing about school-based self-evaluation is that schools are obliged to perform it, not how to perform it.

In all these cases the responsibility for adhering to national policy is placed in the particular school. The schools' implementation of the educational goals and methods are not governed directly; in contrast, an internal process of normalisation described by Foucault (1977, 1979) becomes an effective steering method of restructuring. Educators in schools oversee themselves so that state or local authorities shall have no reason to intervene.

The country study reports show a widespread interest in and acceptance of market devices as governing tools and the marketisation of educational language and discourse (Johannesson *et al.*, 2001; Lindblad *et al.*, 2001; Simola *et al.*, 2001). This is clear from having analysed policy documents and having interviewed policy makers, principals, teachers and other school professionals. Our observed data, however, do not tell us enough about the possible resistance outside education, such as from radical political parties or among selected groups of teachers. Certainly very little questioning surfaced in the interviews. Furthermore, education increasingly seems to be seen as a product that is to be placed in a market where parents and sponsors compete. And although school-based self-evaluation is not necessarily a symptom of the neo-liberalist policy epidemic, we can safely conclude that its purpose of accountability and its relationship to goal steering makes it a perfect partner to the financial devices.

Marketisation of every sphere of society is an international trend (see for example Lauder and Hughes, 1999) that presents a radical change in countries that have been known for stressing equality, as the Nordic countries are. In Finland and Iceland in particular, this new policy is tied to the interest of these countries in being among the best with respect to global competition and in Sweden to interests in not losing Sweden's leading role. The Finnish researchers even report an almost unanimous belief in market mechanisms being applicable to educational policy (Rinne *et al.*, 2001a). Furthermore, the discourse of marketisation focuses not only on institutional but on individual accountability. This discourse affects individual actors in schools.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECTS

One of the theoretical interests in the EGSIE study was to look at how individuals are constructed in the current discourse. The assumption is that changes in discourse and changes in what people do have an impact on how we think about them and their place in work and life. The changing roles of principals and teachers in the current transition of restructuring is discussed here, as well as the current discourse on individualism, and how these changing roles relate to discourse and practices of inclusion/exclusion.

*The Changing Roles of Principals and Teachers*

The picture of budget reforms, accountability measures and the emphasis on evaluation that we have drawn here is greatly reflected in the simultaneous changes in what principals and teachers do in schools. In fact, there are changes in the roles of all players that are related to primary and secondary schools, including parents and children, as well as school counsellors and special education teachers. Here we focus on the changes in the roles of principals and teachers. We focus on these changes as structural changes in the power relations within a school as an institution as well as on the changes in the work that these players perform. Not least, we focus on the discourse around the changing roles. The discourse is one of management where the importance and responsibilities of the principal as a manager are greatly emphasised. Furthermore, school actors are encouraged to adopt a managerial language of planning, evaluation, implementation, accountability and so forth. In this way the language of school actors is transforming itself into the language of system actors. The positions of school actors and system actors are not merging, however.

Principals at the primary and secondary levels in these three countries almost uniformly say that administrative and economic duties have increased at the cost of pedagogical duties (Myrdal *et al.*, 2001; Simola & Hakala, 2001; Zackari, 2001). They are now given almost unconditional power to use the resources that are given to the school with budget contracts or other such arrangements. This means that they are also responsible for letting financial ends meet.

The role of teachers has also changed. They are less visible in the discourse because in Iceland the principal and the 'staff' (not named teachers) sometimes have to perform tasks such as school-based self-evaluation, at least according to one government document (see Johannesson *et al.*, 2000). By such use of language, the professional faculty status of teachers is omitted in how they are talked about. Simultaneously, teachers in these three countries report greater burdens of work as goal steering and management by results is more time-consuming and demanding than following a textbook, trusting that it fulfils the goals. More work outside the classrooms is now required of teachers and they are less free to determine for themselves where and when they use their outside the classroom time. This controlled outside the classroom time seems to be divided between preparation time with other teachers and time when teachers participate in whole school activities (Rinne *et al.*, 2001b). For instance, in Sweden teamwork with other teachers is a relatively new requirement that obviously takes time (Lundahl, 2001).

Several teachers see the duties now emphasised, as well as the demands for whole school cooperation and teamwork, as merely time-consuming, while others seem to see an increased workload as a relatively small payment for the potential progress that is to be the consequence of teamwork. In fact, it is difficult not to interpret these changing trends in teachers' work as greater responsibilities. The Finnish researchers report on the new teacher subject:

A successful teacher must be ... extrovert, a performer and an active person who keeps time, participates easily in different kinds of pedagogic experi-

ments and knows how to express him/herself with parents and in public. ... Teachers' work is no longer concentrated on what happens with students in the classroom. ... The professional profile of the teacher has changed from teaching and mediating information to all-inclusive taking care of the pupil. (Simola *et al.*, 2001, pp. 89–90)

The new teacher subject in Finland seems to be fairly representative of what is also favoured in Iceland and Sweden.

