

# *Home-based education in Sweden*

## Local variations in forms of regulation

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### ABSTRACT

In Sweden approximately 100 children a year are in home-based education, which is regulated by local policies that interpret legislation and guide practice. Based on a detailed analysis of documents drawn up in two municipalities, the article highlights different interpretations of the role and requirement of *insyn* (insight) in the governance and monitoring of home education through municipal authority-home arrangements.

KEYWORDS *governance, home-education policy, monitoring, Sweden*

SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF NATIONAL LEGISLATION on compulsory education and school attendance in Sweden in 1842, home education has been regulated in such a way that a door has always been left open for children to be educated outside school, though the wording of the law has changed over time. Forms of 'home education' were quite widespread until the late 1800s, but declined rapidly thereafter (Litsgård, 1995: 19). With the institutionalization of mass schooling and a phasing out of home education in the twentieth century, little has been documented on the practice and governance of the home education that remained. Nevertheless, a Swedish expert committee report of 1980 (Ministry of Education, 1980) acknowledged that children in modern Sweden could fulfill compulsory education via alternative forms as provided for in international law, declaring that '[p]arental rights to choose a private school or individual teaching for their children remains intact' (Ministry of Education, 1980: 20). This does not give parents 'the right to choose not to give their children any education at all' (Arajärvi, 1992: 410). Swedish law requires that parents must ensure their children engage in compulsory education. If they do

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not, they can be fined, but not imprisoned (Government of Sweden, 1985a, 1985b: Chapter 3:16). In 2008 approximately 100 children were in home education (NAE, 2009a). This figure is a rough estimate covering a range of situations where children are registered as in 'other' education outside of school. Some of them are engaged in family home education, while some are in unclear circumstances. Thus, in Sweden, the question to be considered is not *if* home education should be permitted, but 'how it should be monitored' (Monk, 2009: 163).

Home education is a minor but nevertheless important policy issue. Although relatively few children are home educated in a given year the practice has a significant impact on the local school, the education authority and the families concerned. Home education is a sensational topic in a historically welfare-oriented state such as Sweden, challenging taken-for-granted ideas about public control over knowledge and the training of new citizens. This article aims to examine aspects of the policy on home education in Sweden drawing on an analysis of documents and interviews with officials and families.

In 2008 the *Svenska Dagbladet* (Ernsjö Rappe, 2008), a national newspaper, featured remarks made by the Minister of Education, who said he considered eliminating the regulations allowing parents to home educate for religious or philosophical reasons. Subsequently, another politician in Stockholm announced that the city would stop all parents who 'wished to home educate for ideological or religious reasons'. These statements signalled a radical departure from earlier interpretations of the law and led to home educators demonstrating in Stockholm to gain public support (Adolfsson, 2008). The events gave some prominence to the scattered actions of those who advocated and opposed home-based education. These have largely focused on court cases, which appear to have become more widespread over the last decade. For instance in 2009 several local education authorities denied home-education extensions to families who had been home educating. A number of families were reported to social services and had their homes inspected for safety, though none were found negligent. Six families, whose applications for home education were turned down by their municipal authority, appealed in court. Only one won the appeal (email correspondence with representative of Rohus – the Association of Home Educators in Sweden, 4 June 2009).

Home educating families are occasionally featured in local and national newspapers and radio talk shows (Vynnycky, 2003: 68–71). In 2000, an investigative television program dedicated one of its shows to home education in Sweden and the USA. One home educating parent considered in 2004 that the current stage of development in Swedish home education was 'at a level that corresponds to that in the United States about 20–25 years ago' (Drysen, 2004: 97).

The Swedish media often compare home education in their own country to developments in the US or neighboring countries – Denmark, Norway or Finland – where home-education regulations are less restrictive. However, home education in Sweden is practiced within a more tolerant legislative framework than other European countries with rigid compulsory schooling laws, notably Germany and the Netherlands (Taylor and Petrie, 2000).

Data collected for this study include national statistics on home education for the 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 school years, a pilot study (with 11 out of 293 municipalities reporting cases of home education), a larger survey (with 77 of 293 municipalities), collection of municipal case documents (Villalba, 2003) and interviews with 26 municipal officials. Data from 25 municipalities was analyzed. In addition, snowballing and purposive selection of informants, and leads from news articles and National Agency for Education (NAE) reports provided access to additional materials and information. Home educating families were observed, but only a small number of parents were interviewed. Interviews with key officials were conducted in two municipalities with formal home-education policies. In others a wide range of documents were analyzed. All efforts have been made to maintain the confidentiality of families, municipal officials and school officials.

