Shaping the democratic, relational, and reflective youth recreation leader

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ABSTRACT
Youth recreation centres have been a key institution in providing young people with meaningful activity after school, going back to the mid-twentieth century in Sweden. These centres have been the focus of research, but very few studies have paid attention to the youth recreation leader, the person working in these centres. In this article, we direct our focus towards youth recreation leaders by analysing how a discourse on the ideal youth recreation leader takes shape through policy, how it operates, and with what effect. We are inspired by the work of Foucault in understanding discourse, power, and subjectivity. Our analysis illustrates how a democratic, relational, and reflective ideal youth recreation leader is shaped and fostered through current policy discourses in Sweden. Such a subjectivity emerges through technologies of power and the self, of which the confession is one. Through the confession, the youth recreation leader is simultaneously governed and governs others – the conduct of conduct. The case presented here can tell us more about the way in which governing operates in contemporary society.

KEYWORDS
Youth recreation leader; youth recreation work; folk high schools; governmentality

Introduction
Youth recreation centres have been a key institution in providing young people with meaningful activity after school, going back to the mid-twentieth century in Sweden. These centres have significantly been positioned as an important space for troubled youth and, more recently, specifically in urban peripheries throughout the country (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2018). In a Swedish context, research on these centres has focused on their importance as meeting places in socially vulnerable areas, not least for young people with working-class and migrant backgrounds (Peterson, Svensson, & Addo, 2003). The centres are constructed as places which provide the conditions for play, recreation, and relaxation, i.e. places for learning which are different from the more formalised learning in schools (Bjurström, 2011; Kihlström & Roos, 2000; Roos, 2000). However, this type of informal learning has been seen as important for what happens at school (Sivan, 2003; Trondman, 2000), thus addressing the issue of the professionalism of youth recreation leaders (Forkby, Johansson, & Liljeholm Hansson, 2008).

Even though a number of researchers have been interested in youth recreation centres, relatively little interest has been directed towards the professionals, those who work there. Most of the research that raises issues regarding these professionals does so in passing, or rather, the rationality of the professional work as a youth recreation leader is not the main focus of the research. Some research has touched upon the issue of what competencies the recreation leaders need in order to do...
a good job. Such competencies might include interactive skills (Kihlström & Roos, 2000; Pettersson, Svenneke, & Havström, 2007), communication skills (Kihlström & Roos, 2000), organisational skills (Pettersson Svenneke & Havström, 2007), leadership skills (Kihlström & Roos, 2000; Pettersson Svenneke & Havström, 2007), and conflict management skills (Tebelius, 2007).

Although it might be important to identify what skills are useful in order to be a good professional, such an analysis does not take into account the wider discourses of which such skills are a part. In this article, we will take a different approach by identifying how a discourse on the ideal youth recreation leader takes shape in policy, how it operates, and with what effect.

The educational context of youth recreation leadership in Sweden

The educational setting for the specific programme in focus in this article – the youth recreation leader programme – is the folk high school. This particular setting is part of an educational system in Sweden encompassing a wide range of education targeting different individuals irrespective of their age, needs or circumstances. Folk high schools are targeting adults and is part of the broader notion of folkbildning (popular education). In Sweden, folkbildning is the free and voluntary educational shaping processes that takes place within institutions such as folk high schools and study associations, as well as more informal processes in civil society.

