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Recognition of prior learning as a technique for fabricating the adult learner: a genealogical analysis on Swedish adult education policy

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This article focuses on the recognition of prior learning and the figure of thought it represents in Swedish policy on adult education. It can be seen as a technique for governing the adult learner and a way of fabricating the subject. We are tracing this thought back in time to see how it has changed and what it consists of. The material analysed consists of Swedish official documents published between 1948 and 2004. We draw on two concepts from the Foucauldian toolbox: genealogy and governmentality. The result shows that this technique for governing and fabricating the adult subject is not new. It has been present during all periods analysed. But there is a difference in how the ideas of competence and knowledge are stressed. Today, the focus is on the subject's specific experience, which means competence. You are constructed as an adult with experiences that are to be evaluated. During the 1960s and 1970s the focus was rather on general experience. There was also a discussion present concerned with the subject's ability to study. During the 1950s this figure of thought focused on ability was dominating. Those with talent/ability to study were to be accepted for adult education.

Introduction

> The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 set the European Union the strategic goal, reaffirmed at the Stockholm European Council in March 2001, of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world. Key elements of the strategy to achieve this were the adaptation of education and training to offer tailored learning opportunities to individual citizens at all stages of their lives; the promotion of employability and social inclusion through investment in citizens' knowledge and competences; the creation of an information society for all; and the fostering of mobility. (European Commission 2001: 6)

Today, according to contemporary narratives about adult education, we live in a society where knowledge is stressed as an essential factor in creating a good and competitive society, the creation of a knowledge-based society. In this discussion, the focus is on research but also the knowledge development of each and every individual. If knowledge is not developed, there is a risk that your country will not be able to compete with the other countries in the world. The report A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform was published in the USA in 1983. This view of the future is present at the European level, as quoted above, and it is reproduced and sustained on the national level in Swedish policy documents (SOU 2001:78: 44). The same risk is expressed concerning Sweden in relation to the rest of the Western World (SOU 1998:51, Ds 2003:23). This construction of risk is a liberal technique of governing. By calculating risk, the subjects can and are encouraged to act in a way that avoids this risk (O'Malley 1996).

In this talk about knowledge, the concept of competence is often used (SOU 2001:78). Each individual must have the competence, which is needed to get an employment. These fears of the future are interwoven with policy decision-making concerning recognition, accreditation or <u>validation</u> of prior knowledge and competence. Society cannot afford not 'to use' the competence individuals have already gained through earlier experiences, even if these are not formally documented. If you can find a way of measuring these experiences and documenting them, both the individual and society will gain (SOU 2001:78). This talk constructs a competent subject.

The focus of this article is on how the adult learner is fabricated by assessment. More precisely, we will focus on what in some countries is called prior learning assessment, and in other countries recognition/accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (RPL/AP(E)L) or <u>validation</u>. This will be analysed by means of empirical material from the official level in Sweden. In Sweden, the concept is 'validering' – a translation of the French word <u>validation</u>. Accordingly, we will use the concept 'validation' to keep to the present Swedish discussion on validation. It should be noted that validation in English often means a form of audit or appraisal of courses or programmes. But the concept is also used synonymously with RPL/AP(E)L, referring to the French <u>validation des acquis de l'experience</u>. It is this latter sense the term has in Sweden, and in this article.

The article takes as its point of departure the present time and then traces the figures of thought related to validation, from the mid 20th century and forwards to the present. The Foucauldian notions of governmentality and genealogy are used as analytical tools. As will be argued, validation as a technique for governing is not new in Sweden, even if the concept was introduced as late as in 1996. Figures of thought present today in the discussion on validation, were present before but in a different way. What has changed is the ways the technique acts in relation to the subject, at the same time as there are different subjects fabricated. (For a more general discussion on Swedish education policy since 1975, see Lundahl 2002.)

Examination or assessment of different aspects of the human body and behaviour is one of the main techniques of governing discussed by Foucault (1991). Examination is related to the disciplinary power, which arises parallel with the development of modern society. Time and space are more thoroughly organised and the pupil in school undergoes surveillance, in which examination is an important part; surveillance of the 'soul'. Through examination, knowledge about the individual is gathered, and this knowledge is the basis of power.