NAE has been collecting statistics on home education since the early 1990s. A government survey on home-education requests, approvals and denials was conducted in 1980, in preparation for the 1985 Education Act (Ministry of Education, 1980). This removed provision for ‘teaching at home or elsewhere’, although the home as a possible site of education was noted in earlier legislation, which specifically preserved historical clauses stating that children could be registered by their ‘parents’ as being taught ‘at home’ or ‘elsewhere’ (Education Act, SFS, 1962: 319, Chapter 35, cited in Ministry of Education, 1980). Home-based education is implied in the current Act in Chapter 10:4–6 in the following way: Children ‘may be permitted to complete this [compulsory education] otherwise than as provided in this Act, if it appears to be an adequate alternative to the education otherwise offered the child in the provisions of the Act’ (Chapter 10:4, clarification added by author). Non-specific exemptions from school attendance are now regulated in the Education Act.

The actual task of overseeing home education and taking responsibility for enabling each child’s access to basic education (and rights and duties defined therein) is in the hands of the local-level authority:

. . . I hope I am being objective when I say that . . . because not to prohibit it [home education] but not to encourage it either because we are very anxious that every child has high quality education and gets taught what they should be taught together with others

... and that puts a lot of responsibility to the municipalities. (Interview with Ministry of Education officer, 2003)

This statement testifies to the uneasy position of home-education policy in Sweden, located somewhere between being restrictive and tolerant and consistent with the history of compulsory education in the country. This reflects a respect for parents' 'priority right' (UDHR, 1948: Article 26:3) in making family educational decisions according to their 'religious and philosophical beliefs' (ECHR, 1950: Protocol 1, Article 2), and their 'primary responsibility' (CRC, 1989: Article 18) in directing the 'upbringing and development' of their offspring. As Monk (2009) has pointed out, international law implies that the right of parents to home educate is conditional upon the quality of the education provided, and children enjoy fundamental rights of their own. These documents form the basis for the Swedish National Curriculum (NAE, 2008), which espouses fundamental liberal values.

In Sweden regulation and monitoring of home-education arrangements set up between homes and municipal authorities is specified through the process of *insyn* (literally meaning 'insight' but in practice, as will be shown, a much broader concept). In the discussion that follows the way *insyn* is defined in national and local policy texts, and people's response to this, is explored.

#### INSYN IN POLICY TEXTS

Although the Education Act (Government of Sweden, 1985a: Chapter 10:4) stipulates that *insyn* is required in home-education activities, the legislation does not pinpoint the stage at which this condition should be met, whether prior to the application or once the arrangement has been established. Moreover, in the official English version of the Act *insyn* is translated as 'insight', but this concept is not defined and how it will be implemented is not elaborated.

The only other place in the Education Act where the word *insyn* is used concerns independent schools that receive government funding. According to the law, the municipalities where these schools are located have a 'right to *insyn*' in school activities (Chapters 2b:8 and 9).

A simple translation of *insyn* into English (Institute for Language and Folklore, n.d.) is 'view', 'control', and 'check or inspect'. In Swedish it is defined as 'the possibility to see into or to inspect'. Two phrases are given as examples: *full insyn från vägen* – full view from the street; *insyn i ett företag* – insight into business activities. From this rough definition we can see that the concept may be applied in different contexts. Still, the above definitions do not capture the two-sidedness of the concept in respect to the relationships

between the state/public and private entity/individual as the examples below indicate.

*Insyn* can be a citizen's tool for gaining knowledge of privately organized entities. This is apparent in a document on Swedish municipal interests in competition and choice in the light of EU policy on the boundaries between the market and bureaucracy. Thus the National Association of Local Authorities (*Kommunförbundet*) (Anderssen, 2002: 54–6) makes a connection between 'democratic influence' and 'user-influence' (*brukarinflytande*) in the private and public spheres. *Insyn* is named in this context. The article points out that, in addition to influence over publicly organized activities, Swedish citizens have a right to *insyn* in them, and this is what sets them off from privately owned operations. Concern about EU harmonization processes and new policies stemming from them is noted, namely that 'Swedish principles for *insyn*' may be at risk (p. 54).

