



Lifelong Learning for All!

Katarina Florin ^{1*}, Elisabet Hedlund ¹, Erika Åkerblom ¹

¹University of Gävle, Faculty of Education and Business Studies, Department of Educational Theory, SWEDEN

*Corresponding Author: katarina.florin@hig.se

Citation: Florin, K., Hedlund, E., & Åkerblom, E. (2020). Lifelong Learning for All!. *Mediterranean Journal of Social & Behavioral Research*, 4(2), 35-39. <https://doi.org/10.30935/mjosbr/9599>

Note: This article was presented in ICOINE 2014 : 3rd International Conference on Interdisciplinary Research in Education, 29-31 October 2014, Milano, Italy.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a story about lifelong learning in a Swedish context. The need for lifelong learning is a recurring issue in the political discussions and media reporting. According to Delors, J. (1996), lifelong learning is a prerequisite for modern society. A common way to discuss lifelong learning is to make a difference between formal, informal and non-formal learning. According to Dunn, E. (2003), non-formal learning is about skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that people acquire in their daily lives. We on the other hand believe that all kinds of learning always include the above concepts and that the discussion of lifelong learning is about creating certain subject. Our aim is to visualize desirable subjects through discourse analyze (Foucault, M. 1980). The empirical material consists of syllabus for a project at the University of Gävle in which individuals with intellectual disabilities are offered education at post-secondary level.

Keywords: construction of subjects, lifelong learning, intellectual disabilities, discourse

Received: 09 Mar. 2020 ♦ Revised: 30 Jun. 2020 ♦ Accepted: 21 Jul. 2020

INTRODUCTION

The need for lifelong learning is a recurring theme in political discussions and media reporting and is portrayed as something that we do throughout our entire lives. A common way of discussing lifelong learning is to differentiate between formal, informal and non-formal learning (Dunn, E. 2003). According to Dunn, non-formal learning is about the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that people acquire in their daily lives. On the other hand, we believe that learning in general always includes the above concepts and that the discussion about lifelong learning is to do with creating certain subjects (Tuschling, A. & Engemann, C. 2006; Simons, M. & Masschelein, J. 2006; Lemke, T. 2001). Stories about lifelong learning involve an increased individual responsibility. A report from the Department of Education (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2001) revolves around a responsibility shift from the state to the market, civil society and the individual. Despite this, the discussion is about the state's obligation to those who are unable to succeed. One of the conclusions is that the state has to take responsibility and create conditions for certain groups (e.g., the disabled, people with dyslexia and immigrants with insufficient knowledge of the Swedish language) in order to make lifelong learning a reality for all (a.a.). An equal education where everyone is given a good foundation for future learning is described as important, and an assumption is that groups that are not included in lifelong learning

through higher education are at risk, or, to be more precise, constitute a risk. In this paper our starting point is the notion that higher education is a way to lifelong learning. In this context, our curiosity is directed towards the possible constructions of subjects in a project created exclusively for a certain group of citizens that does not normally have access to higher education. By revealing the construction of the subjects who do not have access to higher education it is also possible to visualize the lifelong learner.

Education is a way of modernizing society (Lindblad, S. & Popkewitz, T. 2000). In this sense, education can be understood as a way of strengthening the nation and producing desirable citizens (Kowalczyk, J. 2006; Kiwinen, O. & Rinne, R. 1998). In the Bill 2001/02: 15, the ambition is that at least 50 % of all citizens will have entered higher education before the age of 25. Even though a lot of changes have taken place since the Bill was introduced, the ambition is still as many as possible, but is not necessarily formulated in the same way. A common notion is that the more educated people are the better their health will be, the longer their life the better their income etc., although there is little evidence to support these assumptions. The Public Health Agency (Folkhälsomyndigheten) in Sweden writes as follow:

There are relatively few published studies that have verified whether it is education itself or other mechanisms that explain differences in health. The research available shows that education provides the individual with a number of societal

benefits in various fields, which in turn can be expected to give better health. (Folkhälsomyndigheten.se)