> Disciplinary power, the power in modern social formations, functions through the practice of surveillance. Subjects are constructed in their individuality and subjectivity by a process of itemisation and atomisation as they become subject to the categorisations generated to 'understand' and 'learn' more about them and their actions. These categories are embodied in dossiers, files and records of various kinds. As the need to regulate increases, so does the need to know more about individuals. Hence the knowledge generated and the categories needed to classify this knowledge increases. Surveillance becomes ever more pervasive and intrusive yet without appearing to be oppressive. (Edwards and Usher 1994)

In this way, power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined, which Foucault illustrates in the concept power-knowledge (Foucault 1980). Where there is power, there is knowledge. In these relations, there are subjects present, participating in the discourse from different subject positions. These positions are created, sustained and changed in the discourse (Foucault 1980). The State has a long tradition of producing knowledge about the individual, and the educational system is one of the institutions where this is done – through different types of assessments (test results, grades, etc.). But this examination has apparently largely been limited to knowledge gained through formal education.

The concept of competence and what it means will not be elaborated on here. Pouget and Osborne (2004) have done this extensively in relation to validation. We will, instead, like Edwards and Usher (1994), 'foreground its significance as a key component of a power-knowledge formation, a set of discursive and material practices, which regulate and "form" adults through a process of self-regulation'. However, our analysis in not about the discourse of competence in general, but about the overlapping discussion of validation and the figures of thought related to it.

Research on validation, assessment and Foucault

Research on recognition/accreditation of prior learning or <u>validation</u> has expanded in the last 10 years. But critical analyses are still rare, and the literature on the topic is often descriptive and prescriptive. There are exceptions, and a number of articles have been published. The relation between APL/RPL, outcomes-based education (OBE) and andragogical principles has been discussed (Challis 1996, Cretchley and Castle 2001). RPL can be seen in different ways, and different practices could contribute to social inclusion/exclusion in different ways (Harris 1999). One point is that credits for vocational competence could be awarded to those with no or limited formal education, but there is also a need for cultural changes in the workplace to enhance learning and development (Davies 1999). Recent initiatives have been taken in recognition/validation of prior vocational learning in Sweden, which place the focus on the influence of the school tradition of grading, and the important role of the Swedish language in assessing competence (Andersson *et al.* 2004). The French history of validation seems to include a broader and more holistic approach than the British tradition, which also leads to a discussion about the universalistic claim of a somewhat Western individualistic approach (Pouget and Osborne 2004). This is related to the argument in favour of a more radical perspective in experiential learning and RPL, where situatedness and the collective dimension are taken seriously and knowledge is valued on its own premises (Michelson 1996, 1997).

Research concerning education from a Foucauldian point of view was almost totally absent before the 1990s (Olssen 1999). One of the first edited books about Foucault and education was published in 1990 (Ball 1990). During the 1990s, and in to the new millennium, research in this area expanded and several edited books were published (e.g. Hultqvist and Petersson 1995, Popkewitz and Brennan 1998, Popkewitz *et al.* 2001, Baker and Heyning 2004). During the same period of time, several books, in which governmentality and genealogy are used in different cultural contexts, were published (e.g. Barry *et al.* 1996, Dean and Hindess, 1998, Bratich *et al.* 2003). There is a focus on, among other things, political rationalities of government, which is also the case in a study on educational policy in South Africa carried out by Tikly (2003). These Foucauldian ideas, combined with actor network theory, have been used to analyse lifelong learning too, e.g. workplace learning (Edwards and Nicoll 2004). Edwards (2002, 2003) has also focused on lifelong learning and its significance as regards the changes in the governing of the adult learner.

