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Education for education's sake? Notes on post-critical pedagogy by example of the compensatory task of education in Sweden

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ABSTRACT
Since the recent call for a turn towards a "post-critical educational philosophy," several philosophers of education have aimed at reaffirming the value of education for education's sake. Rather than wanting to imply that education is apolitical, this shift is defended as itself a necessary political move in the context of contemporary educational research and theory. We agree that there is a problematic tendency of instrumentalizing education for political and economic gain. However, we argue that a more fine-grained and nuanced analysis is necessary in order to be able to distinguish between different political takes on education. We argue that not all ways in which education is described, analyzed or conceived of in political terms are equally problematic cases of instrumentalization and that there lies an immense danger in such over-generalization. Exploring the contemporary historical case from Sweden regarding the shifts in the understanding of the compensatory task of schooling, sheds light on the relevance we see in a contemporary philosophical discussion of the aims of education in terms of both aims goals and distribution goals. While we agree that education and acute political issues need to be kept at a reasonable distance from each other, we believe that some of the arguments formulated in the call for post-critical pedagogy need to be reworked in order to avoid that it turns into a naïve gesture of strengthening tendencies of the status quo which cover over current injustices and contribute to increasing social inequality. We cannot lose sight of the difficulty of ensuring and safeguarding the conditions of possibility of education to be for education's sake. In a spin on Bernstein's famous quote, we suggest that while education cannot compensate for society, we need society to compensate so that education can be for education's sake. For this, we need an educational philosophy which can adequately and critically articulate and describe societal and political questions as they pertain to education.

KEYWORDS
aims of education, post-critical education, post-critical pedagogy, compensatory task, meritocracy, Sweden, aims goals, distribution goals

The question of how we can and should conceive of the aims of education has been one of the classical topics of philosophy of education (e.g., Brighouse & McPherson, 2015; Brighouse et al., 2018; Brighouse et al., 2020). In the Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education, the whole first part is devoted to the "aims of education" (Brighouse, 2010, p. 11ff.), with chapter 1 devoted to epistemic aims and chapter 2 to the moral and political aims of education. If we think of the aims of education in these lines, then the aims of education concern the transmission of knowledge (and skills) as well as knowledge about knowledge (Robertson, 2010) as much as they concern moral and political aims (Brighouse, 2010). By moral aims, such as autonomy, ability to contribute to economic and social life, or democratic and cooperative competence, Brighouse means capacities to be developed by the (individual) educated person. In terms of political aims of education, Brighouse's list comprises different views of how educational opportunities should be

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distributed in a given society. He mentions meritocratic equality, radical equality, and benefitting the leasts advantaged, among others. The authors are clear with that this list can be expanded and has been reformulated throughout history in manifold ways and browsing relevant journals, we find an endless list of proposed aims of education, spanning from “flourishing” to “wisdom”.

In the present paper, however, we will not attempt to argue for a further, important addition to the list of possible and plausible aims, rather we wish to critically engage with a couple of recent texts within philosophy of education which are connected by their joint resistance, refusal or negation of the formulation of any kind of extrinsic or external aims or functions of education. Most prominently, this position has been articulated in connection with what has been described as a turn towards “a post-critical educational philosophy” (Hodgson et al., 2018). In relation to our topic of the aims of education these texts are interesting in that they are united in a vision or call for reaffirming the value of “education to be for education’s sake (rather than for extrinsic goals such as global citizenship” (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 7). There is a longer history within philosophy of education of problematizing defining the aims of education in terms of external functions. As Paul Standish writes a decade earlier, “Educational institutions are not contrivances of some sort with a particular function, appropriately stipulated by a statement of intent. To see them in such terms is already to have thrown something valuable away.” (Standish, 2008, p. 14). The idea is that the very thing that makes education educational is being thrown overboard by such external definitions which reduce education to a societal or political instrument.

At the same time, however, it can remind us of parallel discourses in aesthetics or art theory that the idea of education for education’s sake just as talk of art for art’s sake might throw away something valuable by allowing us to turn a blind eye on the thoroughly political nature of all education (or of all art). In an interview with Poets and Writers Magazine Toni Morrison is quoted as follows:

> All of that art-for-art’s-sake stuff is BS […] What are these people talking about? Are you really telling me that Shakespeare and Aeschylus weren’t writing about kings? All good art is political! There is none that isn’t. And the ones that try hard not to be political are political by saying, ‘We love the status quo.’ We’ve just dirtied the word ‘politics,’ made it sound like it’s unpatriotic or something. […] That all started in the period of state art, when you had the communists and fascists running around doing this poster stuff, and the reaction was ‘No, no, no; there’s only aesthetics.’ My point is that it has to be both: beautiful and political at the same time. I’m not interested in art that is not in the world” (Nance, 2008, p. 1).

It is a similar reaction one can easily assume in relation to the call for refocusing on education for education’s sake in philosophy of education. How is such a turn not a call for an acritical embrace of the status quo, resounding of bourgeois arrogance and possible to articulate only from a position of relative comfort to the detriment of the marginalized and oppressed? Who can even say such a thing?