Popular education has a long history in Sweden, as well as in the other Scandinavian and Nordic countries (Lövgren & Nordvall, 2017). In Sweden, this history dates back to the mid-1800s, starting with the creation of the first FHS in 1868, the creation of public libraries as well as state funded ‘public lectures’ for the broad layers of the population (Larsson, 2013). By the turn of the century, the first study circles were created, soon to be organised within the frames of study associations, of which the first one – the Workers’ Educational Association (ABF) – was established in 1912 (Gustavsson, 2013). Study circles were based on the participants’ own activity and experiences, these becoming the starting point for discussions in combination with books and literature. The study circle leader was included as a member of the group, and thus the leader’s role differed from that of a traditional teacher. These notions of experience, the books and the leader, were the basis for a specific pedagogical ideal with a focus on collective learning, i.e. free and voluntary self-bildung (Gustavsson, 2013). With the social movements, gaining momentum in the late 1800s and into the 1900s, more FHS emerged, and these came to change dramatically in terms of student population. In the 1930s, the majority of participants would come from the working class, and the majority would be females. Since then, the student population has shifted, and today, in the wake of the large migration flows to Sweden, a large proportion of students in FHS are migrants (Swedish National Agency of Adult Education, 2019).

However, in Scandinavia more generally, and in Sweden specifically, popular education is quite different compared to many other countries in the world. In Sweden, the relationship between the state and civil society organisations has for quite long been close – not least as part of the corporatist Swedish welfare model (Fejes et al., 2018; Trägårdh, 2007). Here, there is a long tradition of involving a wide range of civil society organisations in decision-making processes, as a means of embedding decisions in the broad layers of the population as well as contributing to a democratic fostering of the population (Micheletti, 1995). As part of such arrangement, the state has for the last century, funded popular education on a ‘free and voluntary’ basis (Edquist, 2009).

Today, popular education funded by the Swedish government consists of a total of 156 FHS and 10 study associations, the latter located in all of the country’s 290 municipalities (Fejes et al., 2018; Swedish National Agency of Adult Education, 2019). The state’s aim with popular education is, amongst other things, to contribute to the further development of democracy and personal development, as well as decreasing educational gaps within the population (SFS, 2015:218).

The FHS, which are the focus of this article, offer general courses whereby students can attain knowledge to qualify for higher studies, and special courses, some of which prepare students for work in a variety of occupations (Fejes et al., 2018). The vocational orientation of the special courses relates to the ideological foundation of each FHS, as well as the specific geographical and labour-market
context (Landström, 2004, 2018). A trend in the past decade or so, is that the student groups in the special courses outnumber those attending general courses (Nylander & Östlund, 2018).

The youth recreation leader programme has, since 1979, been located in FHS (Boräng, Melin, & Nilsson, 1981). Today, the programme is carried out at 22 locations spread across the country (Youth Recreation Leader Schools, 2018a) and a national curriculum forms the basis for the local syllabus of each FHS, as well as their unique profile. Importantly, and in contrast to most education in Sweden, the curriculum is not regulated by the state through the Education Act (SFS, 2010:800). Rather, in line with the wider ideal of popular education in Sweden as ‘free and voluntary’, FHS are free to design their own courses. However, the curriculum, which is designed and decided upon by the Youth Recreation Leader Schools (2010, p. 2), emphasises that the programme is based on ‘scientific grounds as well as proven experience, anchored in the students’ own lifeworld’.

The youth recreation leader programme is unique in targeting the conditions for and needs of young people’s meeting places. The students at the programme are engaged in a variety of themes and subjects central to youth recreation work, but the specific content and the pedagogy vary locally. The overarching educational areas in the curriculum include: human development and its conditions, social studies, leisure time activities in theory and practice, recreation culture, leadership, and the professional role (Youth Recreation Leader Schools, 2010). Common subjects targeting these education areas include sociology, psychology, pedagogy, power, democracy, and interculturalism. A few examples of unique profiles in youth recreation leader programmes include outdoor life, social work, and project leadership.

For the past few years, about 300 students have graduated each year from the programme (Youth Recreation Leader Schools, 2016, 2018b). These graduates obtain employment relatively evenly distributed between municipal youth recreation centres and leisure centres, whereas a minority work in other contexts, such as social care institutions or treatment centres.