In research on assessment from a Foucauldian perspective, there are different approaches, but none focused on validation. For example Hoskin (1979, 1982) discusses the prehistory of examination and draws on Foucault's discussion in <u>Discipline and punish</u> about examination as a disciplining technique. He argues that the modern examination still represents, since antiquity, rationality and authority. But it has been implemented in new ways. The disciplinary technique has become invisible representing rational authority. He develops his thoughts in a paper (Hoskin 1993) where he proposes that education is the foundation for understanding the genesis of disciplinarity and the growth of disciplinarity's power. The focus is on how the development of the educational practice – where the examination, the numerical grading of it and writing are central – created a student who learned to learn under constant examination. Examination as a disciplinary technique is also discussed by Graham and Neu

(2004). They study standardisation testing in the educational system in Canada. The Foucauldian notion of genealogy is used on documents and they conclude that these tests serve as a technique for governing; to create governable subjects.

If we switch our focus to research on validation from a Foucauldian point of view, such research seems to be absent. The closest we have found is a study by Peters (2004, 2005), who presents a critical discourse analysis, based mainly on Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), of the APEL practice at an English university. She shows how APEL could be a powerful means of control and exclusion, when the APEL discourse is something the candidates have to learn rather than something that acknowledges what they already know. Thus, even if there is some critical research on validation, analyses focusing on validation inspired by tools from the Foucauldian toolbox, as in this article, have been absent this far.

The article is part of a Foucauldian inspired analysis of lifelong learning and adult education in Sweden. Lifelong learning has been discussed as both a dividing practice and a technique for self-discipline (Andersson and Bergstedt 1996). A critical discussion of assessment practices shows how a limited number of formal tests forces the subject to exercise self-discipline when studying. On the other hand, continuous and more informal assessment (apparently more free and fair) might lead to the experience of constant surveillance and examination (Andersson 2000). In research on the adult learner and the changing ways of governing this subject in adult education in Sweden, two different techniques for governing have been discussed (Fejes 2005) – guidance/advising and risk calculation. A main conclusion is that these techniques are used both during present time and during the 1950s but they differ in how they are used. Today, the techniques employed are in line with a more individualistic view compared to a more collectivistic view during the 1950s. In this article, we will discuss another technique for governing – assessment. More precisely, we will focus on the technique of validation and some figures of thought related to it.

Concepts from the Foucauldian toolbox

Two concepts from the Foucauldian toolbox guide our analysis: genealogy and governmentality. Genealogy is derived from the Latin word *genea*, meaning birth (Beronius 1991). This idea has its roots in Foucault's (1977, 1993) view of history which contrasts with the search for origin and the underlying view that there is an essence to things. Instead history is viewed as containing different ruptures and irregularities; it searches for disparity (Foucault 1977). It focuses on tracing the descent of ideas through nonlinear trajectories as a means of identifying the circumstances that gave birth to those things that still continue to have meaning to us; a questioning of the taken-for-granted ideas of the present time. Further, it focuses on the emergence of specific ways of thinking, which are related to a play of dominations; genealogy re-establishes systems of subjection. In other words, genealogy is an analysis of ideas in the present time. Those are traced back in time and the circumstances in which they emerged are analysed. This is a specific form of history and has also been called a history of the present where history is seen as 'an understanding of the present and of collective memory as the weaving together of multiple historical configurations that establishes connections that make for the common sense' (Popkewitz *et al.* 2001: 4). It is the historical configurations that are focused on, and the researcher tries to trace them back in time. This means that history is not viewed as linear. It is the things taken for granted in our present time that are challenged. The perspective is:

> … introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of received wisdom. (Rose 1999a: 20)

Genealogy is one way of doing policy analysis, discussed by Gale (2001). In this article, our starting point is the Swedish discussion on validation. What figures of thought are present? We try to problematise them and then trace them back in time. What did they look like earlier on? Were they spoken of in other ways, in other linguistic forms, etc?

