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Marketisation of adult education: principals as business leaders, standardised teachers and responsibilised students

Andreas Fejes*, Caroline Runesdotter**, Gun-Britt Wärvik**

*Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning, Linköping University, Sweden
**Department of Education and Special Education, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

e-mail: andreas.fejes@liu.se

Full reference:

Abstract
The marketization of education is a global phenomenon and has attracted increased interest during the last three decades, not least in terms of research on school choice and its consequences. However, while much research has been conducted on the marketization of schooling, less attention has been directed at adult education. In this paper, focus is directed at institutional logics and institutional responses to the process of marketization of adult education. More specifically, we focus on how a procurement system, implemented in order to create competition and to increase quality in adult education, influences how students construe themselves, as well as the way principals and teachers work. Our results indicate that teachers emerge as the main source of resistance towards an institutional logic emerging in the wake of marketization, while principals and students to a large extent conform to the emerging institutional demands.

Keywords: Marketization, Adult Education, Institutional theory, Teachers, Principals, Students

Introduction
The marketization of education is a global phenomenon (Ball, 2007; Ball & Yodell, 2008; Burch, 2009) and has attracted increased interest during the last three decades, not least in terms of research on school choice and its consequences (van Zanten & Kosunen, 2013; Dumay & Dupriez, 2014). Sweden stands out as a particularly interesting case due to its historical social democratic heritage in combination with having one of the most marketized education systems in the world. With the introduction of so-called independent schools¹ and a voucher system in compulsory and upper secondary school in 1991, and free school choice, a quasi-market emerged. Furthermore, it became possible for private firms, such as large equity companies, to own schools and make profits through the voucher system (cf. Lundahl, Arreman, Holm & Lundström, 2014). Since the early 1990s, the number of students enrolled in independent schools has increased, and today 26% of all students in upper secondary school are enrolled in an independent school (SNAE, 2015). In the case of adult education, we can see a similar development. However, instead of independent schools and a voucher system, the municipalities buy education from public (municipal) or private providers through

¹ Independent schools are non-public in terms of ownership and they must be accepted as such through an application to and evaluation by the national agency of education. If accepted to launch a school in a municipality, they are then allocated a voucher, which is publically funded, for each student they recruit.
a procurement system, on short-term contracts. Thus, the market for provision of adult education is organized differently. Even in adult education the number of students enrolled with non-public providers is increasing, from 14.7% in 1997 to 45.7% in 2014 (SNAE, 2015).

Research on the marketization of education in Sweden has to a large extent focused on external marketization, i.e. the free school choice and how such a system contributes to increased social and cultural segregation (Bunar, 2010; Trumberg, 2013) and how the free school choice has consequences for students’ knowledge results (Östh, Andersson & Malmberg, 2013), and how it contributes to grade inflation (Vlachos, 2010; Wikström & Wikström, 2005). During the last few years, researchers have started to pay attention to the consequences of marketization on the inner lives of schools (Lundahl, Arreman, Holm & Lundström, 2013, 2014) and have thereby identified how the free school choice and competition introduce new work conditions for principals and teachers, as well as work tasks such as marketing activities (Fredriksson, 2009; Holm & Lundström, 2013; Lundström & Holm, 2011). Furthermore, competition positions students as customers, and students know that they can choose another school if they are not satisfied with the teachers, grades or any other aspect of their current school. Thus, new power relations emerge between students and teachers (cf. Holm, 2013, Lundahl et al., 2014).

The above-mentioned research provides important knowledge about the marketization of education in Sweden, focusing on the impact of the free school choice and the voucher system on the institutions, as well as on the actors within such institutions. However, we still need more knowledge about the consequences of marketization within an important and quite extensive part of the Swedish education system, namely municipal adult education (MAE) where adults go to complete their courses from compulsory and upper secondary school. Since MAE is governed through a procurement process, rather than through the voucher system and the free school choice, we can expect somewhat different institutional responses to the processes of marketization.

Those who have touched upon the consequences of marketization in MAE have been interested in the procurement process in a specific city (see Beach & Carlson, 2004; Beach, 2004), the implementation of a quality assurance system in a specific educational company (Wärvik, 2013), or the changing roles of principals in a market based system (Runesdotter, 2011; Bjursell, 2016). Likewise, issues of the marketization of adult education are not well researched internationally. Some studies point to how marketization contributes to a contractual arrangement focused on what is measurable rather than on what is efficient in terms of process-related activities (Rees, Bartlett & Watts, 1999), and how marketization contributes to a supply of courses deemed profitable by providers (such as leisure-related courses), marginalising possibilities for critical and emancipatory learning (Daley & Fisher, 2000; Grummell, 2007; Liu, 2009).