In a similar vein, *insyn* is used with respect to public and private education. In a study of parent involvement in pre-primary institutions in Stockholm city (for ages 1–7) (Ståhle, 1995), the author presents *insyn* as a right that parents retain in respect to having active insight into their child's school. According to the study, laws on 'user-influence' in Sweden stipulate that parents should 'not only have *insyn*' but also have influence over what happens in these institutions (pp. 15–16), thereby differentiating 'influence' from '*insyn*'. Ways of achieving *insyn* include 'cooperation in school activities', where 'in a natural way' parents come to know other parents, personnel and children (p. 16). In order for school personnel to ensure parents are satisfied with the school, she argues, the school needs to work hard to promote their *insyn* (Ståhle, 1995: 81, referring to Ekman and Sundell). Methods mentioned are pro-actively providing information on the child and on school activities. Other methods include newsletters, video films, bulletin boards, activity planning and evaluations.

Interviews with parents of home-educated children are sensitive to the range of meanings of the term. One set of parents, sent a draft of the home-authority contract by the municipality, objected to the local authority's change from *insyn* to *tillsyn*. The proposed terminological switch involved three places in the written agreement where the family wanted *insyn* to be used instead of *tillsyn*, which is translated as 'surveillance' and 'supervision' (Institute for Language and Folklore, n.d.). According to the parents, the administration wrongly cited the key phrase of the Education Act 10:4. The family argued that *insyn* means that 'the authorities remain outside and look IN at what we are doing' while in contrast, *tillsyn* denotes that the authorities are 'on the inside and SEE TO IT that we do what they want us to do'

(Electronic communication from parent in Municipality 24, 2006), implying increased authority influence over activities.

Thus, we might expect *insyn* to apply to situations and conditions where families have adequate exposure to the school and its activities and the contents of learning, including pupils and staff, the general environment and life of the school and its mission. In addition the school – and educational authority – have exposure to the child and her or his family in the home-education setting. Exposure on both sides is supplemented by knowledge and information about one another. Thus far, *insyn* is both a condition to be achieved and a means to achieve other objectives.

Decisions regarding requests for home-based education are ‘considered by the local education board for the school where the child would otherwise have undertaken its compulsory schooling’ (Government of Sweden, 1985b: Chapter 10:5).<sup>1</sup> These decisions are often made in consultation with the school. The decision process entails an *interpretation* of national legislation and other preparatory texts related to the passages of the Act. Since there are no separate regulations other than the few words governing ‘other’ educational forms outside of school, and no policy tailored to ‘home education’, the local authorities establish their own routines and working policies, drawing on the national steering instruments. Very few, however, have formal policies.

The municipalities are responsible for the compulsory-level comprehensive school (Education Act, Chapter 1:4), normally for children aged between 7 and 16 (nine years in total).<sup>2</sup> The local governing board or similar entity responsible for deciding on home-education requests (Municipal Education Committee: MEC) is in charge of major decisions regarding school operations (Education Act, Chapter 2:1). The municipalities and the schools themselves must draw up certain plans for governing schools (Education Act, Chapter 2:8; Government of Sweden, 1985a: Basic School Ordinance, 2:23). Each school must have a school head, who is responsible for school operations and development (Education Act, Chapter 2:2).

The four most influential national documents or steering tools pertaining to the general and specific goals, contents and organization of education and schooling in the compulsory years, are: the Education Act (Government of Sweden, 1985a: 1100), the Basic School Ordinance (Government of Sweden, 1994a: 1194), the National Curriculum (Lp094) (Government of Sweden, 1994b) and the individual course syllabi.<sup>3</sup> The documents are cross-referenced and legally binding in respect to school education, but they are also utilized by municipalities in governing home education. Some of the statutes and prescriptions *must* be addressed in home-education policy (e.g. how to have insight into education at home, to evaluate the results before extensions are given, etc.), while some *can* be used and adapted, and yet others *cannot* (such

as assigning grades), but it is not always easy to decide which texts fall into which of the three categories. At the very least, the municipalities *may* have a wide range of policy resources for building their policies, with regulations and standards to which they must adhere. Whether they are doing this correctly or not is outside of the scope of the study.

#### PRACTICES AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

According to municipal officials interviewed in two municipalities where detailed examination of documents took place, none of the children involved in home schooling had special developmental, social or educational needs. None of the parents were interviewed in these two municipalities, so it is important to keep in mind that the parents concerned have not been able to represent their own cases. However, written application documents from the four families discussed here have been examined.