The second concept used is <u>governmentality</u>. Foucault argues that there has been a process of governmentalisation of the state during the last few hundred years. A change from a repressive centralised power of the prince to punish, to a more decentralised way of governing through institutions and the subjects themselves. The new ways of governing were made possible through the emergence of population as an entity that was to be governed. To attain this goal, statistics and other technologies were invented to manage the population. We could say that governmentality is mentalities/thoughts concerning how governing should be practised. Foucault (2003a) argues that governmentality focuses on the articulation of different kinds of rationalities of government; not on what is the correct way of governing. Such rationality is always based on, or has a relation to, an idea of what to govern. The main focus of a rationality of governing is on how to govern; the conduct of conduct – how to lead the governing. Conduct points at several meanings; to conduct is to lead or guide, and it also means to conduct oneself (ethical aspect), and at the same time it points at our behaviour, whether we have a professional conduct or not. All these meanings merge in the concept of governmentality; governing attempts to shape our behaviour according to a particular set of norms and ideas. This is not done through laws. Instead, the rationalities of governing are inscribed in different tactics that are intended to shape the conduct of the population by working through our desires, aspirations and beliefs (Dean 1999).

> … the finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes it directs; and the instrument of government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiple tactics. (Foucault 2003a: 237)

An analysis of government thus focuses on how to govern and what to govern. In this article, we focus on the technique/tactic of assessment (validation). We will trace it, and those figures of thought attached to it, back in time to see how it was present and how the figures were constructed. What rationality of governing is it based on? How is validation put to work as a governing technique? What kinds of subjects does it create?

The empirical material is selected to represent the present discussion on validation, and its figures of thought. These figures are then traced back in time in material produced earlier on. The empirical material consists of official documents concerned with different practices. This kind of material is interesting because it is the foundation of state-level decision making. We view them as speaking from a state-level subject position. Eighteen reports have been analysed, Seventeen 'SOUs' (official reports from the state) and one 'Ds' (a report from the Ministry of Education). Three reports have validation as the main topic, eight are about municipal adult education, and seven are about admission to higher education.[2] Fourteen of these reports are quoted and/or referred to, in support of the analysis we are performing. All quotations from official Swedish documents have been translated into English.

A history of validation

In this section, we will analyse the discussion on validation and some of the figures of thought that are present. We will also trace these figures back in time and discuss how they are constituted earlier on; our focus is on experience and ability.

In 1996, validation was introduced as a new concept in the Swedish adult education discourse. It seemed to mean the introduction of a new idea. The possibilities of examination

were no longer limited to the results of formal education. On the contrary, the possibilities were now more or less unlimited. It was possible to assess knowledge gained through informal learning and non-formal education, to assess what had been learnt at work and at home, as well as in other countries. The possibility of validation of foreign vocational competence (Andersson *et al*. 2004), to make it easier for immigrants to enter the Swedish labour market, was one of the main arguments for validation (SOU 1998:165, SOU 2001:78). Another main argument was to make education shorter and cheaper – you do not have to study what you have already learnt and that can be assessed through validation.

As mentioned above, the concept 'competence' is often used in relation to validation, and often together with 'knowledge'. Irrespective of which concept is used, the general meaning of competence is always present, i.e. it is construed as being focused on utility value, that knowledge could and should be used. Also of importance is that there is a constructed difference in the notions about the one being governed, a difference between the competent adult in the discussion on municipal adult education and in the discussion on validation. The focus of municipal adult education is on those individuals who have the least. The main target group is the people with the lowest formal knowledge (but who are still expected to take responsibility and be self-directed, etc.). The competent subject is constructed through the educable subject, who is expected to take responsibility, to study and develop his/her competence. The focus of validation, on the other hand, is the competent adult who already has knowledge, although it has yet to be assessed and formally documented. In the first case, the competent adult comes into being through adult education; in the second case, it is the documentation (validation) of competence the subject has already gathered in his/her life, which makes the subject competent. What is similar in these discussions is that the desirable subject to be created in the different forms of adult education is the competent subject.

> Validating, that is, utilising all the knowledge and competence a person has acquired through lifelong and lifewide learning, results, of course, in a variety of different gains….They do not have to study in areas where they already have knowledge and skills. They enter the labour market faster, can earn their living and contribute to the welfare system. Validation also means that people in lifelong learning can complete formal education programmes in less time. Their real competence is made good use of. They can take on more advanced work tasks or, alternatively, study at higher levels than their previous formal level of knowledge would allow for. They contribute to higher economic growth and are paid higher wages. (SOU 2001:78: 146)

In our material, we have found that there are both similarities and differences between the present time (from the mid-1990s) with its explicit discussion on validation, and earlier times (from the end of the 1940s). We will show how the competent subject is constructed in different ways. What makes the competent subject competent? This question is answered in relation to two figures of thought – experience and/or ability. We describe and analyse three different categories of how the view of knowledge/competence and the subject is constructed: Ability means competence, general experience and ability means competence, and specific experience means competence. In other words, what is taken for granted today is not the same as during earlier times. There has been a shift in the discourse, which we will address in the following paragraphs.