To be sure, the recent proponents of education for education’s sake in philosophy of education are very clear with not wanting to be understood in this way:

> But to take an educational view of education, and to denounce accounts concerned with extrinsic, political, or developmental ends, does not imply that we see the practices of teaching and research as apolitical. Rather, according to this affirmative attitude, the political move vis à vis existing theory is made in the shift to the focus on education for education’s sake. (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 15)

The shift itself is thus considered a necessary political move in the context of contemporary educational research and theory. More specifically, reclaiming and reemphasizing the educational nature of education by resisting a definition of the aims of education in terms of “to upbuild democratic citizens”, “to overcome oppression”, “to empower the marginalized” is understood as a form of necessary (political) resistance to the

reduction and instrumental use of education for external purposes in current neoliberal politics on the side of educational philosophers and theorists.

In the present article, we argue that this turn to education for education's sake indeed has a potentially sustainable political force in the current situation, but we also argue that the way in which the problem of the instrumentalization of education is connected to the explicit articulation of what Brighouse describes as political aims of education is misleading. We suggest distinguishing between instrumentalization and reification in order to avoid that a call for "education for education's sake" turns into a naïve gesture of strengthening tendencies of the status quo which contribute to increasing social inequality and injustice. Particularly, we want to show which preconditions are necessary so that affirmatively focusing on the educational in education does not contribute to further covering over current injustices rather than providing us with the language to describe and, also in affirmative ways, position ourselves differently in relation to the political aims of education we consider worthy.

We take a closer look at the example of how the compensatory task of schooling has been understood during different historical periods in Swedish educational system, up until most recent diagnoses of the functioning of the "smokescreens of meritocracy", where the actual increase of inequality is paradoxically paralleled by a common increase in the belief in meritocracy. If Bernstein argued that "education cannot compensate for society", sociological studies confirm for present day Swedish education that education indeed does not compensate for society and has done an increasingly worse job at that during the past two decades, while at the same time doing a tremendously successful job at upholding the myth of meritocracy. Whitehead wrote in his famous 1948 address concerning the aims of education, "We require to know what is possible now in England" (1948, p. 110). In a similar vein, we need to ask, what is possible now, in today's circumstances, for education as well as for educational philosophy and theory. What can we expect of an educational philosophy which wants to resist the "aggressive instrumentalism of the neoliberal political project" (Säfström, 2020, p. 102) and its consequences for education?

We agree that there is a problematic tendency of instrumentalizing education for political and economic gain, and that the intrinsic value of education is a worthy aim in its own right. We also agree that emphasizing the value of education for education's sake can constitute a strong political move on the part of educational philosophers and theorists within the current political climate. However, we suggest that not all political forms and dimensions of the aims of education constitute problematic cases of instrumentalization and that there lies an immense danger in such over-generalization, namely that of silently contributing to the upholding of oppressive myths and smokescreens. Furthermore, it is not just in relation to the understanding of instrumentalism that we miss a more context-sensitive and detail-oriented analysis. Generalizing statements such as that "the work of critical pedagogy […] is largely done" (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 18) begs the question, for whom, for educational philosophers, for educational theorists, for educational researchers, for those partaking in education and suffering from an increasing rather than decreasing inequalities and injustices? As Wortmann cautions in his overall sympathetic approach to post-critical pedagogy, "a large part of our discipline is not very critical in the sense of a prevailing negative mood." (Wortmann, 2020, p. 3). In a spin on Bernstein's famous quote, we want to suggest in the present article that while education cannot compensate for society, we need society to compensate so that education can be for education's sake. For this, however, we still need an educational philosophy and theory which can adequately and critically articulate and describe societal and political questions as they pertain to education, including the aims of education beyond education for education's sake.

In the following we will first present in more detail in which way post-critical pedagogy argues that there is a problematic politicization of education. It is particularly important to notice the significant differences

between different authors. In a second step, we will then outline the implications of these different positions for the conception of the aims of education and indicate potential shortcomings we see. In order to further exemplify these problematic implications and shortcomings, we introduce the example of the shifting notion of the compensatory task of education in Sweden. By introducing these historical and local specificities we wish to illustrate how different levels of concreteness and abstractness need to be navigated in order to meaningfully criticize or redefine the relation between education and the political without falling behind the critical achievements of earlier philosophical and theoretical endeavors. In the last part of the paper, we give an outline of our own position on the role of the political in relation to the aims of education. We suggest that the critique of post-critical pedagogy could be specified in terms of a critique of reification, rather than sweepingly criticizing the current relationship between the political and education solely in terms of a problematic instrumentalism. We suggest a distinction between problematic reifications, subduing education under political goals, and helpful or even necessary instrumentalist takes on education, as for example in relation to social theory and social analysis.

Post-critical pedagogy against the politicization of education?