In this article, our focus is directed at institutional responses to the process of marketization of adult education. More specifically, we focus on how a procurement system, implemented in

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2 There is much written on the marketization of higher education (e.g. Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2010; Schutze Alvarez Mendiola & Conrad, 2002), but not so much on adult education. However, identifying such literature on adult education is complex as adult education is shaped very differently in different countries, with different labels, names, different institutional systems, different funding systems etc. At the same time, adult education is well developed in some countries, while it is non-existent in others.
order to create competition and to increase quality in adult education, influences how students construe themselves, as well as the way principals and teachers work. Thus, we will be able to problematise how marketization influences the way adult education is organized and operates in Sweden today.

Our research approach
In order to cover a broad range of actors within adult education, we draw on three separate research projects in our analysis. In the first project (Sandberg, Fejes, Dahlstedt & Olson, 2016) the interest was in analysing how students in MAE identified and spoke about citizenship activities within, as well as beyond, adult education. Altogether, 37 students and four teachers within MAE in one of the major cities in Sweden were interviewed. Observations of teaching practices provided a smaller part of the data collected. Interview transcripts consisted of 600 pages. In the interviews, students spoke much about why they had entered adult education, and what their visions for the future were. Furthermore, both students and teachers spoke about their experience and views of what was happening within adult education in terms of teaching practice, relations between students and students, as well as relations between students and teachers.

In the second project, (Runesdotter, 2010, 2011), the focus was on the changes that took place in folk high schools, the first educational institution exclusively for adults in Sweden (created in the mid-1800s), when new forms of public governance were introduced, simultaneously with considerably reduced public funding. One implication of increased dependence on external income, partly through a procurement system, was the introduction of new forms of management, which affected the relations between the principal and the staff. One aim of this project was to understand how the institutionalised logic within folk high schools affected the response to the demands when the schools had to compete in a market. In the project, principals, teachers, administrative staff and members of school boards at eight folk high schools were interviewed. Part of the project was also interviews with representatives from the trade union organizing the majority of the high school teachers, as well as principals, altogether 34 interviews. The selection of interviewees was intended to obtain the greatest possible variety among folk high schools regarding how to perceive and handle the changed conditions for running the schools.

In the third project (Wärvik, 2013), the focus was on analysing the implementation of a standardised scheme for delivery of education and quality assurance by one of the major providers of adult education in Sweden, and on the teachers’ responses to the scheme. Thirty adult education teachers, most of them vocational education teachers, were interviewed individually or in smaller groups (2-3 teachers). The empirical data was also obtained from shadowing teachers’ work for 12 working days, interviews with six people in managerial positions, and participation in implementation and development meetings. In interviews and observations a specific interest was directed at the formation of teaching activities in connection with the implementation of the scheme, and subsequent tensions in teachers’ work. The study also concerned the teachers’ strategies to handle these tensions.

Common to the three projects analysed is how new imperatives of the market affect adult education. The three projects represent different organizational layers: the students that conform to the educational practice laid out for them, the principals in tension between expectations from the board and the teachers, and the teachers who strive to preserve an educational practice controlled by themselves. The projects also represent different kinds of educational contexts: MAE students in need of education to get a job or eligibility to apply for
further education, folk high schools that turned into providers of MAE when the state subsidies were reduced, and finally, the big educational company striving to secure market shares.

The empirical data from the three studies has for this article been analysed by drawing on institutional theory. Institutional theory directs our attention to the persistency of a historically evolved and coherent system of collective rules, ways of acting, and taken for granted norms of behaviour, which we here refer to as institutional logic, but also to change (Freidson, 2001; Scott, Ruef, Mendel & Caronna, 2000). Freidson (2001) identifies three institutional logics as ideal types that form and set boundaries for institutional life. The first is the logic of the market, characterised by competition in which the work is controlled by the consumers. The second is the logic of bureaucracy, characterised by predictability, transparency and formal procedures, and where the managers control work. The third is the logic of professionalism, in which the workers themselves and their code of conduct control work. These logics help us to identify material as well as symbolic dimensions of the institutional life of MAE, and see how the interviewees construe themselves and ascribe meaning when adapting to or encounter change forces.

Institutional theory also directs attention to the assumption that the idea of marketization provides adult education organizations with a certain kind of problem definition, at the same time as providing a valid solution to this problem. The forces of the market can be forceful and difficult to resist since, as many researchers have shown, an organization must live up to external standards of certain external expectations, and act in accordance with them, in order to obtain societal legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Adult education providers must for instance attract the municipalities, and appear as rational, responsible and modern to win the bids in procurement processes. However, a provider of adult education is not only forced to conform to the new demands for economic efficiency and educational renewal, but must at the same time balance the inner institutional life. Educational institutions have long been described as “loosely coupled”, in the sense that the relations between the policy, the managerial levels and the teachers’ practice were not held together by hierarchical bureaucratic imperatives (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Weick 1976).

A point of departure in this article is that marketization means that a new kind institutional logic has been imposed on the inner life of adult education organizations. However, we can assume that the institutional responses to marketization are contingent and we cannot beforehand predict the workings of marketization. Thus, we are interested in institutional responses, i.e. how the inner institutional lives of adult education organizations respond to changes in the external environment.