We will analyse the discussion on validation in two practices. In municipal adult education formal competence can be acquired for access to higher education, you can prepare for (re)-entering working life, you can study (part-time or full-time) to develop your competence or just for the joy of learning. Validation is presented as an alternative or a complement – validation might lead to full formal competence (which might be vocational), but it could also be seen as a basis of exemptions. In the discussion on higher education the problem of broadening access has been a main problem. In this decade, the formal possibility

to state your real competence, or real proficiency, as the basis of admission to higher education has been introduced. This means a reduction in the power of municipal adult education to prepare for, and assess whether the adult subject has the proper competence required to enter higher education. Today, the university has the power to assess if the real competence is relevant, which means the introduction of a new significant point for assessing what knowledge counts.[3]

Ability means competence

As mentioned earlier, Fejes (2005) has addressed the question of governing techniques during present time and in the 1950s. The results pointed to a subject of talent or ability constructed during the 1950s. The ambition was to get the adults, who had the aptitude, to study. The 'reserve of ability' was to be identified. This would lead to a gain for society when the 'right person' was in the right place according to his/hers inner 'essence'. Every person had an inner essence, which could be developed if the state supplied the correct support. By evaluating adults, those with talent could be picked out, no matter from which social class they came. You need to have the ability to study, which is illustrated in the following quotation:

> From the universities' and university colleges' point of view, the first condition for granting an exemption is that the applicant is presumed to have the aptitude to manage to complete a higher education. The applicant should, in other words, have a study aptitude and some prior knowledge. It is not possible to give specific directives on how to conclude that a person has a study aptitude. One way is to focus on the results from different knowledge tests. In several cases, grades from one or another educational setting, attended by the applicant, should give sufficient guidance, especially if the board of exemption obtains knowledge about the principles of grading. Direct information from teachers, foremen, vocational counsellors and other persons who have had the chance to get to know the applicant and evaluate his study and working performance could be of great value. The value of psychological test methods, to measure ability, is much debated. … Individual aptitude tests like those used by the psychotechnical institute in Stockholm could be worth considering. Such tests could make it easier to evaluate doubtful cases. But the head of the commission of inquiry wants to point out, that the evaluation should not only be made with the help of psychological tests. (SOU 1952:29: 126)

In this paragraph, a talented subject is constructed. Through the talk about study aptitude the subject emerges as someone with the ability to study. The evaluation was to be carried out, not only by focusing on formal merits, but also by means of admission tests. Who had ability and who did not? If you did not pass these tests you were not allowed to study unless you had a special ability to study that could be evaluated: 'However, it should be possible to compensate for lack of prior knowledge through a particularly good aptitude for studies, provided this can be proved.' (SOU 1948:27: 342) These tests are constructed in accordance with the taken-for-granted notion about the subject; in this case, the talented subject which is inscribed in the tests. At the same time, the tests construct this subject.

In these paragraphs, we can see how the study aptitude is constructed as talent. You as an applicant will be evaluated according to your ability/talent, and if you do not have the ability, you will not be permitted to study. Here, we can see what Foucault describes as a dividing practice (Foucault 2003b). Subjectivity is construed through categorisation and division. By means of this procedure, the subject is objectified; he/she becomes an object for knowledge production. At the same time it contributes to a subjectification process where the subject comes into being. Labels such as mad/sane, talented/not talented etc., are put on subjects, this being a central part in the construction of subjects. There is no talented subject from the beginning; instead this subject is constructed through talk about it and through different techniques for creating it.