Some of the arguments presented in the call for "post-critical pedagogy" have been articulated earlier already by Masschelein and Simons in their 2013 Defence of the School. Advocating for school as a place for 'free time' and a place for the generation of knowledge and skills as 'common goods', they describe the politicization of the school as one of the dangers or threats to retaining the characteristics of the school as this special place for free time and the creation of common goods. They write as follows:

> What is problematic about the politicization of the school is that both young people and the subject matter become the means by which social problems are addressed in a project of political reform. School as politics by other means. What is neutralized by this is free time and the possibility of young people experiencing themselves as a new generation. If young people are immediately inserted into the old world, we no longer allow them the experience of being a new generation. (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 95)

To be clear, they do not deny that education has political significance or that "social issues should have no role at school" (ibid.); rather, they suggest establishing the sort of school which they envision, namely a school "as free time for practice" is itself a form of political intervention. In a similar sense, their point is restated in the Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy:

> But to take an educational view of education, and to denounce accounts concerned with extrinsic, political, or developmental ends, does not imply that we see the practices of teaching and research as apolitical. Rather, according to this affirmative attitude, the political move vis à vis existing theory is made in the shift to the focus on education for education's sake. (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 15)

For the authors of the Manifesto, just as for Masschelein and Simons, the insistence on a necessary distance between education and the political is in itself a required political move. This is important to keep in mind in order to not simply ascribe a disinterested apolitical attitude to their project. In Masschelein and Simons' work the politicization of the school is primarily problematized in terms of the growing interest in the development of "competencies" and defining the task of the school as securing employability for the young.

However, this double insistence on trying to cast out politics from education (and educational research and philosophy) as itself as a political act gains a different texture in more recent texts. Looking at Vlieghe and Zamojski (2020), for example, the affirmative turn towards a post-critical understanding of pedagogy

implies a critique of the negative-critical paradigm and its approach of "exposing" social injustices and political shortcomings. Vlieghe and Zamojski describe as an essential characteristic of "all critical approaches to education […] the recognition of the inevitable political dimension of it" (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2020, p. 865), and that in the negative-critical paradigm "education is political, as it turns out to be a means of ensuring an oppressive societal order" (ibid.). One of the examples of the negative-critical approach is described as follows: "The project of educating for autonomy can be, therefore, exposed as the imposition of a white, masculine, heteronormative and colonial mindset, and so on and so forth" (ibid.) I want to draw attention to the language in which Vlieghe and Zamojski summarize and describe theoretical and philosophical endeavors which have been developed through decades of activist work by organized political minorities and also later in academic circles which arguably do not constitute a powerful, political majority, not even within academia. Here we can restate with Wortmann that "a large part of our discipline is not very critical in the sense of a prevailing negative mood. Quite contrary, much research […] operates with ongoing promises of technocratic positivity: it pretends to know and continues to offer easy solutions for almost every question of educational policy and practice." (Wortmann, 2020, p. 3) It is not the place to deepen this discussion here, but it is noticeable who the target of the critique and the problem with the politicization of education shifts between Masschelein and Simons' Defence of the school and Vlieghe and Zamojski's "Redefining education and politics". The focus is no longer on a problematic narrowing of education on neoliberal political and economic goals such as employability and competencies, but that it is rather directed at a necessary turn from a wrong focus on politics in the negative-critical paradigm towards an affirmative approach towards education as separate (cleansed of) politics, so that "education in its purest form" (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2020, p. 874) can take place.

To be sure their goal is not to criticize, but to "develop another, altogether different approach towards education" (ibid., p. 865). By disentangling education from politics, they want to avoid that we spiral downwards in a never-ending circle of negative critique and end up in a cynical attitude which prevents us from seeing that "there is still good in the world that is worth studying and passing on to the next generation" (ibid., p. 870). In an earlier article, Schumann has discussed some of the potential shortcomings of this shift of focus in relation to the debate on negative versus affirmative forms of critique within feminist philosophy, turning to the work of Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, Rosi Braidotti, and Sara Ahmed (cf. Schumann, 2018). In particular, she emphasized that "the embrace of more affirmative (rather than destructive-negative) modes of critique [should] not entail overlooking or turning a blind eye to the barriers that unjustly restrain some movements and allow for others' privilege to persist" (ibid., p. 84). While she embraces that the affirmative approach can allow us to "think beyond human- non-human and address the world shaping and co-creating surprising new and different realities" (ibid., p. 95), she also cautions against this potential of "turning a blind eye" to unjust barriers. Following Clare Hemmings' self-reflection on her shifting preferences for different kinds of critique throughout different stages and contexts of her own career, Schumann further explores:

> For some, critique is optional, for others it is not; and we can wonder with Hemmings how to think about the line between the charge of paranoia and the weight of the actual constraint some bodies (in certain con- texts, times, places) experience more than others, and how this connects to the different critical impulses (negativity, paranoia, affirmation, reparation) that urge different bodies to produce different kind of scholarship and research at different times and places. (Schumann, 2018, p. 95)

Schumann insists with Ahmed that "It is not the time to be over it, if it is not over" (Ahmed in Schumann, 2018, p. 83), and we similarly want to question whether the post-critical insistence on an (exclusive) turn towards affirmative modes of critique within philosophy of education will not just imply a turn away from suffering or making ourselves inarticulate in face of on-going political entanglement in education. However,

in order to explore this and do justice to the critical and political endeavors of post-critical pedagogy, we need to look more closely at how the political and ideals such as “equality” are being understood.