To summarize, our analysis has focused on institutional responses to processes of marketization in the interviews with students, principals and teachers. Of specific interest has been the pressure to conform to the institutional logic of the market and conflicting tendencies that challenge the prevailing logics. Our analysis will be divided into three sections, each focusing on one of the three actors. In the final discussion, we consider the general patterns derived from the three examples. But before the analysis, we will in the next section provide a contextualisation of MAE in Sweden.

Adult education in Sweden and the market
Sweden has a long history of institutionalised adult education, dating back to the mid-1800s. However, Swedish formal adult education (MAE) was not created until 1968, and had its
basis in two discourses at the time: a discourse on the need to increase the supply of labour, and a discourse on the reserve of talent (Fejes, 2006a, b). The former discourse had its basis in Sweden having fully functioning industry after the Second World War, and there was thus a huge need to supply industry with competent workers. The second discourse was connected to research carried out on behalf of the government (Husén 1956, Härnvíst 1958), looking at the intelligence of conscripts, and relating this to their school qualifications. Such research illustrated how the intelligence of the population was higher compared to the level of school qualifications attained among the population. Thus, a reserve of talent was identified. Husén (1956), a professor of education, entered this debate arguing that there were many adults who never got the chance to study at upper secondary level (or university level) but who had the intelligence to do so. Thus, education opportunities for them needed to be created.

Related to these two discourses, the government firstly, in 1953, created opportunities for adults to participate in evening courses, and then take the exams for a school qualification. This was followed, in 1968, by the institutionalisation of formal adult education in the shape of MAE. MAE was a place for adults to study in order to get a qualification at compulsory and upper secondary school level. At first it took the form of evening classes, with students who were part of the “reserve of talent”, highly motivated, and with an aptitude for study (Fejes, 2006a, b). But in 1971, due to political pressure from the Swedish trade union confederation, MAE came to be directed firstly towards those who were furthest away from the labour market as well as those with the lowest level of education. Further reforms in the 1970s made it a legal right to take leave from work in order to study, and opportunities for study loans were introduced. This made it possible to organize MAE as daytime studies, and MAE came to take a form very similar to upper secondary school in how it was designed (classes of students, daytime study etc.).

The 1980s had few adult education reforms while in the 1990s many (adult) education reforms closely connected to discourses on new public management and marketization were carried out. Three influential reforms should be mentioned. Firstly, on the initiative of the social democratic government in 1991, there was a shift, from the state as the funder of education, to the municipalities. Management by objectives was introduced, where each municipality was responsible for funding schools as well as MAE, and for reaching the objectives set up by the state in legislation and the curriculum. Through a national agency, the state then made follow-ups to make sure each municipality delivered what was required. Secondly, the charter school reform introduced by the conservative government in 1992 turned the entire compulsory and upper secondary school system in Sweden into a quasi-market, where each student had (and still has) the opportunity to choose which school to attend (either a school run by the municipality, or an independent school), and the municipality has to send a voucher to the school at which the student is enrolled (Lundahl, et al. 2014).

Thirdly, instead of the voucher system, a procurement system was introduced in MAE in the mid-1990s, further supported through the Adult Education Initiative between (AEI) the years 1997-2002. With this initiative, introduced by the social democratic government, the state funded 100 000 study places per year in MAE for five years, targeting those who had the lowest level of education. The aim was to halve the unemployment rate by raising the level of education in the supply side of the workforce (Ministry of finance, 1996). The initiative brought 15% of the labour force into adult education and new providers were encouraged to offer adult education, as the idea was that competition between many providers would lead to new pedagogical approaches as well as higher quality of adult education and a reduction in
costs (Lumsden Wass 2004, Fejes, 2006a, b). A variety of providers should cater for better adaptation to the individual needs of the students. The market-like solutions can also be seen as a way to create tighter couplings between policy, management and the teaching practice than perhaps had existed before. Today, MAE in most Swedish municipalities is organized as franchises for the public sector. The transactions are regulated by a transnational law, the Purchase Act, which is used to establish procurement processes. At the beginning of the initiative in 1997, 14.4% of all students participated in courses delivered by a non-public provider, and in 2014 the proportion had increased to 45.7% (SNAE, 2015).³

The three case studies
We will now introduce our analysis of our three cases, focusing on students, principals, and teachers.

Conforming to the pressures of marketization – individualised students
Drawing on project one, we will now consider how students conform to the pressures of marketization. Through the institutional logic of marketization, students are more or less forced to behave in a certain way.