According to the ideas that prevail, education provides the individual with a number of social benefits and promotes and sustains healthy lifestyles and positive choices (Feinstein, L., Sabates, R., Anderson M.T., Sorhaindo, A., & Hammond, C. 2006). Education is seen as a way of nurturing human development, relationships and community well-being (a.a.). Education can be seen as a hub around which the individual and the nation's abilities rotate (Hedlund, E. 2011). In Scandinavia the education system is based on the notion that the more educated citizens are the more the nation will benefit (Kiwinen, O. & Rinne, R. 1998). In the Maastricht Communiqué of December 2004 the decision was made to introduce a Europass qualification portfolio - a collection of European qualification documents - containing principles for the validation of professional training, non-formal and informal learning and a resolution on lifelong guidance (Bill 2004/05:162). In line with the Communiqué, Dunn, E. (2000), discusses learning from multiple perspectives and identifies a difference between formal, informal and non-formal learning. As non-formal learning includes the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that people need in their daily lives, the implication is that formal education is not necessarily about behaviour, attitudes and so on. However, Edwards, R. and Nicoll, K. (2004) and Popkewitz, T. (1998) argue that formal education does not only lead to professional skills, is also create a mentality. If this is the case, why make a difference between formal and non-formal learning? We think that this dichotomization is a technology for control in a discourse where learning is in focus. In the concept of lifelong learning a shift occurs from education where the focus largely depends on the individual's capacity, motivation and responsibility to learn (Askling, B. & Foss Fridlitzius, R. 2000). Instead of dealing with intentioned and planned learning, future research will have to visualize learning subjectivities as they emerge in contemporary contexts (Fejes, A. & Salling Olesen, H., 2010). The discussion thus extends beyond the formal education system that can be controlled through curriculum and other governing tools to incorporate ways of governing and creating certain mentality. Tuschling, A. and Engemann, C. (2006) argue that lifelong learning plays a central role in modern society as a technique for subjectivation, in that it embraces the majority of citizens. Lifelong learning is a liberal technology for governing in the sense that the will to learn is contracted as a mentality to learn throughout our entire lifetime, or else risk being marginalized (Fejes, A. 2006). Only certain groups are included in narratives about lifelong learning, while some citizens are constructed as being unable to participate in it. Fejes found that the language used is an expression of power in a discourse where "all" is defined as certain groups.¹ For example, "all" has been redefined to mean not "all" in its most inclusive sense. In other words, "all" only refers to certain groups (a.a.), namely those that are considered capable of participating in lifelong learning. Groups that are constructed as incapable of personal responsibility, lack of motivation and do not meet the conditions enshrined in the lifelong learning concept, are excluded. The idea of a need for academic studies for the vast majority can be found in a post-secondary school that enables pupils to proceed to academic studies offering professional specialization and study-oriented programmes. One group that is not offered that opportunity are pupils with intellectual disabilities. This

group is offered a post-secondary education that does not give them any access at all to academic studies. In this group, which is constructed as being homogeneous, we find a variety of individuals, all of whom are perceived to be unable to cope with and assimilate academic studies.

At the University of Gävle a few selected students have been given the opportunity to take part in a project in which individuals with intellectual disabilities are offered academic studies. The project is interesting because it addresses the problem of individuals who are perceived to have a lack of capacity to adequately participate in lifelong and life-wide learning through academic studies. The project is also interesting from another perspective, namely the purpose of the education. These particular students will study a two-year programme during three years with a view to then entering the labour market as health-informers for people with intellectual disabilities. The programme is intended as an opening to life-wide and lifelong learning for those who are excluded from the previously referred to as "all". Access to higher education creates confidence in the ability to learn amongst those who are allowed to participate. Not only does this kind of formal education lead to professional skills, it also creates a certain mentality, including the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that people are considered to need in their daily lives. Based on this, it is interesting to visualize the construction of the desirable subject in an interim report of and syllabus for the above mentioned project at the University of Gävle. By using governmentality perspective on power and subjectivity, our aim is to visualize the possible constructions of subjects (Foucault, M. 2003, 2004; Rose, N. 1999). The empirical material thus consists of syllabus and an interim report from a project at the University of Gävle exclusively designed for a specific group of individuals considered to have a lack of capacity.

