

To Study and to be Assessed

Empirical and theoretical perspectives on students' ways of experiencing studying and assessments

Per Andersson

Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

This dissertation is focussing on students' experiences of assessments, which means that the assessments are related to studying. The assessments particularly investigated are the main types of assessments used in the application and selection for higher education in Sweden – the grading in schools on secondary level, and the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (SweSAT).

The literature review is an analysis of previous knowledge, resulting in a model of orientations to studying.

The empirical investigation consists of interviews with 100 students in upper secondary school, municipal adult education and folk high schools. The interviews are analysed with a phenomenographic approach, and the analysis results in categories describing ways of experiencing what it means to study, ways of experiencing the grades, and the SweSAT. In addition to this, the analysis gives a description of relations between components within categories, relations between categories, and relations between phenomena.

The main patterns in the students' experiences of the assessments are the following: The different categories, describing the experiences of the assessments *per se*, are focussing on assessment of performance, assessment of personal qualities (including developed knowledge), or uncertainty in relation to the assessment. There are four main aspects of the students' experiences of the value of assessments, i.e., the relation to future plans, the relation to the student's personal context, the possibility to influence your result, and the relation to other assessments used in the selection.

The final result of the empirical investigation is a reconstructed model of five orientations to studying, where the empirical results are integrated with previous knowledge. The five categories are the knowledge orientation, the duty orientation, the participation orientation, the qualification orientation, and the resistance orientation. These orientations are also described as adaptive and/or non-adaptive in relation to the demands of the education.

A further analysis in relation to three social science perspectives shows how assessments can contribute to the colonization of the educational lifeworld, how assessments can be seen as instruments of discipline, and how assessments can be seen as disembedding mechanisms.

Key words: Assessment, grades, the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (SweSAT), orientations to studying, phenomenography, colonization, discipline, disembedding mechanisms

Department of Education and Psychology
Linköpings universitet, SE-581 83 Linköping, Sweden

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