In current policy-making in Sweden, MAE is positioned as having three broad functions that have been present since the emergence of MAE in 1968. In the school law, it is stated that:

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The aim of municipal adult education is to support and stimulate adults in their learning. They should be provided with opportunities to develop knowledge and competence to strengthen their position in work and social life, and to encourage their personal development. The starting point for MAE should be the needs and prerequisites of the individual. Those with the lowest level of education should be prioritized (SFS, 2010:800).
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Firstly, adult education should help students who previously failed in their schooling and/or who do not have qualifications from compulsory and/or upper secondary school. This could include migrants and those who have previously partaken in the Swedish educational system. Secondly, adult education should foster individuals who can partake in life as active democratic citizens, and thirdly, adult education has a function of preparing students for the labour market. However, there has been a shift in emphasis among these three functions and the relationships between them since the creation of MAE in 1968 (cf. Rubenson et al., 1999). In the last decade, along with the increased marketization of MAE, the focus has been on the labour market function and the shaping of an employable workforce (cf. Fejes, 2010). Such a shift is also visible in the two latest green papers on adult education in Sweden (Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b), in which a discussion of the democratic function of adult education is lacking. The focus is instead on issues of cost efficiency and flexibility in terms of organization as well as in terms of educational delivery.

³ A question is of course why the Swedish government has chosen another model of marketization for the adult education, in which the individual seems to have less influence on the choice of educational provider. One answer might be the strong emphasis on employability and the problem of matching skills and labour market needs. Then it may be too risky to hand over the entire decision on what to study to the individual adult student. The municipalities can define the supply of available courses and keep control as the buyers of educational services.
In interviews with teachers and students, we can see how the organizational arrangements coincided with policy ambitions. The arrangements put certain demands on students at the same time as the arrangements had certain consequences for the teaching practice. Firstly, MAE is shaped as a flexible course-based organization, with different educational providers. Students might take several courses delivered by different providers, and thus they might rush between classes in different parts of the city. As one teacher expresses it:

First, I meet 25 students in history and then I meet 25 other students in social science, but they have nothing to do with each other. By the way, two of them do both classes, but they are the only ones, but that doesn’t mean they are necessarily friends.

Thus, on the one hand, the demands on students are that they should carefully choose which courses they wish to attend, as well as which providers should deliver them, all in line with the institutional logic of the market. They thus have to be active, as well as responsible in their choices. On the other hand, these organizational arrangements have consequences in terms of lack of continuity in classes and also in terms of the opportunities for students to interact and get to know each other.

Secondly, and further supporting the above example, is the continuous intake of students in MAE. Students can enrol in a course at any time during the semester; at the same time, students are continuously dropping out of courses. Thus the student cohort constantly changes and a lack of continuity emerges. As one teacher expresses it:

It’s very flexible in the sense that you begin at different dates. There is a small core group, who begin and end during traditional dates, but then there are big changes during the semester in terms of student enrolment. This might be negative for teaching, as you don’t get any continuity, you don’t get any team spirit. And this has to do with the course format [in MAE], i.e. we do not have cohesive groups that make it possible for us to work with the entire group and its development.

Here, on the one hand, the demands on students to choose courses and providers are further reinforced. They do not have to adapt to certain dates, but can make their choices, as well as enrol at any time they wish. Thus, they are construed as flexible, active and responsible. On the other hand, the organizational arrangements concerning enrolment pose a challenge for teachers’ work in terms of working with group development, as well as posing challenges for students’ interaction with peers.

Turning to interviews with students we can see how they seem to fully conform to the demands outlined above, such as being flexible, active in their choices, as well as responsible in terms of choosing as well as in terms of being efficient, i.e. focusing on their path towards employment or further studies. Thus, students can be seen as adapting to the institutional logic of the market.

In the student interviews, MAE is shaped as a place where individuals meet up in order to realise their individual trajectories, whether these are further studies in higher education or entering into the labour market. Interaction and socialisation with peers are not seen as important aspects of the studies, regardless of the purpose for studying. Life as a student is more of an individual process rather than collective, which comes to the fore in the very relationship between individuals and MAE to which they are subjected. The relationship is shaped and supported when students compare their experiences of MAE with their previous experiences of studying at upper secondary school as youths. As one student puts it: “I’m here
like, as an individual or something...you think about yourself and your future”. Another student argues:

I see this [participation in MAE] as going from point A to point B. Of course you attend the lessons, but I’m not going to put too much time and effort into engaging in new relationships and...to stay in the cafeteria. That’s not the experience I’m looking for. I wish to get my grades, and I wish to get going with this [studying] again, I wish to progress.

Such interpretation is further supported when turning to how the teaching practices of MAE are described. Teaching practice is here shaped as a one-way communication, where students attend and quietly listen to what the teacher says, in order to be successful in reaching their individual goals. As two students express it:

Here at MAE, you choose to study. Most of the students who come here study, and they are quiet in class, and they listen, and they attend the exams.

There are a lot of people here. It’s hard to make contact with other students. If you attend a class, you wish to listen to the teachers. And then you can’t sit there [in the lessons] and talk to other students. And after the lesson, one student is going home, the other is going to another class, and the third is having lunch.

Here, according to the students, students who are at the lessons are “quiet”, “listen to the teachers” lecturing and “arrive for the exams”. There is no possibility in lessons to chat with peers, as this would disrupt the students focus on passing exams in order to reach the individual goal set up for the future. There is an instrumental rationality construed here. The goal-oriented students attend MAE in order to reach individual goals, and the teachers who provide a space for students to be quiet, listen and to do exams, reinforce the students’ orientation. Students construe themselves as consumers in a market where instrumentality is more valued than social bonds, and the educational providers lay out the organizational foundation for the student to act in such instrumental manner.