In both municipalities the policies for home education were created *after* requests for home education were received by the school or education authority. In Municipality 14, it was after its experience with the first home-education arrangement that a working group started drafting the policy:

SO YOU THOUGHT YOU NEEDED A POLICY?<sup>4</sup>

Not the first time, but then the second time we thought oooyyy!! . . . is it so common? . . . and then we got the third family and we were so glad we had gone through this and made a policy. And then there was a school head from another municipality who contacted us about home education there, and we thought we must do something since we could see that it was more common than we thought. (Interview with School Head)

A member of MEC remarked that they were glad to have ‘something to check against’ once the policy was approved and applied to the third family arrangement:

From the beginning there weren’t so many here involved, and then when we saw it could go on for many years, then we thought we would need a policy, something we could check against . . . then we can leave it to the delegation so they don’t have to start fresh every time, and then we wouldn’t be steered by the circumstances each time . . .

The Head of Administration interviewed in Municipality 7 remarked that, after the first attempted application, they were in a hurry to make a policy to have some basis for deciding on the application, for which an arrangement had not been made because of disagreements between the municipality and the home:

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE MEC DISCUSSED (WHEN THEY MADE THE DECISION)?

Since we have a policy, the issue was around if they fulfilled the policy in a good way. I don’t know what their views on home education were . . . they wanted to know if the requirements were fulfilled.

The document was prepared in an ad hoc fashion, in order to deal with the matter at hand. Otherwise, the Head of Administration summarized her view on MEC's position on an ideal home-education arrangement and application as largely depending on broader social contact:

If we can go over their knowledge compared to other kids, and the parents can be good at that in many ways, but we must see that the child has – social contact . . . is okay . . . and that we have contact.

Once the policy was made during consideration of the first application received, the application was turned down since the requirements were not seen as being fulfilled. The main objection, according to the interviewee, was that the family did not have an appropriate 'education plan' already prepared, though no guidance on creating a plan was provided by the authority. She said that the parents

fulfilled in some way the requirements . . . fixed to set the educational standards . . . but we couldn't check things, we weren't welcome into the home and the boy shouldn't [sic] take tests that can show his progress . . .

School officials were apparently given access to the home in the early stages of the application process, at which time a parallel plan was being made by the municipality for bringing the child back into the school. Various members of the school staff were engaged in the process:

In the beginning, it was a school head and class teacher, and school nurse, parents, and then school head and teachers, and then another school head and then the administration slowly, and then a psychologist.

WHEN DID THE ADMINISTRATION GET INVOLVED?

After a half year . . .

. . . After many meetings, a 'special measures plan'<sup>5</sup> from the school, and the boy was still at home.

The family then took the matter to the Administrative Court of Appeals. The MEC decision was upheld for the two children (the family initially applied for one child and later the daughter was added to the application). The case went on to two higher courts and then back to the Court of Appeals. The timespan was about four years, according to information from a follow-up communication after the interview, at which time the case was still tied up in the court system.

The school head who worked with the first family in Municipality 14 explained that she had never encountered a request previously, had no set policy to work from, and she was new to her post. She described her approach to the task:



I had absolutely no knowledge at all about how it should go . . . it was a big mission for me. The family had written an application to the MEC, and I had nobody who could guide me in this, so I made the best of it. It began with a home visit. [ . . . ] The child would go to the first grade, [ . . . ] we talked about what the child could do, and they had been teaching at home so the child could do a lot already, and then we had a teacher visit to map out where the child was in his/her knowledge, and from that we selected materials from the school, that we could give the family, and then they could contact us . . . so that is what we did and this was my first family . . .

Despite this lack of experience with home education, she, and others assigned to the task, worked closely with the families. At the time of the interviews in 2003, these three families, the first of whom began home education in the late 1990s, had already ceased home educating for various reasons. The arrangements had been positively evaluated by the municipal authority. The school head explained that when one of the boys later applied to an upper secondary school under a special clause for children without ordinary qualifications (Upper Secondary School Ordinance, 1992: 394, Section 6:3), the head of the upper secondary school contacted Municipality 14: ‘. . . the chair at the upper secondary school reacted in a strange way when the parents said their son had been home educated, but they contacted us and we said it was true . . .’.

All of the above municipal interviewees stated that their policy was an important tool for dealing with home-education requests. This is the case where the policy was used as justification for turning down an application, as in the case of Municipality 7, or for preparing the school and its head, teachers and board members, along with the family, for a school authority-home arrangement, which is demonstrated in Municipality 14. It is difficult to say from the evidence whether the policy for Municipality 7 would have developed further or been used in a different way had a working arrangement been established, and how much the situation was influenced by behaviour of individuals from the municipality or the family. Nevertheless, according to the interviewee, the requirement of a satisfactory ‘teaching plan’ prior to setting up an arrangement was emphasized as a criterion for denial of the application. The claim of insufficient contact with the family was also used as a criterion, but it is not clear if this situation arose before or after the application was denied and the family took the case to court.