### *The Emphasis on Individualism, Competition and Stronger Individuals*

Policy documents and education actors in Finland, Iceland and Sweden emphasise the education of individuals as rational beings who are independent and capable of learning and adjusting to the various needs of modern society and indeed to serve global needs. In Finland students are described as rational choice makers; they are independent, flexible, adaptive and active individuals. The Finnish state educational discourse of the 1990s constructs the student 'as a lone rider looking for a suitable niche in an uncertain world' (Simola *et al.*, 2001, p. 79). Icelandic policy documents in the late 1990s call for students who are stronger and more independent individuals and that they can learn more in a shorter time. Icelandic students are also to become among the best in using foreign languages, according to the policy documents we analysed (Johannesson *et al.*, 2000). In Sweden there is an increased stress on individual agency, for instance reflected in the interest in the individualisation of the curriculum by using study plans for each student (Lindblad *et al.*, 2001). One group of Swedish informants declared that society should not be afraid of promoting skillful students (Zackari, 2001).

The Finnish system actors emphasise that the possibility of choosing between schools demands a clearer vision from students and their families. This means that the future division between those who succeed and those who fail will be a result of the choices they make today. Individual study plans are to be made and schools must compete for the good students. This is thought to be a fair price for better education of individuals who will be more effective future citizens and consumers (Rinne *et al.*, 2001a).

This 'ultimate pedagogical individualism' (so named by Simola *et al.*, 2001, p. 81) is also reflected in the discourse on special educational needs. Inclusion of students with disabilities becomes a technical matter and difficulties in schools are more and more seen as the qualities of individuals to be treated on an individual basis. In Finland the new school legislation of 1999 made it necessary to draw up a personal plan to organise and develop the tuition of every student with special educational needs (Simola & Hakala, 2001). In Iceland students with special educational needs are seen as the consumers of services such as diagnosis performed by clinical methods (Johannesson, 2001). In Sweden the 'key pupils' are those who have had a diagnosis by specialists (Zackari, 2001, p. 391). There are some reservations, however, about those with the most expensive special educational needs being

able to have the same freedom of choice between schools as other students (see for example Lundahl, 2000).

Based on what has been said above we can conclude that individualism is rising in the three Nordic welfare states. Constructing the individual principal or teacher as accountable for money or for students' success and seeing students as individual consumers who can learn more in a shorter time is part of an international movement of restructuring towards neo-liberal thought. This is not only a practice, something that, for instance, principals just do; they seem to have been extremely quick in adopting the rhetoric as their way of thinking. They have internalised the responsibilities; they govern themselves, for instance by deciding how to use money, instead of being directly told. This kind of governmentality is important in the implementation of the various reforms.

## CHANGES IN REASONING ABOUT GOVERNANCE AND INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

Some of the chief implications of the restructuring measures and discursive changes for the social and political spheres of society deserve to be focused on more closely, not only how many of the restructuring measures are introduced and received as inevitable but also the socio-economic issues in our data, about which we perceived an almost total silence.

### *An Inevitable Progress?*

The question mark in the headline is meant to question two things. On the one hand, we want to ask whether the ongoing changes in education in Finland, Iceland and Sweden are indeed something that must come, no matter what reservations individuals or groups may have. But we also want to point out that even though the changes may be 'inevitable' in some sense, they may not be 'progress' for everyone. As is reported in a Swedish report on policy texts: change is the first and foremost concept in the narratives of social change in five texts. The society of yesterday and even more that of tomorrow is characterised by rapid change, new knowledge, new technology, new jobs, more globalisation, etc. (Lundahl, 2000). And one Swedish politician, a former social democratic minister, declared: 'The pace of change in society is so high that you can be certain that you don't know which knowledge children will need ...' (Lundahl, 2001, p. 344).

In policy documents and the discourse of our interviewees we observed a reliance on a logic that goes like this: the schools must change, otherwise they are not trustworthy domestically. Further, if they do not change, the nation will be unable to compete internationally, and not at all in the global market. Documents and interviewees present the changes of restructuring, decentralisation, budget reform, school-based evaluation and so on as if there is no other alternative (see for example Simola *et al.*, 2001).

