

Chronicle

Inger Enkvist: Portugal shows the way to learning



Photo: Malin Hoelstad

Not many people have heard of it, but Portugal has a lot to learn Sweden when it comes to better teaching.

Inger Enkvist

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This is a text from SvD Ledare. The editorial board is party politically independent with the term unbound moderately.

Fon people in Sweden have heard of Portugal between 2011 and 2015 conducted a successful shake-up of its educational system. Portugal was literally literate, and it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the entire Portuguese population was literate. Portugal had then received a strong warning of the weak results in the TIMMS comparison in mathematics and physics at the end of the 1990s, and changes had begun such as the introduction of a final exam after the elementary school.

A civilian government under Pedro Passos Coelho took office in 2011, while there was a difficult economic crisis. Portugal was even put under guardianship by the EU. The raising of school results was

therefore interesting enough, at the same time as cuts.

Nuno Crato, the mathematician, was appointed Minister of Education, who made a start. He looked over the curricula to make them more demanding and better coordinated, that is, more effective. They would be so clear that students, teachers, textbook authors and parents could clearly see what was to be learned. He extended the class in mathematics and Portuguese, but also in history, geography, natural sciences and English at the expense of subjects with vague subject content. He introduced national examinations every two years to be able to follow the students' progress as well as an opportunity to group the pupils temporarily by skill and offered extra tuition after school hours for weak pupils. He introduced the opportunity to choose a vocational course during the secondary school.

The results rose for both weaker and stronger students. An acknowledgment of the efforts already came in PISA 2015, where Portugal for the first time ever reached above the OECD average. Portugal's average score was 501 as well as Poland. Portugal had higher scores than Norway and the US, not to mention Sweden, the Czech Republic and Spain, all of which were just on the OECD's average score of 493.

In addition, Portugal participated in TIMSS 2015 for the fourth and eighth grade, and Portugal's fourth-graders were in mathematics before Finland and Sweden. The good result already in the fourth grade showed that it was the reform that provided the improvements. This Portuguese success is a good news for all countries. It shows that it is possible to improve learning outcomes in a short time, if you just want to.

At the 2015 election, the bourgeois government party became the largest with 38 percent of the votes, but at the same time, all other parties joined together in a red-green coalition, which now governs with Antonio Costa as prime minister. The first thing the new government did was to abolish the middle school tests. The new education minister Tiago Brandão Rodrigues then decided that the teachers only needed to apply 75 percent of the curriculum and that the rest of the time could be used for projects that would be happy to be interdisciplinary. It was not said which 75 percent would be compulsory. The Minister called the change a "flexibility".

Nuno Crato is now receiving invitations from other countries who want to know how to do it to pull up educational results. One of his experiences is that the biggest problem is not the teachers or the students but the politicians.

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