#### MUNICIPAL POLICY DOCUMENTS ON HOME EDUCATION

The first page of the documents used in the two municipalities, each of which is two pages in length, contains the relevant text of the Education Act Chapter 10:4–5, though Municipality 7 includes other legal texts supporting

the exercise of educational choice and reasons to home educate, taken from preparatory works (Government of Sweden, n.d.: Proposition 1985/1986–10). Two common arguments for home education are apparent in the texts: the specific situation of the child, and the particular views of the parents. The text states that home-education activities should be evaluated on the same terms as independent schools and the education must be comparable to that given at the basic school.

Considerable attention is given by both municipalities to the increasing demands on parent knowledge as children grow older. The remainder of the Municipality 7 document is divided into two parts, one defining the evaluation of the child's situation and the other with short lines on other aspects of the policy: testing, financial support for materials, information provided to the home, frequency of follow-up, restrictions on home-education requests in the latter years and how home-educated children apply to secondary schools.

Municipality 14 also includes supporting legal text at the end of the document. This text comprises court decisions involving appeals for four different school years. The policy is divided into three parts: the first with lines on overall policy, the second with the definition and plans for implementation of *insyn* (elaborated upon below), and the third on how to apply for secondary education following home education. The first section notes how financing will be handled, that the home does not have a right to money normally allocated per-head for school children, and that the child will be assigned to a school grade. It also notes the increased workload for the contact teacher appointed to the family.

Authorship of the Municipality 7 policy document is unclear although the document is printed on the local education administration letterhead and it was approved by MEC. Several stakeholders from the school have drafted, signed and dated the bottom of the policy for Municipality 14. This policy was also approved by the MEC and the local teacher's union, and reviewed by the leadership group.

The Municipality 7 policy is oriented towards accepting and denying applications, although it also addresses monitoring arrangements and the requirements for the home. The other policy deals more with monitoring ongoing home-education arrangements and the obligations of the municipality and school.

In the two policies, *insyn* is implied (Municipality 7) and defined (Municipality 14). This means that the term itself is either mentioned or explicitly defined, or it is implied since the activities specified correspond to the indicators of *insyn*. In other words, certain actions were qualitatively coded as indicating *insyn*.

Three labels were assigned to the indicators/categories of *insyn*: evaluating and assessing; informing and guiding; and making social contact and interacting. These actions were articulated with respect to handling applications, setting up arrangements and actual monitoring practices.

Policies on evaluating and assessing cover both general evaluation of home education, including assessment methods and instruments such as testing of knowledge and skills. Both municipalities require standardized testing, though Municipality 7 only lists 'all school tests' and only specifies reading tests and a word association test. In contrast, Municipality 14 lists a variety of required 'national and local' assessment tools, including standardized national tests for years 5 and 9. Also included are diagnostic tests (years 2 and 7), reading tests (year 3), reading and writing development assessments (year 7), mathematics testing (year 6), and reading and writing development schemes.

The policy in Municipality 7 covers general evaluation under the heading *helhetsbedömning*, which is a term cited from one preparatory bill supporting the Act. It can be translated as evaluation of the child's whole situation in general terms (Villalba, 2003). In this policy, *helhetsbedömning* should involve, among other things: diagnosis of prior knowledge (before home education); social situation; parent preparedness; conditions for *insyn* and follow-up, the latter of which is to occur two times or more per term; plan for school-home cooperation; and parent plan for instruction in the goals of Lp094. The school carries out evaluations and reports back to MEC.

As for general evaluation of home education and the arrangement, under the specific rubric *insyn*, Municipality 14 also assigns tasks to the school: home visits every term or more and cooperation with the home regarding the 'individual development plan' (IUP).<sup>6</sup>

In different formats, both municipal policies mention providing the home with information on the national and local school governing documents, such as the Lp094. The policy for Municipality 7 contains a couple of lines mentioning the documents and texts it notes as important: 'the Curriculum's overall objectives', 'the goals of the municipal school plan', and 'the goals and guidelines of the relevant local school working plan'.<sup>7</sup>

Consistent with its more detailed policy approach and under the rubric of *insyn*, Municipality 14 lists nine 'steering documents' that 'should be given to the home': Lp094; course syllabi; grading criteria; municipal school plan; local school working plan; current school and class term plan; school timetable; instructional time;<sup>8</sup> and school health services.<sup>9</sup>

Municipality 14 states its intention to 'cooperate with the home' using the IUP described earlier, Municipality 7 states that the responsible school 'should be helpful to parents' in relaying information on the steering documents. As noted above in the first category, the school is also responsible for conducting

evaluations and assessments, which is only feasible with contact and/or interaction with the child. The same is true for Municipality 14 concerning the evaluation and assessment activities, as well as in providing the home with information. Municipality 14 is, however, more explicit and specifies 'home visiting' and cooperation with the home in creating and following the child's IUP.