Disentangling the aims of education from the political?

As we have seen earlier, Masschelein and Simons call for a disentanglement of education from politics in order to defend the idea of a school where teachers as pedagogues lead their students to a school which is formed as a place of free time – in opposition to a place of productive time. Their main issue is with the infiltration of a neoliberal politics and their focus on learning outcomes, productivity and accountability which creates a school whose culture is thoroughly penetrated by pressures quite opposite to the idea of school which Masschelein and Simons want to defend, namely a school that provides “free time” which brackets life on the outside and becomes the “physical embodiment” of the belief that “there is no natural order of privileged owners; that we are equals; that the world belongs to all and therefore to no one in particular; that the school is an adventurous no-mans-land where everyone can rise above themselves” (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 141). It is not least in descriptions like these of the school, which they attempt to defend, that clear political visions are being articulated, which place “equality” not as a goal to be achieved through education, but rather as an assumption which becomes the necessary starting point for any meaningful educational space.

We have also seen that the argument in Vlieghe and Zamojski (2020) takes a somewhat different angle. Their defence of the autonomy of education is in a significant way directed against a critical tradition of analysis within educational philosophy and theory, when they argue that education should not just be classified as an end in itself, but should be conceived as a “pure means” in Agamben’s sense. By “radically disjoint[ing]” (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2020, p. 874) education from any internal or external end, education as a pure means “remains fullly in potentiality” (ibid.). Education should be kept separate from the political sphere in order to allow for education to fully remain in potentiality and to not be subjected to political objectives. The reason that education needs to be afforded “a proper, independent sphere of life that follows its own logic” (ibid.) lies also in that as a means, education can very easily be instrumentalized for political objectives. However, they argue that education can only be of use politically if “it remains fully in potentiality and that this political potential does not get actualised” (ibid.). Masschelein and Simons’ idea of the school, as a place of free time, of new beginning and of the common is paralleled to some extent in Vlieghe and Zamojski in the idea of a politics which “can allow education in its purest form to take place” (ibid.). While the Defence of the School opposes a more specific kind of political pressure on education in terms policies focused on learning outcomes, accountability and productivity, Vlieghe and Zamojski’s issue appears as a much more pervasive attempt at purifying education from politics, one of the main targets seemingly being critical analyses of “white, male, etc.” privilege and their impact on education. In that sense, their idea of education for education’s sake seems to only allow for what Brighouse terms “aims goals”, whereas “distribution goals” per se constitute a threat to the autonomy of education. Thus, their idea of education for education’s sake seems to fall more in line with art critics who expressed exhaustion with “yet another piece of political art” created by artists who, one could argue against those critics, simply by the very act of creating art works, and through their mere existence as artistic practioners in a certain space inevitably become politicized. How are those artists meant to act until politics has succeeded in creating spaces where “art in its purest form” can take place? How are we as educational philosophers meant to act and to react as long as politics does not allow for education in its purest form to take place? How are we supposed to adress even simple pedagogical questions such as which book to put on the common table to study, or which activities to consider worthy to study, which objects to gather around as a shared beginning?

We would like to return to the question of "distribution goals", and their legitimacy within discussions of the aims of education as well as education's desirable autonomy from the political sphere from a different angle. In some ways, a clarification of what we mean by the "political" might be helpful in order to understand some of the underlying issues at hand. As Jean-Philippe Deranty writes in his introduction to the prominent Recognition or Disagreement (2016), which brings the philosophical work of Axel Honnneth and Jacques Rancière in dialogue with each other, both their styles of philosophical critique are characterized by closely drawing "from the empirical realities of social and historical developments" (Deranty, 2016, p. 35), i.e. they both, in contrast to other styles of critical theory, develop their philosophical work on "social and political issues in direct connection with real existing social and historical phenomena" (ibid.). As Katia Genel states in her introduction to Recognition or Disagreement, both philosophers also oppose paternalistic forms of criticism. But whereas Honneth starts from injuries to our desire for recognition, which can reveal normative expectations as starting points for critique, Ranciére "starts from the way criticism is exercised within society" (Genel, 2016, p. 12), not least in his The Ignorant Schoolmaster which has given inspiration to some of the educational philosophical arguments for a post-critical pedagogy.

For Rancière, criticism is mainly concerned with disrupting established social positions "by bringing to light the unrepresented part of society (la "part des sans parts"), the part of those who are not counted and remain voiceless" (Genel, 2016, p. 13). But his notion of the social is not determined by power relations, but by different modes of division and distribution, one being "police" and the other being "politics". As Genel keenly summarizes:

> One is called the "police," which assigns places and distributes goods; another is called "politics," which refers to the act of contesting this assignment in the name of equality. With such a conception of the social, Rancière therefore proceeds without sociological analyses; indeed, he even questions the epistemology such analyses presuppose. This point opposes him radically to the Frankfurt School tradition. (Genel, 2016, p. 13)

The reason for bringing up the similarities and differences between Honneth's and Rancière's understanding of the social and the political respectively, is that some of the questions we want to raise in relation to the separation between education and politics suggested by the advocates of post-critical pedagogy can be located in questions which have been raised against these respective understandings of equality and politics.