As we have illustrated in this section, students are conforming to the institutional logic of the market as shaped through policy-making as well as teachers’ descriptions. However, there is to some extent an ambivalence, where teachers could be seen as mobilising an institutional logic of professionalism, as they themselves raise issues of concern regarding the continuous intake as well as the very flexible course-based system and the consequences of such a system in terms of lack of continuity in the student cohorts as well as risk of lack of student interaction.

Ambivalence in conforming to the pressures of marketization – the principal as a business leader
Drawing on project two we will now see how principals, like students, also conform to the institutional logic of the market. However, there is also ambiguity among principals.

In the early 1990s, public funding for folk high schools was cut by almost one third. Thus, folk high schools, with traditions going back to the 1860s, as mainly non-formal adult education institutions cultivating core values such as small school units, small classes, a certain degree of autonomy and a leadership where teachers have had a considerable influence, were more or less forced to find other sources of income. The AEI came to be one such important source of income, rescuing the finances of many folk high schools. However, participating in different commissions meant that the folk high schools lost the autonomy that had been one of their characteristics. They could no longer claim that they should decide
about the content of teaching or which students to accept, as they now came to deliver formal, curriculum-based education. At the same time, the role of principals changed. No longer able to rely only on state subsidies, principals had to start managing schools like companies, and had to employ or dismiss teachers depending on the demand for the courses they could offer. Folk high schools were now operating in a competitive environment where they had to compete based on quality and price. The risk of losing procurement processes became a strong incentive to reduce costs (Runesdotter, 2011).

The changing role of the principal is expressed in the interview with the representative from the trade union. According to the representative, until the beginning of the 1990s, principals were chosen from among the most experienced teachers. However, when folk high schools became involved in educational commissions like the AEI/MAE, the boards at many schools expected other competencies from the principals in order to manage school finances. New principals were now sought from among economists or human resource managers with experience of working in the public or private sectors:

Nowadays they [principals] are recruited from other fields. Some of them have been a financial manager somewhere, or something like that. The employers don’t seem to appreciate experience or knowledge of folk high schools or popular education anymore. Instead they prefer experience of finance and management on a more general level.

At many folk high schools the role of the principal started to resemble that of a business leader rather than what was traditionally associated with a principal, implying a new institutional logic, that of the market rather than that of professionalism. This was obvious, not least when looking at the advertisements for new principals. Often experiences with private companies or public organizations were given preference as well as competencies to handle budgets and staff. For example, in one advertisement to recruit a principal to a folk high school, asked for was a person that was “brave and entrepreneurial” who previously had experience of having “at least one foot in the world of folk high schools” with the mission to work towards “strategic renewal, funding for growth, competitiveness and a purpose- and result-oriented” direction of activities (Birkagarden, 2013). The work of the principal could thus, to a high degree, be argued to correspond to that of a private enterprise.4 To run the school as an enterprise entails accepting certain means and goals following another institutional logic far from the idea of the principal as an educational leader. The changed role of the principal and changed logic guiding the decisions concerning the school have in many ways been unfamiliar to those working at the folk high schools.

For many principals in the study, there was a pressure to reduce costs, contrary to the interests of the teachers, and many of them found themselves in a situation where they had to take unpopular decisions. As one principal argues:

Many of those that are employed as principals nowadays have a certain mission from the board: get a new agreement on working hours, introduce individual salaries and reduce the influence of the teachers’ board.

In the interviews with principals it became clear that many of them experienced tension between the expectations of the school board and those of the teachers, where the former could be seen as representing the logic of the market and the latter the logic of professionalism. To compete on price means cost reductions and as the main expense in

4 See e.g. Lundahl et al. (2014) for a similar reasoning in relation to principals in upper secondary school.
education is salaries, cutting staff costs becomes a logical action. One way to do so was to get
more working hours out of each teacher, and thus local agreements were cancelled at some
schools, which caused conflict with teachers. Whether or not the principals were willing to
challenge the teachers depended on their position in relation to the board of the school. As a
new principal you could be more inclined to feel loyal to the board than to the teachers at the
school. One principal that had managed to oppose the board with the support of the teachers
said:

Those recently employed principals that start to carry through the mission from the board of the
school always have to resign after a few years. They may have realised decisive changes at the
school, but they will have to leave; they become impossible to keep at the school as principals.

Thus, the processes of marketization through the procurement processes on the one hand
contributed to a destabilisation at many folk high schools, when the institutional logic of
professionalism developed at folk high schools was challenged by the demands to find new
means of income through commissions such as the MAE. Many of the new principals had to
conform to the shifting conditions, which meant that they had to compete with other
providers, and it could be very tempting to compromise with some of the ideals developed
within the folk high schools. However, some of the principals, such as the one above,
revealed ambivalence between demands to conform to an imposed institutional logic of the
market or to defend the ideals of the school and the logic of professionalism.