In addition to home-school contact and interaction and roles assigned to the school, the policies include social activities for the child, inside and outside of school, and for the parents. Municipality 14 elaborates on this topic, under the heading of *insyn*, stating that the school 'invites to social activities' (it is unclear from the text if it is the child alone or with parents) and 'offers access to the school facilities/premises'.

One aspect of the evaluation of the child's general situation (*hellsbedömning*) that Municipality 7 specifies is the child's 'social situation', which was also listed under the first category.

The two municipal policies construct the conditions for the requirement of *insyn* to be satisfied (Government of Sweden, 1985a: 10:4). For example, the municipality employs devices for gaining knowledge of the child and her or his family and learning environment, and in the process the family may have exposure to the school, education authority and the goals of the education system in the country. The two policies, however, differ in their orientation: one is geared towards avoiding particular arrangements while the other is oriented towards creating and maintaining certain kinds of arrangements. The policies thus serve as good illustrations of two main approaches to governance of home education in Sweden.

Most of the contents of Municipality 14's policy are arranged under the term '*insyn*' and these also correspond to the indicators found in Municipality 7's policy. Although we do not know why Municipality 7 does not address *insyn* as a concept and mentions it only once, this difference might be attributed to the general orientation of the policies. For Municipality 7, the policy is directed towards the initial application process, such as exploring the criteria for accepting or denying a home-education request. It proceeds from the preparatory text *selected* to appear on the policy document (the preparatory work is in fact more comprehensive), whereby the evaluation of the child's whole situation is brought into focus. According to the text, this can be interpreted as either forming the basis for judging an instance of home education and the potential arrangement, or the application itself, before an arrangement is established. On the other hand, the Municipality 14 policy is directed at the next stage of the governance process and the evaluation of the arrangement and the child.

Thus it is evident that there are very widely different interpretations of *insyn* and the obligations of municipalities. Some contemporary debates about governance allow us to set these in a wider context.

#### INTERPRETING *INSYN*

Nikolas Rose (1996, 1999) and others have written about the process of ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 1991), which refers to the practices of government (and thus power) realized through a process of ‘problematization, regulation and modeling’. Governmentality is a form of political rationality which can be used to understand the ways in which ‘individualization’ is realized in the Swedish ‘modern welfare state with a sanctions-based control by social threat and a regulated modeling of desirable personal lifestyle behaviors/habits . . .’ (Lindgren, 2005: 369). Rose (1999: 4) contends that ‘governing’ in our times is an exercise of power, but can be differentiated from ‘simple domination’. ‘To govern human beings’, he argues, ‘is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and to utilize it for one’s own objectives’. Burchell (1996) describes this as ‘acting on the actions of individuals’ to ‘shape, guide, correct and modify’ their conduct (p. 19). As such, the concept of governmentality can help explore the ways that government steers and utilizes individual capacities for rational, autonomous self-governance. Personal responsibility, self-care and calculated avoidance of risky behavior (O’Malley, 1996) may be included as strategies.

Rose (1999) contends that we live in societies where control means that we are subject to continuous modulation of ourselves entailed by practices designed to keep us ‘hooked into mainstream society’, such as continuous training, lifelong learning and perpetual assessment (p. 234). Fejes (2006) argues that the current use of assessments and testing is a form of governmentalist action: ‘through the construction of systems of measurement, the subject is made into a calculable self who is open to comparisons and interventions’ (p. 79). Thus through governing and self-governing technologies associated with examination/assessment (as well as guidance), information is collected on the individual and s/he is subject to surveillance, generating knowledge in the service of power. ‘Surveillance becomes ever more pervasive and intrusive yet without appearing to be oppressive’ (Edwards and Usher, cited in Andersson and Fejes, 2005: 597). This is particularly true in modern, decentralized systems of governance having a ‘new order of responsibility’ with a shift from central-hierarchical to horizontal governing (Fejes, 2006: 77 referring to Petersson). Daun (2007) argues along the same lines, adding that the central state remains in power at the center, but power is dispersed and organized in a different ways, with increased monitoring and checking.