While Honneth thinks of his own theory of recognition more in terms of calling into question modes of interpreting existing normative principles of recognition, it is easy to read Rancière as concerned with the interruption of the normative order as such. However, as Rancière himself defends, his notion of political action is not merely one of "the negative interruption of the police domination" (Rancière, 2016, p. 125), but "inscribes effects of equality into our laws and our practices" (ibid.), which "in turn, allow new political conflicts and actions" (ibid.). In that sense, as Perica poignantly analyzes, Honneth and Rancière both are concerned with a form of internal struggle for recognition (cf. Perica, 2017). However, and this is crucial also for our own take on the question to which extent political aims of education are a legitimate part and focus of the study of education and educational philosophy, Perica also points to how Rancière misunderstands Honneth's concept of equality as telos. Rancière insists that equality is wrongly (and cruelly) conceived as a (never to be fullfilled) promise instead of as a powerful presupposition or force "already at work in all our relations" (Rancière, 2016, p. 95). As Perica writes, Rancière here seems to "misinterpret the companion's (and some other's) conceptualizations of telos: notwithstanding its historical misueses, the term is not to be simplified as an instrument of false promises" (Perica, 2017, p. 397). We want to simililarly call into question how, without a thorough discussion of a potential political telos, we can enact knowledge about our always

already being equal, and work meaningfully towards an improvement of educational institutions and their organization.

When looking in the following chapter at the shifting meanings and understandings of the so-called compensatory task of the school system in Sweden, we do this very much Honneth and Rancière's spirit of engaging closley with social and historical developments in the philosophical analysis of how to think the political in relation to education when discussing the meaning of the aims of education today. In particular, in order to highlight which place and which form the political idea of equality should be afforded in our conceptualizations of the aims of education.

The example of the historical shifting of the "compensatory task" of education in Sweden

As a reaction to post-war politics and growing welfarism, Sweden started a journey towards a more inclusive educational system. Gradually reducing levels of formalized organizational, or external differentiation the emerging structure of education provided increasing opportunities for widened participation throughout the Swedish population. Ambitions to foster educational and social mobility as well as labour market advantages was particularly evident in the reformation of secondary education in 1962 as well as in the reformation of post-16 education (upper secondary or gymnasium in Swedish) by the early 1970's. Organizational differentiation by way of school association was dismantled as overcoming the previous separation into grammar schools (läroverk), all-girl schools (flickskola) and folk schools (folkskola) became the key element to societal and educational change. This process of dismantling the organizational differentiation between different school types had the explicit ambition to reduce classed and gendered hierarchies between and within schools. Earlier, grammar schools and all-girl schools mostly catered to the higher social stratum while folk schools catered to the lower social stratum of Swedish society (Florin & Johannsson, 1993). In the course of this dismantling process, the Swedish government slowly organized a new national educational system which rested upon the introduction of mandatory secondary education, state-guided curriculums to uphold greater levels of equality as well as clearer guidelines for the enlistment of students by the use of geographical zoning.

Mandatory education was meant to provide a foundation from which social mobility could emerge, and as grammar schools were gradually replaced with the new integrated gymnasium in the 1970's, more students from the lower social stratum were able to continue their educational careers and could aim towards university studies (Hultqvist, 2001; Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2014). Yet, further organizational changes were introduced to reduce the implications of structural inequality. Geographical zoning was perceived on a policy level to bring students from different social groups together in local municipal schools, reducing the effect of individual choice and privilege. This togetherness would foster development with regard to democratic values, mutual understanding and learning as social mixing between students from different backgrounds was amplified. The ambition to target class inequalities and privilege is perhaps even more visible in the political determination to dispose of private institutions within the emerging welfare sector. This was the case for both health care and schooling (Blomqvist, 2004). In the post-war era private schooling in Sweden shrunk substantially and had almost completely vanished by the 1980's. One vivid illustration is the drastic drop of the number of students enrolled in private institutions which decreased from almost half of the Swedish population in 1919 to less than 0,6 percent in the early 1980's (SOU, 1981, p. 34). Additionally, organizational regulations structuring school life and educational opportunities changed to fit the political ambitions of Sweden at the time. A highly centralized educational system with comprehensively organized curriculums from 1962 and onwards implied limited space for interpretation by school professionals (Jarl & Rönnberg, 2010). However, it also provided increasing potentials for equivalence in education as the risk of

local level variation between schools decreased. Swedish curriculums continued being highly centralized even though we can see a stronger emphasis was put on possibilities for individualization and internal differentiation towards the 1980's.