Analytical approach

In order to identify how a discourse on the ideal youth recreation leader takes shape in policy, how it operates, and with what effect, we draw on a poststructural approach inspired by the work of Michel Foucault (1972, 1980, 1990, 2007), and specifically the concepts of discourse, subjectivity, governmentality, and technologies of power and the self. Such an approach has proven beneficial for identifying the ways in which professional subjectivities emerge and are governed through policy discourse in a range of educational areas; for example, in schools (e.g. Breidenstein & Thompson, 2015), in teacher training (e.g. Popkewitz & Kirschgasler, 2015), in teacher professional courses (e.g. Nicoll, 2015), and in academia (e.g. Fejes, 2016; Hodgson, 2015).

In our approach, ‘discourse’ includes what is said through speech or writing (Foucault, 1972). A statement concerning the youth recreation leader then refers to what is recognisably said of the leader within a specific discourse, and what can be taken seriously, in the sense that the statements conform to the ‘rules’ of this discourse (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2018). Thus, these might be statements found in policy texts, scholarly works, politicians’ pronouncements or other authoritative ‘texts’ on youth recreation work and the leader, or more widely. Statements are nodes in discursive networks that are systems of reference to other texts, sentences, and books (Foucault, 1972). There are rules within or behind specific discourses that support the proliferation of what can be seriously said at a certain time and in a certain space.

Through discourses of the youth recreation leader, power operates and shapes the possible field of action. Power is here conceptualised as relational and non-intentional. Rather than asking the questions ‘where is power?’ and ‘where does it come from?’, Foucault (1990) suggests that we should ask the ‘how’ questions of power: How is power exercised? What are the means by which it is exercised? What happens through this exercise of power? What are the effects of this power? From such a perspective, power is understood as operating everywhere, in all relations (Foucault, 1990).
and it only exists through actions, such as the way in which actions modify other actions within the relationships between groups or individuals. Power makes certain actions and distinctions possible.

Through power relations, subjectivity emerges. Power defines who can speak, about what and with what authority. Thus, a discourse makes available a certain field of possible subject positions, including the position of youth recreation leader, the targeted young people, and other positions. Thus, subjectivity is not pre-defined, nor does it have any essence. Rather, subjectivity (here, the youth recreation leader) emerges through discourse, i.e. through the way in which youth recreation workers are spoken about. In other words, this is a decentred notion of subjectivity, and it is enmeshed in the power relations that make these subjectivities possible (Foucault, 1990; Fejes & Nicoll, 2015).

So then, through discourse, power operates and shapes subjectivities, i.e. there is governing at play. Foucault (2007) called this governmentality. From this perspective, government is analysed as a more complex concept than the government of the nation-state; it involves the government of ourselves, the government of others, and the government of the state (i.e. the ‘conduct of conduct’). The focus is on liberal mentalities of governing. A governmentality analysis directs attention towards the technologies and techniques through which governing operates and reaches its goals (how governing operates), combined with an analysis of what subjects are brought forth through them (the effect of governing). Technologies do not have any essence, and they are not the direct linear output of a specific will to govern or of any particular intention. Instead, they are assemblages of aspirations, beliefs, knowledge, and practices of calculation.

There are primarily two types of technologies that Foucault (2003) analysed in his writing: technologies of power and domination and technologies of the self. The former concerns the practices through which the self is objectified and shaped through dividing practices, while the latter concerns the ways in which the self constitutes itself as a subject. These technologies seldom function separately; rather, the encounter between the two is what Foucault called governmentality. Thus, in order to conduct a governmentality analysis, the researcher needs to consider both types of technologies, although Foucault turned his attention to the technologies of the self in his later writing.

**Empirical material**

Drawing on the theorisation outlined above, the focus of this analysis is to identify regularities of statements across the empirical material in terms of the emerging subject positions, and how governing operates. In this analysis, the guiding questions are: What narratives are there about the ideal youth recreation leader, that is, the knowledge, competence and characteristics of this leader, and how are they constituted? What constituents of the ideal youth recreation leader are constructed as truths, and in what ways?