Fejes (2006) contends that 'interaction' is linked with 'guidance' as a 'contemporary technique of governing' (p. 77) in the broader context of shifts towards decentralization (and control of the self). He argues that interaction (between education officials and adult learners) is a means for creating knowledge of the learner-interactor (p. 76). One goal of guidance is to lead the learner towards making the 'correct' decisions by showing what choices are available and desirable (Fejes, 2006: 76–7).

Local-level policies are themselves examples of governing practices comprising strategies in respect to policy-writing, policy implementation, monitoring and related 'practices of government', according to Rose (1999: 4). These practices involve 'deliberate attempts to shape conduct in certain ways in relation to certain objectives . . . formally rationalized in programmatic statements, policy documents, pamphlets and speeches . . .' (Rose, 1999: 4). Policies are an expression of a certain kind of 'thought' about governing society (Dean, 1996: 28–9).

The importance of investment in formal education can be read as an injunction to take personal responsibility. The Swedish government's concern with home education draws on ideas about what is seen as children's increased exposure to risk through this practice, for example social isolation, future unemployment, marginalization and brainwashing. There is also the social risk of wrongly educated citizens. *Insyn* is a process for minimizing risk since without the insurance provided by the monitoring of the comprehensive school – 'the pinnacle of the State's bureaucratic intervention in education' (Hunter, 1996: 146) – government needs to construct 'technologies of government' (Rose, 1999: 52) for interventions to protect against risk outside the school.

*Insyn* of home education plays a key role at the local level, and it may be read as 'imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events' (Rose, 1999: 52). *Insyn* can be seen as a central 'technology of government' (Rose, 1999) based on a particular way of thinking. 'Thought becomes technical' in that it 'attaches itself to a technology for its realization'; this technology can be defined as an 'assembly of forms of knowledge with a variety of mechanical devices and an assortment of little techniques oriented to produce certain practical outcomes' (p. 52). *Insyn* is thus a technology underpinning the government of home education, including writing policy and continuous monitoring of the arrangement, activities and the child's development, together with other instrumental technologies 'imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events' (p. 52).

Standardized and diagnostic tests and other ‘school tests’ feature in the home-education policies, tools that can be used for ‘comparisons and interventions’ and measuring the success or failure of home education according to criteria designed for the school context. Although the school may be involved in administering the tests, it is not clear from the policies where or how they will be taken, but that tests are mentioned adds legitimacy to the policy in the eyes of national administrative bodies. The idea behind assessing out-of-school learners is not new, however, as ‘testing’ as a method of individual assessment (that the child should be tested before a ‘suitable authority’) was specifically mentioned in education legislation regulating home education between 1842 and 1962 (Ministry of Education, 1980). In today’s legislation, however, there is a wide selection of authorized devices for governing, and according to the devolved decision-making structure, it is left to the local level to decide how *insyn* will be satisfied and which tools to employ.

The two municipalities do emphasize evaluation and assessment, which is hardly surprising since 10:4 of the Act stipulates that ‘during the validity period, the results of home education should be assessed’. As we have seen, evaluation and assessment may cover evaluation of the child’s total situation going into an arrangement or prior to it; the process of being home educated and/or the end of a period looking back. The summative evaluations that may be conducted at the end of the compulsory period for children who would like to enter upper secondary school, according to the clause on alternative assessment of student qualifications (Upper Secondary School Ordinance, 1992: 394, Chapter 6:3), serve as a device for linking the child into the system of ‘perpetual assessment’.

Evaluating home-education applications may serve a selection function. In one municipality, for example, parent ability is treated as an item of importance in judging the child’s learning situation, along with a parent teaching plan, a plan for school–home cooperation, the prior knowledge and the social situation of the child. These items are presented as forward-looking in that they can be regarded as criteria for accepting or denying an application, which can be a method of screening out many applications since the requirements from the municipality in these cases are not usually clear to parents in advance, and thus the MEC maintains leveraging power. In this respect, prior evaluation may be a means for averting certain ‘undesired events’.

Fejes describes the ‘individual study plan’ (Fejes, 2006: 76–7) used in adult education as the culmination of a ‘dialogue of pedagogy’ between student and advisor. The IUP, mentioned in the one home-education policy, is a relatively unstandardized tool since it is tailored to the individual child and jointly produced through interaction among actors, though the learning and development goals are normally set in relation to the national steering

instruments, whereby choice-making is framed. The IUP is also normally used as a tool for measuring student ability, capacity and development against established norms and/or her or his own learning goals. This facilitates self-evaluation opportunities using 'care of the self' techniques in constructing the autonomous individual who can compare her or himself with others. One change for school personnel working with home-educating families is that parents and/or children may play an enhanced role in guidance offered through the IUP compared with at school, potentially shifting the frame for choice-making and the choices themselves.