METHOD

Lifelong learning is stated as a prerequisite for the modern society (Delors, in UNESCO, 1996). Arguments that legitimate lifelong learning concern the individual's quality of life and the wealth, health and prosperity of society. These arguments are necessary if the state is to intervene in people's lives. Different interests both legitimize and make different kinds of measures possible to ensure that the interventions are of interest for individuals and collective (Andersson, R. 2002). Policy rationality and legitimacy is based on the assumption that knowledge based interventions are the proper way to design policy for individuals and society (Lemke, T. 2001). For example, Groot, W. and Maassen van den Brink, H. (2006) argue that there is a correlation between level of education and health status, i.e. higher education creates opportunities to manage, address and make the right choices. The question is not whether this knowledge is true or not, but rather why it is interesting and what the effects of it might be. This kind of knowledge and research legitimizes inventions to stimulate continuing education. From a discourse analysis perspective, knowledge can never be just knowledge, but is always a political act. In that act, knowledge and knowledge production are productive activities that create expectations and possibilities for us to create ourselves as subjects. Knowledge creates realities and demonstrates what people are or should be, i.e., what is normal and not normal (Hedlund, E. 2011). In other words, knowledge contributes to the control and shaping of the

¹ See also Lindblad, S & Popkewitz, T. (2000)

subjects of which it speaks. The constructions are not given by any sort of natural order; it is included in the political rationality and practices that are both created in and create discourses (Hultqvist, K. & Peterson, K. 1995). Discourses create the conditions for and are dependent on our way of talking about special problems, events and needs at a certain time and in a certain context (Foucault, M. 2004; Foucault, M 1993; Foucault, M 2006). Pictures of and stories on lifelong learning contain technologies and create subjects. By using the above aspects on syllabus and an interim report from the project, we intend to visualize the construction of desirable subjects. As indicated in the introduction, the empirical material consists of an interim report and twelve syllabus from the Health-informer project at the University of Gävle.

RESULTS

In the interim report of the Health-informer project, the ambition is described as: "Opportunities for lifelong learning for individuals with intellectual disabilities and possibilities to enter higher education" (Högskolan i Gävle 2012). In this discourse, lifelong learning is enshrined in higher education. There is a notion that this type of student has to be tested in order to ensure that they can cope with and assimilate the education. The admission criteria are described as the lowest acceptable level in the following areas: reading ability, motivation and the ability to communicate. After a test of their reading skills the students also have to pass a physical test. In this test the student has to run 2,000 metres in 13 minutes or less at a constant speed. The test is conducted using a pacesetter and the student is only allowed to lose 30 metres within the setting. Students who pass the reading and physical tests then move on to a personal interview with a focus on motivation and communication skills. This means that access to the project is conditioned in a way that is not frequently used in higher education in general. This group is initially constructed as something else, and this otherness emerges in the documents in several ways. The subject is described by means of his or her shortcomings, such as lack of working memory, reading comprehension, abstract thinking, study skills, and the inability to express theoretical issues in writing, read large amounts of text and recapitulate these, undertake written examinations, define what is important in a text and so on. The construction of these shortcomings creates an image of a different and challenging teaching situation. The challenge creates possibilities to emphasize a need for special didactics, expertise and knowledge from many fields, a network of shareholders, specific solutions and so on. For example, "*Teachers felt inadequate or found teaching to be at a too low level, or a combination of both*" (Högskolan i Gävle 2012). The dominant discourse of differentness enables teachers to articulate and highlight problems and relate them to this particular group. The project itself is based on something that is different, an assumption of "the others" manufactured by a lack of necessary skills. The tests in themselves are a description of these subjects' expected shortcomings, which at the same time creates an image of a desirable student. The text also tells us about how difficult it is for teachers to work with "the others" and describes a feeling of inadequacy, teaching at too low a level, the need to visualize the text content and the students' need to be told what to focus on in the literature. On the whole it seems as teachers have to learn to work with "the other". In this case "the other" requires that special teaching materials and techniques are developed. The construction of "the other" makes it possible for teachers to claim teaching and examination as problematic.

Reading comprehension and expressing themselves in writing are normally weak areas for people with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, they also have a very limited ability to learn large amounts of text and to recapitulate them [...] One way of taking account of the disability would be to implement portfolio examination and to divide and collect the examination material over time (Högskolan i Gävle, 2012).

In addition to the teaching, the examination form is constructed as something different, based on the manufacture of the students' shortcoming. In short, access to the project is conditional, because access requires motivation, perseverance and discipline in order to "keep pace". Even though the students have passed the tests and are accepted onto the project, the initial construction of otherness remains, which creates an opportunity to talk about the difficulties and link these to the students.