The empirical material analysed consists of five kinds of policy texts on youth recreation work. The first policy text is the national curriculum for the FHS that provides the youth recreation leader programme (Youth Recreation Leader Schools, 2010), published by the umbrella organisation for the 22 FHS that provide this programme. One part of the organisation’s purpose is to facilitate pedagogical development and cooperation among the members, as well as to address issues of quality (Youth Recreation Leader Schools, 2012). The second kind of policy texts is the 17 local syllabuses available online from the FHS currently offering the programme (referred to in the analysis as, for instance, FHS 5). These syllabuses vary between 15 and 59 pages in length and, combined with the curriculum, consist of a total of 479 pages.

The third policy text under scrutiny addresses young people’s venues and the professional role of the youth recreation leader. This is a research-based collection of work published by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (2008), addressing issues of preventive and promotional youth activities, targeting youth recreation leaders, officials and politicians, as well as students attending youth recreation work programmes.

The fourth policy text consists of a publication providing an analysis of 1800 discussions that were conducted with representatives from youth recreation centres in Sweden over a three-year
period (Recreation Forum and Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union, 2015). The publisher of this text is the Recreation Forum, an umbrella organisation with members consisting of associations running youth recreation centres and other activities for young people in Sweden, as well as the Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union.

The final policy text is called ‘Ethics for youth recreation leaders’ (Knowledge Centre for Youth Recreation Leadership, 2016). This text provides an ethical code for youth recreation leaders’ work and is published by a regional umbrella organisation that aims to contribute to the development of the youth recreation leader profession and venues for young people. The members consist of 14 municipalities and one FHS.

Taken together, these 772 pages of current policy texts from different organisations provide significant narratives on how the ideal youth recreation leader is shaped within and beyond youth recreation leader education at FHS in Sweden. In the next section, we will turn to the issue of technologies of the self and, specifically, to the technology of confession.

Constructing the ideal youth recreation leader

Through our analysis, the youth recreation leader emerges as a democratic leader, with knowledge about democracy and a bearer of certain values. With such a foundation, the logic goes, the leader will be able to foster and support young people in order for them to become democratic citizens. A central competence in being and acting democratically is the competence to work relationally, with the young people, with colleagues, and with people in the world outside of the youth recreation centre. It also involves the ability to support the young people coming to the centre to act and be relational towards each other. Furthermore, in order to become such a democratic and relational leader, there is a need for the ability to reflect, not only about one’s occupational practice, but also about one’s self. In the following, we will elaborate further upon how such a discourse and subjectivity emerge from our empirical material.

The democratic leader

The democratic youth recreation leader is one central aspect that emerges as constituting the ideal youth recreation leader subject position. Here, exerting leadership grounded in knowledge about democracy is construed as a basis for fostering young people into becoming democratic citizens. Firstly, such leadership is construed as requiring certain knowledge about society as well as democracy. The construction of the knowledge required in the overarching educational area of social studies is expanded in the following policy text:

The youth recreation leader has knowledge about:

- The starting and development of non-governmental organisations as well as understands [sic] the foundation of civil society.
- The local community, the common situation, the local actors as well as the social, cultural, democratic, and physical ‘map’ of an area. (Recreation Forum and Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union, 2015, p. 4)

Here, the youth recreation leader’s required knowledge in social studies is construed as encompassing knowledge about democratic society in terms of ‘the foundation of civil society’. Moreover, knowledge is required regarding the local community in particular, i.e. the ‘common situation, the local actors’.