Yet another change was made on post-16 level. While boundaries between schools had been reduced since the early 1960's at secondary level, choice of educational programmes still regulated the entry to the newly integrated gymnasium which had been introduced in the early 1970's. The difference in status between these programmes had, and still has until today, a significant impact on enrolment. Theoretical programmes, especially the natural science program, are more socially and academically selective than labour market orientated, vocational programs (Broady & Börjesson, 2005; Forsberg, 2015). Yet Hultqvist (2001), mention that, although equality has been a target, there has been a continuous concern about the effect of too little differentiation. That is to say, to many students selecting theoretical programmes or that too many are able to reach university level. Hence, different initiatives were initially made to regulate the increasing number of students. Unsurprisingly, the students attending the vocational programs initially had fewer courses related to theoretical subject and consequently fewer chances to attend university. Towards the early 1990's however, a range of changes aiming to create a common foundation between all programmes within post-16 education made it possible for all students to transition into university – albeit with different likelihoods. In summary, by the 1990's, Swedish education showed historically low levels of organizational differentiation (Hultqvist, 2018), both in a national and international comparative perspective.

This transformation targeting within-school inequality connected to class and gender also produced new challenges for state organized education. As policy changes connected to reducing educational differentiation on an organizational level were made, new patterns of urbanization and residential inequality appeared and changed the contextual preconditions for schools. This development created what Lindensjö and Lundgren call "problems within the educational system" that are not "universal, rather to a large degree connected to various local conditions, and thus, connected to societal differentiation" (2014, p. 65). The increasing social heterogeneity of students attending the same schools meant that there was a perceived potential problem with achieving equality. One crucial example is the micro-level challenges of teaching and classroom management in which unequal access to educational goods becomes evident. Such class advantages comprise what sociologist Muriel Darmon (2018) refers to as the (dis)harmony between family socialization and institutional socialization. One such thing is the continued struggle of students with working class background to navigate the unwritten rules of schooling – or the "hidden curriculum" as it is sometimes called (Broady, 2007). Similar to other post-war educational initiatives, the political solution became adding compensatory measures to counterweigh potential asymmetries (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2014).

The first stages of compensatory measures in Sweden are similar to those of post-war UK. These could be said to include the matter of redistribution and a struggle for societal equalization (Power, 2012). However, this idea is fairly absent in contemporary Swedish policy concerning compensatory measures. In fact, the name compensatory actions or measures, has largely been abandoned in recent policy document rather focusing on individualization and individual aspirations. To be more concrete, as Sweden's public education system became more egalitarian and uniform, new counter-perspectives emphasising choice and responsibility grew. This outcome follows international trends, and especially struggles of the cultural middle class to uphold their social position in an era of continuous massification of education and the hyper-liberal logic of educational marketization (Hultqvist, 2018). Parental choice, efficiency, and individual responsibility became key words as the Swedish educational system became increasingly commodified in the early 1990's as a result of political struggles and parental inquiry. Even more so, new opportunities opened up for establishing independent schools which could be attended by all students, regardless of their socioeconomic

background, through the use of publicly financed vouchers. The ambition was putting school against school and student against student, to stimulate and foster competition and as such, better financial and economic outcomes. To attain the highest levels of future academic opportunities and range of educational choices, students had to achieve high grades. These grades had an exchange value, making it possible to choose academically "superior" educational institutions when moving from secondary to upper secondary level, or from upper secondary to university level. Correspondingly, the promoted ambition behind introducing parental choice and independent schools was to stimulate school improvement as educational institutions had to advance and progress to appeal to parents.

The number of independent schools grew only slowly until the early 2000's, but the following years saw a vast expansion. One clear demarcation of this is the escalation of upper secondary schools increasing from 42 to 466 between 1992 and 2023. Another crucial point is the portion of students attending independent schools at secondary and upper secondary level. As mentioned before, in the 1980's about 0,6 percent of Swedish students attended independent schools. In 2023 the portion had increased to 31 percent at upper secondary level and 16 percent at secondary level (Skolverket – Jämförelsetal, 2023). Nowadays, filtering between the great number of schools and also between the educational options within schools is a task on its own and poses particular challenges for those students who have fewer resources and support for succeeding at this task (Forsberg, 2015). A variety of pathways (i.e., pedagogical, theoretical, vocational and esthetical) is possible to select from within schools, and there are more fine-grained educational options separating and differentiating students into different trajectories.

Our undertaking here is not to dissect the political transformation from state centred welfarism to the marketization of the educational sector in Sweden in detail. Rather, we wish to outline certain crucial historical changes in relation to the role of compensatory measures within Swedish education. One of the most vital parts of this discussion is the shift away from term "compensatory measures" in policy documents and how this shift follows ideological changes which correspond to the above-mentioned characteristics of the growing marketization of education in Sweden.