Yet one more important aspect of the challenges appearing with the processes of
marketization concerns short-term contracts that impose new demands on principals, as well
as influencing the conditions of employment for the teachers. As expressed by an economist
at a folk high school:

The greatest expense is wages and that’s why you need to have a staff that is flexible and that
you can use, and that is not stuck in permanent employment. Rather, they should be employed
for a limited period, in order to avoid the school having to pay wages for ... a project that wasn’t
prolonged.

Thus, principals are expected to embrace an institutional logic that makes them prepared to
accept short-term flexible work contracts for the teachers and dismiss or employ teachers
according to supply and demand. Traditionally, the folk high school principal stayed in post
until retirement. With the new expectations of the principals it became difficult to both keep
the confidence of the board and legitimacy among the teachers, and many principals left their
job after a few years. In a study to find out why so many had chosen to quit after few years,
Mustel (2009) showed that principals, especially those with no former experience of work in
folk high schools, encountered difficulties when they strived for acceptance among the
teachers. And when they needed to implement changes conceived as negative among the staff
and students in order to improve the school economy, they were met with strong resistance.
The secretary of the teachers’ association associated this with a clash between the more
market-like structure of the current school and the traditions of folk high schools:

… if you generalise, one can say that some of the principals, that come from totally different
sectors, tend to behave more like traditional business executives and are inclined to point with
the whole hand in a way that teachers at folk high schools are not comfortable with. Instead they
are used to, as a collective, having a considerable influence on the activities performed.

In many ways the challenges are similar among many providers of adult education that have
to adapt to market conditions within the frameworks of the procurement processes. The
principals have to act as business leaders when finding ways to become more cost-efficient, which in turn might have consequences for teachers’ work conditions, quality of education, and stability in terms of employment. The conditions set by the procurement processes impose demands on the principals in similar ways, irrespective of the educational institution they belong to – but the institutional response will depend on its values and historical traditions.

In this section we have illustrated how the procurement system influences the institutional logic of the folk high schools and imposes new demands on principals. Principals should act as business leaders, cut costs, and use flexible employment contracts in order to obtain flexibility concerning employment, and adapt to the demand for their courses. The analysis illustrates how principals conform to an institutional logic of the market that is unfamiliar to the traditions in folk high schools, in order to keep the confidence of the board and save the economy of the school. However, there are several indications of ambivalence, as the logic of the market is challenging some of the core values of the folk high schools and in that sense also destabilising the relations as well as activities in the school.

**Resisting the pressures of marketization – standardised teaching**

So far, we have focused on how students as well as principals conform to the pressures of marketization as these are played out in relation to institutional logics and new demands. We now turn to how teachers seem to be the main force for resisting the logic of marketization and defending a logic of professionalism. In project three, the focus was on how one of the major adult education companies in Sweden, which operated in more than 90 locations all over the country, implemented a new quality assurance system based on a standardised scheme for “delivery” of courses. The system was introduced in order to increase the competitiveness of the company and could be seen as mobilised within the frames of both an institutional logic of the market as well as bureaucracy. Both price and quality were evaluated in the procurement processes; meanwhile, the contracts were short, only two or three years each, and there was pressure for efficiency. The standardised scheme embraced a) a concretised digitalised syllabus including all teaching materials, lessons, workshops, criteria for assessment etc., b) digitised study guidance for the students, and c) a digitised students’ log for the teachers’ formative and summative assessment of the students. In the following, we specifically focus on how the standardised scheme affected teachers’ work in their meetings with students.

The implementation of the standardised scheme was accompanied by seminars for the teachers in which they were told that they could not drop the scheme. All teachers were expected to use the standardisation and not to deviate from what was laid out. From a management perspective the scheme was an organizational strategy to gain external legitimacy. The students, the state, the municipalities, i.e. all those that in this context were seen as customers, should be able to use the services of the company with confidence. Through the standardised scheme, the provider hoped to be construed as a legitimate successful, rational and up-to-date company (cf. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977). From this perspective, one could say that the standardisation scheme had been designed to create a symbolic value to be used in the many competitive procurement processes all over the country. The scheme is thus one example of how the institution conforms to the external pressure and the logic of the market. In other words, the scheme was not only a managerial technique to regulate teaching activities, but could be seen as embedded in societal norms, values and preferences supporting the idea of a market logic that
competition would enhance educational quality. As expressed by one of the leaders within the company:

And the quality audits are really hard. They visit us regularly. And it will be much, much tougher now, than it was before.

It was clear that the standardised scheme had several consequences for the institutional logics of the educational provider. Firstly, the scheme regulated the course content. The curriculum was developed in one location, and then expected to be used in the same way in numerous locations, by different teachers. Thus, course content was strongly regulated.