Secondly, the democratic youth recreation leader is constituted in relation to certain values, including both humanistic values and those concerning how to conduct the fostering of youth into
democratic citizens. In the following policy texts, these humanistic values are characterised accordingly:

YOUTH RECREATION LEADERS’ WORK emanates from the principle of human dignity – everybody has equal value. This is the foundation for human rights with democratic values and an attitude of humanism towards other people. […] Humanism means seeing every person as a fellow human being whom we are to meet with trust, receptiveness, compassion, and love. (Knowledge Centre for Youth Recreation Leadership, 2016, p. 3, emphases in original)

The youth recreation leader stands for values based on human freedom and human rights, everybody’s equal value, and shows trust in humankind’s own strength and ability to take responsibility. (Recreation Forum and Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union, 2015, p. 2)

These statements construe youth recreation leaders’ knowledge about democracy as based on the principle of ‘everybody’s equal value’. The humanistic notion of humankind construed through such reasoning characterises all individuals as potential fellow beings and, accordingly, they must be met with ‘trust, receptiveness, compassion, and love’. Furthermore, such democratic leadership should be guided by ‘trust in humankind’s own strength and ability to take responsibility’.

The democratic youth recreation leader also exerts leadership in relation to certain values concerning the fostering of young people, by acknowledging the resources, capacities, and characteristics that are deemed positive among the young people. Accordingly, in the curriculum it is purported that:

The youth recreation leader role is characterized by a fostering approach in which it is important to focus people’s inherent resources and what is experienced as positive. […] In the collaboration with other occupational groups, the youth recreation leader’s special task is to have people’s possibilities as a point of departure to strengthen the factors that promote coherence, participation, and meaningfulness. (Youth Recreation Leader Schools, 2010, p. 4)

Here, a specific notion of fostering emerges. The kind of fostering that youth recreation leaders are expected to conduct is specifically guided by a notion of humankind as intrinsically resourceful and full of possibilities. Thus, conducting such fostering means attending to each individual’s ‘inherent resources’ as a means of promoting ‘coherence, participation, and meaningfulness’. This discourse on values concerning fostering is further explained in the following policy texts:

An important foundation to succeed with the youth recreation centre is that the leaders have a positive approach to the young people they meet. That the leaders’ starting point is the positive, the young people’s possibilities, resources, and expect something good. This brings about a salutogenic and health-promoting approach. You focus on wellbeing and the positive, what works, and work to find more space for this. The starting point means that the leaders search for resources and strengths instead of getting stuck in what is problematic, and what does not work. With this approach you give space for humans’ resources, making them able to better cope with the difficulties and challenges they face on their own. The leader’s approach and working methods will target making growth and development possible. […] The leaders expect something good and show trust: ‘I know you can make it’. (Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2008, pp. 104–105)

The youth recreation leader has a deliberate leadership with a salutogenic approach in encounters with people. The exercise of the occupation is based on trust and confidence. (Recreation Forum and Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union, 2015, p. 2)

In these statements, the youth recreation leader is construed as a certain kind of leader, one who conducts fostering work driven by a positive expectation of young people – both guided by and displaying trust and confidence in young people’s ability to really ‘make it’. This rationality is characterised in terms of a ‘salutogenic and health-promoting approach’, with a focus on ‘what works’ and on ‘resources and strengths’ rather than a focus on ‘what is problematic, and what does not work’. As constituted, such leadership, as set into practice by a range of methods, has the power to strengthen young people’s own coping abilities, thus making ‘growth and development possible’.
The relational leader

The relational youth recreation leader is the second central part of the subject position of the ideal youth recreation leader. Here, the leader is construed as having the ability to create relationships with young people and other professionals, as well as between young people. In one of the policy texts, such ability is exemplified in the following way:

Adults have to breathe trust, desire, and passion in their relationships to young people. Sincere and genuine. Not like empty phrases in a verbosity of objectives and political correctness. Young people unveil falsehood. Fostered in a message on the rights to both have and express an opinion, they have furthermore learnt to turn their backs against those they do not believe in. Thus, the occupation as a youth recreation leader demands top quality in terms of the ability to communicate and create trustworthy relationships. (Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2008, pp. 278–279)

This statement construed young people’s need for trusting relationships to be founded in authenticity, rather than in empty phrases about ‘objectives and political correctness’. Without such authenticity, the logic goes, young people will ‘turn their backs against those they do not believe in’. Thus, the youth recreation leader has to ‘breathe trust, desire, and passion’ into their relationships with young people. Furthermore, the leader has to have an ability ‘to communicate and create trustworthy relationships’. Here, a logic emerges where the two abilities, to ‘communicate’ and ‘create trustworthy relationships’, become two sides of the same coin.