In Iceland the inevitability logic is portrayed in the way that schools need to adjust to financial models that focus on individuals and individual needs. It is



inevitable that schools should be emphasising information technology, language education, certain teaching methods, testing, etc. It is inevitable that Iceland must move farther away from governing by rules to governing by goals and it is inevitable that Iceland 'decentralises' school administration. In short, the discourse and some of the practices of the market are being brought into education not as ideological goals but as technical progress that everyone should be pleased about (Johannesson *et al.*, 2002).

Popkewitz & Lindblad (2000) identify this as the discourse of progress, and it is not restricted to the Nordic countries. It is a particular style of discussion that relies on science to rationalise educational systems. Education is part of a general story of social progress and improved quality of life for the citizens of the nation states. Science, preferably 'packaged' as easy to install techniques, is to secure social and economic progress.

The chief reservations concern the price of the inevitable changes for progress. For instance, it is reported that in Finland the new models for allocating funds have caused large deficits in the budgets of some municipalities. Further, small municipalities cannot utilise curricular freedom unless they can attract some EU money. The possible domestic costs are overlooked; what is looked at is global competition (Rinne *et al.*, 2001a). Similar reservations about the price of progress can be detected in Iceland and Sweden.

### *Silence About Socio-economic Issues and the Education of Immigrants*

We witnessed a rather 'loud' silence on socio-economic and cultural issues. For example, many of the Icelandic interviewees looked surprised when they were asked direct questions about the 'social position' of students and the role of school systems and schools in working towards social equality. They responded with questions about whether we meant 'social position within the classroom' or they declared something about people being more equal in Iceland than in most other societies (Johannesson, 2001). A similar difficulty arose for the Swedish researchers when they discovered that school informants either did not want to or were not used to discussing their professional work in terms of segregation and discrimination (Zackari, 2001). In the Swedish interviews the performances of primary and lower secondary school students were never connected with their socio-economic background (Lindblad *et al.*, 2002b). Yet the school informants in Sweden expressed worries about the differences between social classes having increased and they talked about 'harder language, harder attitudes ...' in somewhat moral terms (Zackari, 2001, p. 373). Finnish school informants expressed their worries over increased social divisions when asked about the consequences of students' choices between schools. Nearly every one of them added a warning, a 'but' sentence to their otherwise neutral and positive views. Only a few interviewees articulated the background of parent choice clearly in social and political terms (Simola & Hakala, 2001).

The education of immigrants is a matter that Sweden looks at with critical importance as mass immigration into that country has taken place for decades. The

Swedish researchers focused on the matter, for instance, by selecting a place in a city where inhabitants from foreign countries (including immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, Africa and the Nordic countries) form about 30% of the population for a part of their interview study. Swedish politicians and system informants tend to worry about how poor children, in particular immigrant children, are isolated in their city areas and excluded from wider social experiences (Lundahl, 2001).

Mass immigration is a more recent phenomenon in Finland and Iceland than in Sweden. In fact, a somewhat moral discourse in Finland and Iceland on the need for discipline, tradition and social harmony may be seen in relation to the relative silence about the education of immigrants in these two countries (see for example Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001a). Finnish teachers very rarely spoke about immigrant students unless asked about them, but if they spoke about them they identified the problem as a cultural problem of isolation (Simola & Hakala, 2001) rather than as related to socio-economic or other issues.

The silence on socio-economic issues goes hand in hand with the emphasis on individualism and competition. To conclude, pedagogical individualism seems to some extent capable of accommodating students with mental and physical disabilities, reading difficulties and other diagnosable differences because such difficulties can be individualised. School difficulties and special educational needs that are related to socio-economic or cultural factors, such as language status, have a much lesser chance of becoming acknowledged as they cannot, or at least not as easily, be diagnosed by technical (clinical) methods. In fact, in all three countries it is emphasised that the right to be included is the right of an individual, not the right of a group or a class.

## PARADIGM SHIFTS: THE 1960s COMPARED WITH THE 1990s

Our main finding in this research project is that there is a changing discourse and changing notions of restructuring of governance in the Nordic countries. Significant changes in education discussions in the three countries are observed when comparing the 1990s, especially the late 1990s, with the educational reforms in the 1960s–1980s. These changes can be viewed as changes in the systems of reason (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001b). By system of reason we mean that there are culturally woven patterns that legitimate certain ideas and practices and delegitimate others. Ideas and practices that would have been almost unspeakable in the 1970s have become widely accepted at the turn of the millennium, while other ideas are silenced and practices abandoned. This has not happened in exactly the same way in the three cases studied (Finland, Iceland and Sweden), although we focus here on the similarities.