Quality assurance of the contents of an education ... and then uniform, form and content, we will do the same everywhere. (Teacher)

We're still struggling with this, that there can be different deliveries … depending on who is a teacher. I'm not looking for automated teaching but there must of course be some consensus. (Leader)

Secondly, the standardised scheme also regulated the relations between teachers and students. In the empirical material, we could see how the standardised system meant that teachers had more administrative work in relation to their students. The teachers said, for instance, that they had more administrative work with students’ assignments and that they spent less time face to face with the students since most of the communication between teachers and students was computer-based. As expressed by one teacher:

It has become almost like two departments … instead of coming to us, they are expected to turn to the computer.

The logic of the scheme was that the students should structure their own studies with the help of the digitised material. Teachers should act as supervisors but only when the students contacted them. Thus, the Swedish adult education policy emphasis on individualised study paths with flexible course starts could be seen as easily feasible by the company and its courses through its standardised scheme. The scheme made it possible to conform to the rules of the procurement system and the logics of both the market and bureaucracy. The company would thereby also guarantee a specific teaching content. At the same time the company could be flexible in relation to the changing local “order intake” from a specific municipality, and be independent of the professional competencies of the individual teachers. Instead of corridors with classrooms, the different schools were equipped with computers in a study hall for the students to carry out their individualised courses. As MAE students, they also had the option to study at home.

Thus, the institutional demand put on teachers was that they should use the standardised scheme, and thus devote more time to administration, and less time to interaction with students. Furthermore, they were thus asked, to some extent, to put their own professional judgement on hold, and instead follow the logic of the scheme.

However, most of the teachers did not adhere fully to the scheme. Drawing on their professional judgement and knowledge of their student cohorts, they saw the need for more meetings with and guidance of students face to face, than was promoted by the scheme. Their argument was that many students needed physical meetings with teachers. If not, the students would go home, they said. This was something the teachers struggled with every day, as the system was based on very few physical meetings. What teachers here identified was that the
online system was not adapted to the study situation of many of the students. For different reasons, many students were not able to be directors of their own study paths. According to the teachers, most students needed more structured support. Thus, if the teachers felt it was necessary, they manipulated the standardised scheme, or sometimes even avoided it, as for instance expressed in an interview with two teachers:

Teacher 1: We can put it like this; if we had followed this [the scheme] to the letter, that they would sit in a study hall and read [by themselves], then maybe we would have had around seven or eight students present. Now at least we have around 17, 18 students that are here every day. We are catching them now, when we have contact with them all the time.

Teacher 2: You have to work like that. You must have contact with them every day, so that you talk with them.

Teacher 1: Yes, and I think that they can finish their studies faster, because we are pushing them all the time.

The teachers were trying to preserve what they thought was good teaching. They structured the teaching in an individualised way, but this was an individualisation of a different kind than the path laid out by the standardised scheme. It was about individualisation based on professional logic and the teachers’ own control of their work process for the benefit of the students. The teachers focused on building relations with students in order to help them move forward in their studies. They did not wait until the students asked for help. Instead, teachers acted in a proactive manner to give support. Furthermore, none of the teachers related to the contracting customer when they talked about their work with students, even though they often mentioned the fierce competition between providers. The wellbeing of the students came first, and thus one could say that the teachers resisted attempts to impose changes that could be considered as derived from the logic of the market. Such resistance can also be seen in the following quotation:

For sure, the scheme is great for those who can work independently. Our students can’t do that … we must give them support them all the time. … so instead we are working in the old traditional way, classes led by a teacher, so that they learn something at all.

In this section, we have illustrated how the implementation of the scheme could be seen as a way to conform to the pressures of marketization by the educational provider. The teachers could be seen as a main source for resistance. In their meeting with students, the teachers often tried to avoid the scheme and rather drew on their professional judgement, and thus could be seen as defending an institutional logic of professionalism.

Discussion
Our analysis has illustrated how established institutional norms are challenged and destabilised when a process of marketization is in progress manifested in a procurement system, a flexible course-based organization, continuous intake, students as responsible for their choices, and expectations on principals to run the school as a business. By focusing on three categories of actors, drawing on three research projects, we have been able to illustrate how on the one hand, teachers emerge as the main source for upholding and defining an institutional logic of professionalism, while on the other hand, principals and students uphold a logic of the market, although for principals, there is ambivalence since they have to handle conflicting interests: either standing up for the school board or for the teachers.
Our results partly corroborate previous research on the marketization of compulsory and upper secondary school in terms of principals becoming more like business leaders, as well as students becoming responsibilised through the invitation to actively make choices (cf. Lundahl et al., 2014; Fejes, 2010). However, some of our results indicate different dimensions as compared to previous research on the marketization of education in Sweden.

Firstly, the principals and teachers in adult education are governed in terms of competition in the procurement process as well as by short contracts, which is not the case in compulsory and upper secondary schools and the systems of free school choice and a voucher system. Thus, principals in adult education could be expected to be more interested in keeping a flexible labour force in terms of short-term contracted teachers, as the volume of teaching could drastically change in a short time (if the school is not successful in the next procurement process). As a consequence, the specific form of marketization in adult education in Sweden could contribute not only to more uncertain working conditions for teachers compared to compulsory and upper secondary school, but also to unpredictable conditions for the providers of education.