The significance of creating good relationships at the youth recreation centre is further illustrated in the following quotation:

The only thing you have to work with at a youth recreation centre is relationships. Without relationships, there is no real influence. For this reason, it is important that relationships with the visitors is in the epicenter. Relationships are not merely about knowing the visitors’ names. You build a good relation over time. The strongest relationships are not those occurring spontaneously – challenges can sometimes create conditions for stronger bonds. (Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2008, pp. 80–81)

This statement construed the recreation leader’s sole work at the youth recreation centre as being to create relationships. This is pivotal, the argument goes, in obtaining ‘real influence’. Therefore, relationships with the young people are portrayed as being top priority and they are considered to be built over time.

The ability to create relationships is also addressed in the syllabuses. Below is an example from the two-week module Social and Emotional Competency in one syllabus:

The module aims to build a greater awareness and understanding of the interpersonal encounter that the youth recreation leader occupation demands. To function well in different social situations and social groups is about being able, in a balanced manner, to cooperate with others in a way that means partly that you continue to maintain good communication with others, and partly that it does not confine you to your own specificity or value base. (FHS 5)

This statement construed the ‘interpersonal encounter’ as the basis of the profession of youth recreation leader. Being able to successfully cope with a variety of social situations and target groups is characterised as being about collaboration, in a ‘balanced’ manner. Such balanced collaboration encompasses continuously maintaining good communication with others, while simultaneously staying true to one’s own specificity or values.

However, the youth recreation leader should not only create relationships with others, but also have the competence to actually help build relationships between others. This line of argument is illustrated in the following policy text:

They [the youth recreation leaders] must also function as ‘social architects’ that facilitate for the visitors to connect and build relationships between themselves. […] One of the leaders’ most important missions is to create relationships between visitors. The leaders are to choose activities that promote cooperation, deepen bonds, and build different kinds of relationship. (Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 115)
This statement construes the making of relationships between visitors as a crucial ability for youth recreation leaders. They are to create relationships and thus act as ‘social architects’, making activities available that facilitate cooperation among visitors, deepen their connections with one another, and build relationships of different kinds.

Not only should the youth recreation leader have the competence to build good relations with those visiting the youth recreation centre, and between those visitors, but even more importantly, the youth recreation leaders also need to be able to build good relationships outside of the centre. This argument is illustrated in the following policy text:

With the area’s needs and conditions as point of departure, the youth recreation leader collaborates with local actors and groups of individuals focusing possibilities and coordination of resources. (Recreation Forum and Swedish Municipal Workers’ Union, 2015, p. 2)

This statement construes the youth recreation leader as having the competence to build relationships in collaboration with a broad spectrum of ‘local actors and groups of individuals’. On the basis of the community’s specific needs and conditions, such collaborations focus on possibilities and the coordination of resources. Thus, such reasoning relates to the line of argument analysed previously, with a focus on mobilising possibilities and focusing on ‘what works’, rather than on ‘what does not work’.

**The reflective leader**

The reflective youth recreation leader is the third central aspect constituting the subject position of the ideal youth recreation leader. Here, the youth recreation leader is construed as having the ability to reflect upon both professional practice and one’s own role and personal character. A logic emerges, suggesting that structured reflection on professional practice is necessary in order for development and progress to happen.