The basic tenet of Finnish education from 1960 to 1980 was that everyone should receive the same education in comprehensive public schools for primary and lower secondary education, established in the 1970s (see for example Rinne *et al.*, 2001b). These school and their curriculum placed heavy stress on equality, and it was overtly centralised. The school policy in Finland in the 1990s was based on choice, deregulation, evaluation and managerialism. The everyday work of teachers

and other professionals at the school level is now increasingly realised through these steering techniques, and parents have the option to choose a school for their children other than the nearest one. That arrangement is observed to have a clear class bias and it is an obvious departure from the comprehensive school model of the 1960s and 1970s. Further, there is an emerging attitude that the education of the best should be emphasised because the global market needs 'winners'.

In Iceland there was a change from the discourse of the 1970s and the 1980s. The 1974 school legislation and its subsequent curricular directives strengthened the already existing comprehensive ideal for the primary and lower secondary school. The 1970s and 1980s discourse was characterised by child-centred, humanistic and equality views (Johannesson, 1993). In contrast, child-centred and humanistic views were almost entirely absent from the documents that we analysed for the EGSIE study, although equality is sometimes mentioned in one of them (Johannesson *et al.*, 2000). In the 1970s the child-centred, humanistic and equality views were coupled with technological views concerning the definition and grouping of goals and objectives (e.g. by using the Bloom taxonomy). We did not hear much of the child-centred views in the interviews with school actors, which may tell us that they, as a group, never adopted them, although many educators did. Further, there is an increasing marketisation discourse (e.g. budget reform, private enterprise in education, the student as a consumer) that now functions in conjunction with technological views. There is an increasing belief in the laws of the market being able to rescue just about anything that goes astray during these current times of change (Johannesson *et al.*, 2001).

The decades 1940–1980 in Sweden were characterised by a striving for equity through a highly centralised welfare state governance (see for example Lindblad *et al.*, 2001). A breaking away from earlier forms of political governance started taking place in the 1980s. Sweden started decreasing its centralised governance procedures; for instance in 1991–1994 a non-socialist government took steps towards local autonomy, introduced an interest in vouchers and brought in lump sum payments to municipalities.

These paradigm shifts are also present in the changes at the level of national politics. In Finland the political elite has moved to the right and to the market by broad coalition governments. In Iceland the right-of-centre Independence Party came to power in 1991 after significant absences from government since 1971 and remained in a leading position in the cabinet with a change in the supporting party in 1995. The city of Reykjavík, where more than one third of the population lives, is governed by a left-of-centre coalition, but it fully participates in the budget reform practices. In Sweden the power grip of the social democrats has not been as strong in the 1990s as before and the differences between the parties have to a considerable extent smoothed out as the social democrats did not abolish some of the things taken up by the non-socialist government in the early 1990s, such as the freedom of choice legislation in 1993. Decentralisation and deregulation were formulated and elaborated by social democratic and non-social democratic governments alike, with somewhat different sets of arguments (see Lundahl, 2001).

The changes, both in the practices and in discourse, seem to be more alike

across the different national contexts than they are different. And what appears as different between the countries is part of the same international movement not only for enhanced use of technology as tools but also of technological thinking. These paradigmatic changes characterised by education becoming a technical matter are also in some ways connected to the European Union (EU); all three countries have participated in the European Economic Area since 1994 and in 1995 Finland and Sweden joined the EU. The changes also are similar to changes in other EU countries that participated in the EGSIE research project, as well as in Australia (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2001b). This technological thinking includes how accountability is seen; for instance, school principals are becoming accountable for how they use money. School-based self-evaluation is being implemented as a technology for increased goal steering. The phrase 'management by results' combines budget reform and goal steering in one discursive jargon that makes principals accountable for both the use of money and the performance of students and teachers.

There is increased individualism with an emphasis on stronger individuals and the choice of schools and less emphasis on decreasing the impact of socio-economic and cultural differences. Those to be included are those who can be included by technical methods on the grounds of individual rights. At the same time, those who are socially and economically worse off than the average or are culturally 'different' are in greater danger of being excluded, although all three countries consider the education of immigrant children important. This is not because the politicians or anyone else is bad, but because the discursive principles of legitimation allow those who have individual and diagnosable conditions to be 'treated'. Further, the Western human rights tradition is based on individual rights rather than group rights. The clinical approach and current inclusion politics emphasise individual rights (see Johannesson *et al.*, 2002). None of this takes place in exactly the same way in each of the three cases, but the similarities in how they appear and are argued for override the dissimilarities in the particular cases of implementation.