While compensatory measures still exist in today's educational landscape in Sweden, they mostly focus on supporting students in their within-school development and possibilities. This means that "compensatory measures" are no longer conceived of as necessary tools of transforming educational organizations on a societal level, but rather the organizing of measures at classroom level as well as the improvement of collaborations between teachers and professionals working with student health. Two indications of this development are the classifications of "additional adjustments" (extra anpassningar) and "specific support" (särskilt stöd). While former group of measures aim at supporting students by adjusting and organizing the classroom at a collective level, the later focus exclusively on the needs of specific individuals. More interesting for this text though is the common move away from collective action meant to prevent educational inequality on collective level. The focus on parental choice and the massive increase of independent schools is reversing the post-war ambition to reduce classed and gendered inequality in education. As has been shown in several studies, it puts enormous pressure on individuals while differentiating schools and students in hierarchies and enhancing existing educational gaps. Although not mentioned directly as compensatory measures, the emphasis in Swedish educational policy has been to support students' possibility to navigate between different pathways and make strategic choices. In the current curriculum for secondary education, it is stated that educational professionals within schools should "contribute to ensuring that student's choice of occupation and education are not limited by gender or by social or cultural background" (LGR 22). This is elaborated further, while targeting specifically gendered inequalities within education and the labour market with social class being absent.

> The school must actively and consciously promote equal rights and opportunities for students, regardless of gender. The school also has a responsibility to make visible and counteract gender patterns that limit students' learning, choices and development. How the school organizes education, how students are treated and what demands and expectations are placed on them contribute to shaping their ideas about what is feminine and masculine. The school must therefore organize education so that the students meet and work together and test and develop their abilities and interests with the same opportunities and on equal terms regardless of gender. (Skolverket, 2022)

As stated in these quotes, the imagined solution is to compensate gendered inequalities by fostering individual abilities and improve individual prospects and in this way break with structural inequality. One way of achieving this goal is thought to be through providing more substantial guidance and create what is named “competences for choice”, which includes the ability to make decisions and self-awareness (Skolverket 2013, p. 12). This is also formulated in a recent governmental report as “getting knowledge about one’s own strength and interests with regards to the possibilities at hand” (SOU 2019:4, p. 299). The reasoning behind these statements is that students ought to be compensated and schooled in how to individually circumvent the obstacles and boundaries within the contemporary educational system. At the same time little attention is paid on addressing the insufficiency of focusing exclusively on individual solutions and the lack of reflection on the impact of increasing societal inequality on the preconditions for individual students to succeed in the educational market.

To achieve greater equality, municipalities can also organize different financial counter-measures and compensate for structural inequality by assigning additional funds to struggling schools. However, the practical dimensions of this task are not formally organized by the Swedish state. The irony is that municipal taxes are paid and then used to uphold a system which generates further division and inequality. Together with the focus on individual level compensation in the form of increased knowledge about how to navigate various labour market and educational boundaries, structural adjustment for school level inequalities resonates with the logic or the “new face” of meritocracy as Littler (2018, p. 2) puts it. Increased focus on knowledge, grades and choice moves responsibility from possibilities of state intervention to solely individual merit. This “smokescreen” of meritocracy (Kennedy & Power, 2010; Koh, 2014) is encapsuled by groups with much resources, as they legitimize their social and educational position by supposedly hard work rather than privilege (Khan, 2015). The belief in meritocracy is institutionalized in Swedish education as well as the promises of individual mobility (Larsson, 2019). More importantly, however, it moves the gaze away from increasing inequality. As sociologist Jonathan Mijs (2019) has shown, relying on data from Sweden among other countries, as inequality increases so does the belief in meritocracy.

From a critique of instrumentalism towards a critique of reification

Looking back to the contemporary historical case from Sweden presented in this article, three noteworthy turns are presented. The first period represents a highly differentiated educational system with little concern in compensatory actions. The second turn, starting in the early 1960’s, represents an attempt to minimize classed and gendered differentiation, while implementing compensatory actions at societal as well as individual level. Combining emphasis on structured and systematic social redistribution resulted in an attempt to transform and democratize education. While inequalities persisted, a larger portion of the population had the prospect of receiving comparable educational opportunities. This focus on collectiveness and equality, however, was drastically changed in the early 1990’s, with a marketized educational system that stressed parental choice, individualized responsibility, competition and meritocracy. Highlighting prospects of social mobility for hard working students with the ability to navigate a highly differentiated

educational system, less attention was paid to social redistribution and social class. Instead, compensation is now largely understood in terms of actions directed at individual level. Following the historical development as well as the current interpretations of the understanding of the compensatory task of schooling in Sweden sheds light on the relevance we see in a contemporary philosophical discussion of the aims of education in terms of both dimensions, which Brighouse calls "aims goals" and "distribution goals" respectively.