In one policy text, a structured model for deliberate recreation methods – referred to as ‘the recreation method spiral’ – is described. In this model, there is an explicit ambition to analyse and develop recreation methods that are applicable to various target groups and activities. The source of the need for reflection is said to be a problem needing attention, or an idea or task needing to be implemented in practice. The youth recreation leader is described as in need of engaging in an iterative spiral consisting of several steps, described as follows:

The first step involves the youth recreation leaders acquiring solid knowledge and making an analysis of their target group(-s). Here it is important to extract both what they wish and what they need. The more knowledge the leaders have, the easier it will be to find the ‘right’ methods. Hereafter, goals are formulated that are to emanate from this analysis. The goals should focus on what the participants are to gain but you can also make explicit the goals for the activity or the staff’s work. When the goal formulation is complete you choose methods and carry out the activity. If the resources are insufficient, you might need to seek extra funding to carry out that which has been planned. Deliberate methods are also followed up by a reflective evaluation. On [the] basis of which answer you get, then, this hopefully results in a development and increased awareness of what is favourable for visitors and the activity. (Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 109)

This statement construes the initial step for identifying the ‘right recreation methods’ as formulating goals based mainly on a thorough analysis of the target group’s desires and needs. These goals may also involve the activity or the youth recreation leader’s work. In the next step, methods are chosen, and activities are planned and implemented. Thereafter, the implementation is reflected upon. This structured reflection on professional practice is constituted as potentially resulting in the ‘development and increased awareness of what is favourable for visitors and the activity’.

However, the goal of reflection is not merely constructed as being to analyse and develop activities or methods in professional practice. Reflection also emerges, and permeates the syllabuses, as an ability to be systematically developed in the students. For example, as expressed in the syllabuses of the following two FHS:
In every module the student’s ability to plan, follow up, and evaluate one’s own work is practiced. To be able to document what you have accomplished and decided is important in the upcoming work life. In the introduction to every module, the student formulates their own goals with the module. These are, if [sic] the basis for a reflection over one’s own work. By creating a portfolio that follows [the student] throughout the module, one’s own learning can be elucidated and lifted. (FHS 7)

Knowledge, reflections, and practical exercises in leadership are present in all [education] areas. (FHS 10)

These statements construe the idea that every single module will provide opportunities to practise the ability to plan, evaluate, and reflect upon what has been done. The students are encouraged to document their own goals, for instance in a portfolio, which is considered important for their ‘upcoming work life’. These goals are constituted as the foundation for reflections on work.

The following example illustrates how specific learning outcomes that are to facilitate reflection may be formulated in syllabuses. Such specific learning outcomes emphasise the ability to reflect; for instance, in the following syllabus:

After a carried-out module, the student should:

– be able to reflect on one’s own pedagogical foundation
– be able to reflect on and discuss the role of knowledge in society and people’s responsibility for how the knowledge is used
– show an ability to independently and in groups analyse and reflect on pedagogical theories and concepts related to practical activity. (FHS 2)

The learning outcomes are here construed as facilitating students’ ability to reflect upon pedagogical theories and concepts in relation to professional practice. The use of the word “reflect” in each learning outcome signifies the central position of this concept in this particular syllabus.

Another central part of the way in which reflection emerges in the policy texts concerns the youth recreation leaders’ ability to reflect on the self, i.e. to turn the reflective gaze inwards. This is illustrated through the following statement from a syllabus:

Catching oneself and becoming aware of one’s own patterns is a decisive competency for a professional youth recreation leader and is also the primary characteristic to leave the programme with, sought for in our students by employers. […] A central part of the programme is to develop the self-reflective ability and receive feedback from teachers and fellow students. Feedback on thoughts, feelings, and behaviour becomes an important way of working to let my [the student’s] picture of me meet others’ picture of me, and thereby render possible a deliberate and desirable development. The ability and the quality of self-reflection set the limits for my own [the student’s] developmental process. A few question formulations that can guide the self-reflection are: Which presumptions and values govern my thinking and my actions? Which intentions did I have with my actions? Which were the effects of my actions? Which alternative actions are there? How can I become fully responsible for my way of being? (FHS 15)

Here, making oneself visible, to oneself as well as to others, is construed as a crucial competence in the youth recreation leader’s professional practice. Such an ability concerns reflection upon both one’s professional role and personal character. Furthermore, a logic emerges that specific guiding questions may assist reflection on the student’s innermost thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. These guiding questions direct attention, for instance, towards the students taking responsibility for discovering the assumptions and values influencing their professional thinking and actions as well as their personal character.