Secondly, with the specific form of auditing of contracts, educational providers might be expected to introduce standardised systems of teaching and quality assurance. In the frames of a logic of the market as well as bureaucracy, this can be interpreted, as an attempt to make teachers exchangeable and the provider less dependent on the teachers’ experience and skills. Such changing employment relations influence the way teachers conduct their teaching, and accordingly, affect teachers’ professional expertise. However, as we have illustrated, teachers in one of our studies resisted the standardised system by ignoring or re-shaping the scheme in order to provide teaching that they deemed to be of good quality and adapted to the individual students. In one way, the standardisation of teaching as expressed in our study is similar to the former ideas of “teaching machines” based on behavioural psychology (Skinner, 1984) that became popular in Sweden in the 1960s and that were intended to make teaching more effective (Wallin, 1968). However, they were embedded in a different kind of governance.

Thirdly, not only are the principals and educational institutions described in our study illustrative of the pressure to conform to external demands; so are the students. The increasing policy focus on the labour market function of MAE and on the shaping of an employable workforce is reflected in the interviews with students. Students talk about themselves and their reasons for participation in MAE in terms of being responsible for their own life situation, and describe participation as a way to change their lives and get a job. Thus, they construe themselves as responsible for their own failures and successes.

These three examples point to how the introduction of market principles is challenging and destabilising the institutional logics of adult education. The changes implemented in order to create a market for adult education started with the AEI. Competition between providers in the procurement process was justified as a way to enhance both the variety and quality of

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5 Auditing as well as quality assurance systems have become central in compulsory and upper secondary school as well, not least during the last few years, with the introduction of numerous reforms in Sweden, e.g. more national testing at lower ages and across more subjects, grading of students at lower ages etc. This, together with the competition in recruiting students, contributes to standardisation of education as well as de-professionalisation of teachers (cf. Lundahl, et al. 2014), for example encouraging “teaching for the test” (cf. Burch, 2009).
adult education. Rather than variety however, the conditions and market principles contribute to conformity. As illustrated in our analysis, the conditions for competition are regulative and force providers into certain ways to behave and respond, e.g. in terms of weighing financial issues in relation to issues of quality. The principals at folk high schools are, for example, more or less forced to choose to deliver external courses, e.g. for MAE, in order to survive financially. Such choices affect the autonomy as well as the identity and characteristics of the internal organization of folk high schools, and thus the institutional logic of folk high schools. Above all the effort to conform to market principles is destabilising the inner life of the schools, and is one reason why many principals resign after a few years. Students are likewise shaping themselves as forced to choose participation in adult education in order to get a job and become employable. However, such shaping is quite complex as students, at the same time, position themselves as responsible when choosing to partake in adult education. The attempt to standardise the education and teachers’ work is yet another example of the consequences of marketization. Standardisation of teaching can be understood as a way to ensure teachers’ quality, irrespective of who is actually teaching. However, teachers in our study resisted such attempts by not conforming to the new scheme introduced. Thus, teachers found solutions that helped them resist changes in the environment and maintain autonomy (cf Weick, 1976).

Our analysis illustrates different examples of how the marketization of adult education affects actors in adult education institutions. Here, we have pointed out some of the ways principals, teachers and students respond to the pressure to conform. Such responses to the pressure to conform could be expected to have consequences in terms of, for example, students’ knowledge and exam results, their possibilities of gaining employment or partaking in further studies, teachers’ and principals’ professional autonomy, as well as a redefinition of what it means to be a teacher and a principal, and so forth. Such consequences could be good as well as bad, but they are “real”. Thus, it is quite remarkable that there is such a limited amount of research available on the marketization of adult education in Sweden, as well as beyond. Our hope is that our analysis has provided a basis for further analysis and debate on the topic.

References


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**Notes on contributors**

Andreas Fejes is professor and chair of adult education research at the department of behavioural sciences and learning, Linköping University, Sweden. His current research interests are the marketisation of adult education, citizenship education within and outside of adult and popular education, as well as sociological analyses of adult education as a research field through the use of bibliometrics. Fejes is one of the founding editors of the European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (www.rela.ep.liu.se), and he has published more than 100 articles and book chapters across journals such as Journal of education Policy, British Educational Research Journal, British Journal of Sociology of Education, Adult Education Quarterly, Vocations and Learning, and Studies in Continuing Education. His latest co-authored book (with M. Dahlstedt), The confessing society: Foucault, confession and practices of lifelong learning, was published by Routledge, as well as one of his latest edited books, Foucault and a politics of confession in education (with K. Nicoll).

Caroline Runesdotter has a PhD in Education and is a senior lecturer at the Department of Education and Special Education, University of Gothenburg. Her research interest includes adult and popular education, politics of education, educational restructuring and governance, and curriculum theory.

Gun-Britt Wärvik is Associate Professor in Education and senior lecturer at the Department of Education and Special Education, University of Gothenburg. Her research interest concerns politics of educational phenomena, including educational restructuring and formation of professional expertise, lifelong learning, adult education and higher education.