Informing and guiding the home were located as common policy items under *insyn*, though it is more difficult to understand how providing the home with information on steering instruments and school operations implies gaining insight on home-education activities. It may be a question of influence. One theoretical argument is that the 'systems of reasoning' imparted in these communications may demonstrate a power relationship where the identities of the parent, child, school and community are constructed in a particular way (Pedroni, 2006: 4). In the case of Sweden, according to the Lp094, parents and schools are to develop 'structures for co-operation between the school and the home' in which 'parents receive information on the school's goals, working methods and the range of choice that exists' (2.8). The guidance aspect that this reflects may shed light on the constructive role informing plays in governing home education, and this might be explored in further studies. Information-giving may also emphasize the other side of *insyn* whereby parents may become more familiar with the system in the name of which the authorities perform their duties.

Home visiting is a good example of a governance tool that lies at the intersection of the three *insyn* technologies. It is mentioned in one of the policies and by the interviewees as a means for achieving *insyn* and as a starting point for home-education arrangements or, as in the case of Municipality 7, for initiating the process of bringing the child back to the security of the school. It represents a firsthand evaluation method and also serves as a technology for making social contact, interacting and 'cooperating' with people at home. While in some countries or localities home visiting is de-emphasized or even overruled in court (Cooper and Sureau, 2007), in Sweden, satisfying *insyn* is associated with school and authority personnel visiting children's homes.

Parents whose children attend school, in contrast to home-educating families, do not normally need to open their homes and lives to the school and administrative authority to such an extent; the schoolchild is subject to surveillance and social disciplining within the school as a space where 'governmental thought has penetrated' (Rose, 1999: 35). The school is a 'purpose-built pedagogical institution' through its architectural design (Hunter, 1996),



whereas the home is a private zone and therefore the rules for access and observation may continually be negotiated.

It is evident that *insyn* technology is being utilized by local government in diverse ways. Policy can be directed towards averting undesirable events and consequences, by constructing certain home-education applications and arrangements as unauthorized, such as those without an appropriate 'teaching plan'. This can be construed as a way to circumvent perceived risks entailed in approving certain arrangements. *Insyn* can also be used in continuous monitoring, whether to simply observe or 'look into' the home through assessment, home visits and so on, or to influence, steer and guide in the hopes of producing certain 'desired effects', such as the opening up of the home and the establishment of good contact in connection with the fulfillment of the *insyn* requirement. *Insyn* is thus a key element in a set of 'technologies of government' which seek to regulate home education, shaping and modifying it in ways that demonstrate a concern for parents' rights as well as the obligations of the modern Swedish welfare state.

#### NOTES

1. Citations refer to the Act in English, unless indicated otherwise.
2. Children can start at age 6, or even 8 if parents request, and for children with learning disabilities, the ages vary. The age of completion of compulsory education can also vary (Education Act, Chapter 3).
3. See the NAE website at <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/165/a/8906> for a list of courses and contents of the syllabi, grading criteria and knowledge-goals for children completing their 5th and 9th years of schooling, in addition to grading criteria.
4. In these interview quotations, my questions or probes are in capitals.
5. This plan is mentioned in the Basic School Ordinance (Government of Sweden, 1994a: 1194). It is used when a student needs immediate support regarding a problem at school, and includes information on what the student's needs are, how they should be met, and how to follow-up and evaluate the outcomes (5:1 paragraph 3).
6. Details on the regular individual development talk among school, parents and pupil are included in the Basic School Ordinance, along with the corresponding IUP. This plan is defined by the NAE as a goal-oriented 'active tool in the pupil's learning process and should begin from her or his abilities, interests and strengths'. The IUP is to be co-constructed with pupil, parents and teachers. It should refer to the learning and development goals found in the Lp094 and the course syllabi (translated by author; NAE, 2009b).
7. The first plan is drawn up by the municipality, and deals with resource planning, school organization and premises, etc., and how national goals will

be achieved and evaluated. The second type, the individual school working plan, is the responsibility of the School Head. It is a living document that address how school-level activities are organized, and how national and municipal goals (as outlined in the first plan) will be fulfilled (NAE, n.d.).

8. The number of instructional hours is regulated in the Education Act (Chapter 4:3a and attachment 3) and the Basic School Ordinance (1994: 1194). In addition to total instructional hours per subject and area, it includes the guaranteed instructional time per child (Chapter 2:2–5).
9. School health is another area regulated by the Act (Chapter 14) and referred to in some municipal home-education policy texts.

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