So, what kind of desirable subjects does the project aim to create? Three distinct themes can be identified: food intake, physical activity and learning processes. Coherently for these three are control and registration, consciousness and reflection on their own and others' behaviour and actions. The subject will be trained to keep track of the self and actions regarding nutrition, physical activity and learning processes. A desirable subject is one who is responsible and capable of controlling her or his own life. The following is a selection of some of the goals:

After completing the course students will be able to:

- plan and prepare meals using the plate model
- apply a food registration programme using their own food diaries
- describe the meal-order importance for hunger and satiety.
- evaluate and discuss their own learning from an individual and a societal perspective.
- describe learning processes that promote positive living habits change
- describe the various forms of health problems associated with physical inactivity (syllabus Högskolan i Gävle, 2012).

The overall aim is that the student will be able to make the right choices based on the knowledge of what is manufactured as good or bad. It is about diet and eating habits for health and well-being, health problems associated with physical inactivity and the importance of regular eating habits. In the project the students are expected to become aware of their own behaviour regarding diet, and register this in a diary and take into account the knowledge that exists regarding hunger and satiety. They are also expected to be able to evaluate and discuss their own learning from an individual and a societal perspective. In the display of positive and risky lifestyles, a picture of the desirable attitudes and behaviour that students should adopt in their daily lives emerges. Awareness of one's own habits creates an image of accountability, and that image demands a certain lifestyle. This means an individual responsibility for behaviour and choices, where the wrong choices appear as a risk to society and the individual. This responsibility is a motivating factor and a way of becoming someone to count on, i.e. accountability. The project thus creates a certain type of mentality based on a narrative of responsibility for behaviour, health, and so on.

The described future profession is to work as health promoters for people with intellectual disabilities, i.e. "like minded" persons. A

number of goals are included in the syllabus, where the students are expected to describe and explain the importance of aspects like physical activity, eating properly and communicating processes that promote positive living habits. They are also trained in activities specifically aimed at people with intellectual disabilities. There is a notion that these students cannot communicate with language and words like other people, and that instead communication is mediated through practical actions and becoming some kind of role model. The communication is about reaching the students; the image is that a lot of practical elements need to be included because "they" are considered to have lack understanding of the written word. Next, they must be trained to be good examples and to adopt certain behaviour and attitudes. In sum, the project's design is based on a number of subject constructions. These are the incomplete subject: there are a number of shortcomings that students admitted to the program are provided with, the normal subject the notion of shortcomings tells us about how it normally should be; the desirable subject who has self-control and discipline, a subject who watches over herself and her own behaviour and attitudes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper the starting point is the notion that higher education is a way of providing access to lifelong learning in a proper manner. Our curiosity is directed towards possible constructions of subjects in a project created exclusively for a certain group of citizens that does not normally have access to higher education. By revealing the construction of these subjects we have also visualized the desirable subject, i.e. the lifelong learner. We have shown that the dichotomization of formal, non-formal and informal learning is not relevant, because attitudes and behaviour are a major part of the formal education in this project. An assumption is that this is not exclusive for this particular project, but can be applied to most kind of formal education. The lifelong learner is a subject with self-control and discipline; a subject who watches over her or his own behaviour and attitudes as an answer to what the society has to face in the future. The responsibility lies on the subject's accountability, and even though the state provides the education and training opportunities, the project is a joint one based on the subjects' motivation and responsibility. In today's society citizens who follow the norm (the sweeping "all") are offered opportunities for lifelong learning through higher education, while others are excluded. We have studied a project in which citizens who normally do not have access to lifelong learning through higher education have been given this very opportunity. In the study we have seen that already during the initial testing these students are constructed as "the others"; an otherness that pervades the teaching methods, assessment methods and expectations. Despite this, we think that we can discern an ambition to provide these students with skills that make them capable of choosing to live according to the standards that are produced as true knowledge. This knowledge creates expectations and possibilities for students to create themselves as certain desirable subjects. The knowledge creates realities and demonstrates to the students who they are or should be and what is desirable and not desirable. In other words, knowledge contributes to controlling and shaping the subjects on which it speaks. Based on the above, it would be interesting to visualize subject constructions in the curricula and syllabus used in regular education program in higher education.