The changing concepts of governance, i.e. the new paradigm of marketisation with its emphasis on accountability, individuals and technical methods of inclusion, can be connected to the political and cultural changes that Bourdieu describes in *Acts of Resistance* (Bourdieu, 1998), where the inevitability logic of progress is debated: by portraying education as a technical or economical rather than a political or cultural matter, it aims at building a social and political consensus about what is portrayed as an inevitable global trend in history. The politicians do not see themselves, however, as tearing down anything of the previous system (Rinne *et al.*, 2001a). In fact, they see themselves as working along the inevitable path towards progress where they are making what is good better than before (see for example Johannesson *et al.*, 2000). They do not directly attack the ideals of the comprehensive school except in terms of what might cost too much; rather they claim that we need the current proposals to maintain the quality that will create progress on a global scale, adding to what we have gained by the comprehensive school.

## CONCLUSIONS

Current changes in the system of reason consist of culturally woven patterns where technology and inclusion are woven together with individualism aimed at educating the best. Further, market strategies, for instance budget reforms, are introduced as technically effective devices both for educating the best and to increase inclusion. This system of reason presupposes that the neo-liberalist restructuring changes are inevitable, that they are progress compared to the old arrangements, and it is silent about socio-economic issues and the equity goals of the 1960s–1980s. Furthermore, school-based self-evaluation as a practice and as a language is a normalising technique that ensures that school actors will identify the obstacles encountered in the transition so that neither state nor other authorities have a reason to intervene.

The success of the marketisation of education is based on the measures and devices appearing as technical so that a consensus can be acquired. In Finland it is the magic of evaluation that appears as the technically appropriate way about which there ought be a consensus. In Iceland this is done by devising a new national curriculum for three school levels at once, the early childhood, primary and secondary school levels, where precise and measurable objectives are defined for the primary and secondary levels. In Sweden it is steering by objectives and results that differ from governing by directives and rules that ensures educators' acceptance.

Are these changes indeed inevitable? Are we in a transition to something that is better for everyone? And if changes are inevitable, how are they inevitable? We would like to argue that an acceptance of the necessity of what is presented as inevitable progress (e.g. accountability) is due to normalising techniques of the self. Individual principals and teachers are, for example, made accountable for not hindering progress so they must participate in the practices of school-based self-evaluation projects, in the practices of accountability, in the practices of including children as individuals and so forth. Many of these educational actors actually accept these terms; they seem to 'own' them whether or not they agree with them in their heart. And even if principals or teachers do not accept the concepts and ideas of the neo-liberalist market discourse, this discourse frames the debates that take place in education. In contrast, the debates of the 1960s and 1970s were framed by a concern with the equality of students. Now, at the beginning of a new millennium, those arguing for inclusion (in terms of disability, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, etc.) are best off using the new discourse of governance and education as a technical matter to advance their aims.

Here we have described how techniques of governance currently work at the practical level of education restructuring in three Nordic countries. These techniques establish that neo-liberalist marketisation practices are perceived as inevitable steps towards progress. The practice and language of self-evaluation, managerialism and budget reform in conjunction with a clinical approach to individuality ensure the internalisation of governmentality. Educators in Finland, Iceland and Sweden have normalised themselves by participating in the reforms conceived of as inevitable.

## NOTES

- [1] EGSIE is a research project conducted with the financial support of the European Commission, Directorate General Research and the Targeted Socio-Economic Research programme from 1998–2000 (grant no. SOE2-CT97–2028). Besides Finland, Iceland and Sweden, other European participants were Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain and the UK (England and Scotland), and Australia also joined us. In each country, policy texts were analysed, interviews taken with politicians, school officials, school administrators, teachers and other professionals and official statistics were discussed to observe the discursive groupings (see also Lindblad *et al.*, 2002a). National support was obtained in Iceland from the Icelandic Science Council and in Sweden from the HSFR and the National Agency for Education. This article is based on papers published in the EGSIE reports and other materials drawn from the project. In the discussion in this article we emphasise the similarities. Some of the peculiarities of each country are described in this issue by Simola *et al.*, Johannesson *et al.*, Lindblad *et al.* and Aro *et al.*
- [2] As a springboard, we used here ‘The twelve point programme of neo-liberal education policy’ presented by Rinne *et al.*, 2001b.
- [3] Formally the Grade 10 examination in Iceland is voluntary, but very few students have declined taking it since it became voluntary in 2001.
- [4] See <http://www.skolverket.se>.
- [5] In Finnish *tulosjohtaminen*, in Icelandic *arangursstjornun*, in Swedish *mål- och resultatstyrning*.

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