**Discussion**

In this article, we have illustrated how the ideal youth recreation leader emerges as a *democratic leader*, with knowledge about democracy and as a bearer of certain values, in Swedish policy. With such a foundation, the logic goes, the youth recreation leader will be able to foster and support young people to become democratic citizens themselves. A central competence in being and acting
democratically is the competence to work relationally, with young people, with colleagues, and with people in the world beyond the centre. Furthermore, this competence involves the ability to support young people coming to the centre to act and be relational towards each other. In order to become such a democratic and relational leader, there is a further need for the ability to reflect, not only about one’s occupational practice, but also about one’s self.

While previous research on youth recreation centres provides some input into what competencies are deemed necessary in this specific occupation (see e.g. Kihlström & Roos, 2000; Pettersson Svenneke & Havström, 2007; Tebelius, 2007), in this study we have been able to illustrate, firstly, how these competencies can be seen as ‘effects’ of how governing operates and, secondly, how these competencies are connected and produce a specific kind of subjectivity. Such a subjectivity, the democratic, relational, and reflective youth recreation leader, emerges as an ideal, as someone every student on the programme should strive to become, and as someone whom teachers in the programme should contribute towards shaping. In a way, such ideals might sound unproblematically ‘good’ to a contemporary reader. Democracy, relationships, and reflection are key topics in contemporary discourses, not only in relation to youth recreation work. We can see similar ideas operating, for instance, in schools (see e.g. Breidenstein & Thompson, 2015; Nicoll, 2015), teacher training (Popkewitz & Kirschgasler, 2015), academia (Fejes, 2016; Hodgson, 2015), and so on. However, these ideas are neither unproblematic, nor ‘good’ in themselves. They also ‘do’ something to us, i.e. they shape subjectivity.

One way to understand the emergence of the democratic, relational, and reflective youth recreation leader would be to see her or him as part of a wider idea of how governing should operate. Through, for example, the idea of shaping a reflective youth recreation leader, technologies of power and of the self are at play (see e.g. Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013; Fejes & Nicoll, 2015). By asking students to direct their gaze inwards, to reflect upon both their actions and their selves, a confessional relation emerges. The teacher becomes the one asking for and encouraging the confession, while the student becomes the one disclosing her or his inner ‘secrets’ to an ‘other’, for instance the teacher, as well as to herself or himself, as representing the ‘virtual other’, i.e. the ‘norm’ of good behaviour (cf. Rose, 1999; Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013). Just by speaking the self, the idea is that the student will correct her or his own behaviour. This is what Foucault (2007) referred to as the ‘conduct of conduct’, i.e. how students are governed as well as how they partake in the governing of others and the self. By disclosing one’s own weaknesses, maybe to the teacher or one’s peers, the student conforms to what is deemed good or bad and shows remorse, and a will to change. Thus, the student is simultaneously being governed and governing others, according to the norm of ‘good behaviour’, i.e. the student is creating the self in particular ways.

However, by directing our attention towards the emergence of such a professional ideal, we also get to see something else, i.e. the emergence of a contemporary ideal citizen-subject. After all, it is the fostering of young people in line with this particular ideal that the work of the youth recreation leader is all about. Otherwise, there would be no need to educate students in how to become a democratic, relational, and reflective youth recreation leader. Thus, the specific case focused upon in this article may tell us something more about the ways in which professions, subjects, and society at large may be governed and made governable.

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