REFERENCES

- Andersson, R. (2002). *Kriminalpolitikens väsen*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet Kriminologiska Institutionen Avhandlingsserie Nr 10.
- Asking, B. & Foss-Fridlitzius, R. (2000). Lifelong learning and higher education: The Swedish case. *European Journal of Education*, 35(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-3435.00025>
- Dunn, E. (2003). Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life, The Lifelong learning Strategy for Scotland: Summary (p. 3) The Scottish Government, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47032/0028820.pdf>
- Edwards, R. & Nicoll, K. (2004). Mobilizing workplaces: actors, discipline and governmentality. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2), 159-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/158037042000225191>
- Feinstein, L., Sabates, R., Anderson M.T., Sorhaindo, A. & Hammond, C. (2006). What are the effects of education on health? <https://www1.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/37425753.pdf>
- Fejes, A. (2006) The Planetspeak Discourse of Lifelong Learning in Sweden: What is an Educable Adult? *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(6), 697-716. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930600969266>
- Fejes, A. & Salling Olesen, H. (2010) Envisioning future research on the education and learning of adults. *European journal for research on the education and learning of adults*, 1(1-2), 7-16. <https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.relae1>
- Folkhälsomyndigheten. (2012). <http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/amnesomraden/livsvillkor-och-levnadsvanor/folkhalsans-utveckling-malomraden/ekonomiska-och-sociala-forutsattningar/utbildningsniva/> 2014-09-09 (The Public Health Agency).
- Foucault, M. (2003). Regementalitet i Fronesis (2003) *Lag och ordning* 14-15 Göteborg: Tidskrift föreningen Fronesis
- Foucault, M. (2004, 1976). *Sexualitetens historia band 1 Viljan att veta*. Translation: Gröndahl, B. Göteborg: Daidalos, Originals title: *Histoire de la sexualité La volonté de savoir*
- Foucault, M. (2006). Biopolitikens födelse i Wennerhag, M & Unsgaard (red.) (2006) *Fronesis Liberalism 22 – 23* Göteborg: Tidskrift föreningen Fronesis
- Groot, W. & Maassen van den Brink, H. (2006). What does education do to our health? In *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement*. Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium. OECD
- Hultqvist, K. & Petersson, K. (red.) (1995). *Nutidshistoria: några inledande utgångspunkter I Foucault Namnet på en modern vetenskaplig och filosofisk problematik*. Stockholm: HLS Förlag
- Halvtidsrapport. (2012). *Hälsoinspiratörsprojektet*: Högskolan i Gävle (Interims report)
- Kivinen, O. & Rinne, R. (1998). State, Governmentality and Education the Nordic experience. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 19(1), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569980190103>
- Kowalczyk, J. (2006). Immigrants as "Outlaw Ontologies": Italian Educations policy and the non – Italian student. In Popkewitz, T & Petersson, K & Olsson, U & Kowalczyk, J. (red.) (2006). *The future is not what it appears to be: pedagogy, genealogy and political epistemology: In Honour and in Memory of Kenneth Hultqvist* Stockholm: HLS Förlag

- Lemke, T. (2001). 'The birth of bio politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal Governmentality. *Economy and Society*, 30(2), 190–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140120042271>
- Lindblad, S. & Popkewitz, T. (2000). *Public discourses on education governance and social integration and exclusion: analyses of policy text in European contexts*. Uppsala. Department of Education Uppsala University, Uppsala Reports on Education 36
- Popkewitz, T. (1998). *Struggling for the soul: the politics of schooling and the construction of the teacher* New York: Teachers Collage, Columbia University
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of Freedom Reframing political thought* Cambridge: University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511488856>
- Regeringens Proposition 2001/02:15 *Den öppna högskolan*. Stockholm.
- Simons, M. & Masschelein, J. (2006). The learning Society and Governmentality: An introduction. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38(4), 417-430. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2006.00202.x>
- Högskolan i Gävle. (2012). Syllabus 1-12 Högskolan i Gävle akademien för hälsa och arbetsliv: Högskolan i Gävle.
- Tuschling, A. & Engemann, C. (2006). From Education to Lifelong Learning: The emerging regime of learning in the European Union. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38(4), 451-469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2006.00204.x>
- Utbildningsdepartementet. (2001). *Debatten om det livslånga lärandet: den nationella konsultationen om EU-kommissionens memorandum om livslångt lärande*. Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet.
- UNESCO. (1996). *Learning: the Treasure Within*. UNESCO: Paris.