In order to further clarify that connection, we can turn to a recent publication by Carl Anders Säfström (2021). Säfström's critical analysis of the "distributive paradigm of schooling" is a description which problematizes the logic behind hierarchical organization and the tendencies of the current school system to enhance and justify social inequalities similar to what is characterized in our critique as the mire of meritocracy. In a similar way to the post-critical approaches discussed in the introduction to the article, Säfström insists on "educational thought and research […] need[ing] to keep a critical distance from solving 'acute societal problems'" (Säfström, 2021, p. 1) and relies on Rancière in his critique of the future-orientedness of an instrumentalist understanding of education which enables what he calls the distributive paradigm of schooling (ibid., p. 1 ff.). With Rancière he argues for an education which enables students to disidentify with the dominant order of distribution of educational merits. However, if we look at Säfström's critique of "instrumental pedagogy" and his notion that "such pedagogy contributes to the depressive state of things and the end of popular sovereignty as well as democracy as such" (Säfström, 2021, p. 111), his critique leaves little room for appreciating the importance of the kind of sociological analysis which informs his own characterizations of the distributive paradigm of schooling, as illustrated also by our analysis the shifting understanding of schooling's compensatory task.

As Schumann has argued in other work (Schumann, 2012; Schumann, 2020), distinguishing between the concepts of reification and instrumentalization can be helpful in this regard. She suggests to "reserve the notion of reification to characterize lasting distortions of the whole of human practice, and distinguish it from alienation as well as from temporary, harmless, under certain conditions useful, necessary or even joyful forms of instrumentalization and objectification" (Schumann, 2020, p. 77). Developing more narrowly a critique of reification allows to recognize innocuous or even meaningful forms of objectification, de-personalization and instrumentalization allows for meaningful forms of objectification, not least "in terms of social theory and social analysis which need to articulate forms of discrimination and social stratification in society without forgetting that these analyses never exhaust an individual narrative, potential or possibilities, real or imaginary" (Schumann, 2020, p. 56).

By introducing the more nuanced idea that some forms of instrumental takes on education, for example in social theory and social analysis, might be meaningful and not constitute pathological forms of reification, we allow for an idea of the aims of education to be discussed both in terms of aims goals, i.e. in which way and why education is valuable for its own sake, but also in terms of distribution goals, how we understand an education that aims at equality. Säfström here, as in his overall approach, is strongly informed by Rancière and the idea to start with the assumption of an equality of intelligence in a practice of "teaching without a future" (Säfström, 2021, p. 112). As we developed above, in reference to Rancière's critique of hope and telos, this calls into question how, we can meaningfully expect that knowledge about our always already being equal can be enacted, and how we could meaningfully work towards an improvement of educational institutions and their organization, without a thorough discussion of a potential political telos of education within educational philosophy and theory. A swiping critique of the instrumentalization and politicization of education runs the danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater by subsuming all critical discussion of the political dimensions and potentially meaningful "distribution" goals of education under the header of a problematic instrumentalization and politicization of education.

Even though the discussion of the aims of education has been relatively sparse in recent years, some publications still stand out. Harry Brighouse is one of the authors in the field who has written most notably on the subject (e.g., Brighouse & McPherson, 2015; Brighouse et al., 2018; Brighouse et al., 2020). More recently, Philip Kitcher, Professor Emeritus at Columbia University in New York, published a very comprehensive and ambitious book on education, which he calls with Emerson "the main enterprise of the world" (Kitcher 2022). Kitcher's project is remarkable not only in trying to reignite a more thorough engagement with questions regarding education in mainstream philosophy. It is also a noteworthy contribution in the present context in that he devotes the first half of its 440 pages to rethinking the aims and purpose of education. Kitcher's pragmatist, Deweyan approach makes his serious engagement with education as a philosopher less surprising, and it also explains why the renewed look at education which he proposes involves a thorough, even utopian vision for social change which needs to precede or go hand in hand with the changes of our vision for education which he suggests. Despite his Deweyan inspiration, the story which Kitcher develops through his book starts with "individuality" to then end with suggestions for social change and utopia. In this way, despite his best intentions, the book remains a shining example and continues to perpetuate the central problems of (liberal) hope.

In the present article, our approach is closer to Richard Bernstein's early critique of Kitcher's work for its individualism despite its pragmatist ambitions. One of the main arguments leans on the way in which it is misleading to start the discussion of the aims of education by focusing on the individual first. While Brighouse's approach differs from ours in that regard as well, the present paper is nevertheless inspired by Brighouse's methodological approach in Educational Goods (Brighouse et al., 2018), exploring the question of the aims of education both as a philosophical question as well as a question of practical policy application. Similarly, we try to bring together perspectives from philosophy of education as well as from educational sociology. More specifically, we discussed the recent, quite influential proposition in philosophy of education, which asked for a return to "education for education's sake" (Hodgson et al., 2018). Our argument complicates the critique of critical theory as wrongly subduing education to extrinsic political ends by looking at some concrete examples of how the so-called "compensatory task" of education in Sweden has been interpreted in recent years and how this interpretation has changed historically. These examples highlight in which way some of the philosophical points of post-critical pedagogy are valid, but they also show how their arguments need to be reformulated so as not to lose sight of the difficulty of ensuring and safeguarding the conditions of possibility of "education to be for education's sake" (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 7). Again, in a spin on Bernstein's famous quote, while education cannot compensate for society, we need society to compensate so that education can be for education's sake.

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