The adult learner was not constructed as one who had least, and who had to become competent, as in the contemporary adult education discourse. Instead, the subject was constructed as one with talent/ability. The focus was on constructing a subject with a good study aptitude; a competent subject. This discussion on ability can be seen as a figure of thought that is present in the discourse on adult education. The main idea was to identify and select the subject who was part of the 'reserve of ability'. We have chosen to call this period 'ability means competence'. Ability was construed as a requirement for studying and the talented subjects were to be identified.

General experience and ability means competence

In the previous section, the focus was on a figure of thought focused on ability/talent. This idea was also constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, but here we can see a change, from the construction of an elite of individuals with ability to the value of general experience and equality on a collective level, but still with the idea of ability present.

The discussion of broadening access to higher education evolved at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s. Two new techniques for governing potential adult students were introduced – the 25:4-system (first 25:5), and the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (SweSAT). Both these techniques are based on the idea of assessment, but in different ways.

The 25:4-system, still in use but questioned today, means that anyone who is 25 years old and has four years experience from working life has the basic eligibility to enter higher education. (Grades at the upper secondary school level in English and Swedish are also required.) Here, experience is construed as competence in a general way, independent of what the subject has done during these years. Work experience is seen as giving the subject a general introduction in society. This general introduction, and a variation between students, was seen as important for higher education and working life. Thus experience was valued on a general and collective level. This idea of the general and collective is combined with a notion about equality. Focusing on the general makes it possible for persons from underrepresented groups to enter higher education. This is talked about on a collective level. It does not matter what person is admitted. Instead, it matters that the person represents the lowest social group. Any experience means valuable competence, and even if the individual does not know everything, there is a collective competence, which is important. (SOU 1970:21, SOU 1974:71)

Working life experience is given another general value related to the self-governing process. It could be the basis of a better choice concerning study programme and future profession, an idea expressed explicitly later on (SOU 1985:57). There is also an expectation that a self-governing process, based on ability and motivation, will be part of the selection process. Only those with sufficient ability and high motivation will leave a job to study (SOU 1970:21). Still, there was a tension between this idea of general experience and the expressed requirements of special eligibility to meet the expectations in a study programme. But even this need of specific competence could actually be met through 'real competence'. 'CC [the Committee on Competence] wants to emphasise that applicants with real competence, although accounted for in untraditional ways, in relation to the requirements of a certain education, should not be excluded for formal reasons.' (SOU 1974:71: 101)

> A higher variation in the recruitment to professions with higher education could be in the public interest; so far, recruitment from the lowest social group to higher education has been relatively low. Also different dispositions and interests should be represented among the students. A broader base for the recruitment to higher education means not only a rising number of individuals but also the inclusion of social groups that previously, in reality, have only had limited access to this educational level. (SOU 1970:21: 99)

> Admission to higher education is also viewed as a question of making better <u>use of the resources of society</u>. It is necessary to make use of a large educational reserve. (SOU 1970:21: 149, emphasis in original)

Here, there is a notion about different aptitudes or dispositions being represented. Thus, a notion of ability/talent is constructed. Society will benefit from broadening recruitment to higher education. Thus a reserve of educable people is constructed who have not had the chance to study because of the social group they belong to. It is not only general experience that counts. Ability is still important, which could be seen in texts about admission to adult education as well as higher education. We can again see what Foucault (2003b) calls dividing practices. The educable subject is constructed in the talk about it, and through the knowledge gathered. This can also be seen in the discussion about municipal adult education.

> A relatively free evaluation of both the formal and real aptitude to study of the pupil is especially necessary in adult education. Accordingly, in the admission process, you should take into account, in addition to previous school grades, circumstances such as working experience, different appointments, self-studies, etc. Moreover, personal circumstances, which emerge in an interview with the applicant, should be added to this. Among the applicants, there are both older and younger persons, who have dropped out of their studies because of temporary failures, school fatigue, lack of ability to adapt to the working forms of the compulsory school, illness, etc., or who late in life have got the ambition to study. Lack of formal merits should not be the only hindrance for applicants to be admitted to adult education. But sometimes it can be appropriate to offer teaching as preparation for studying if the applicant is evaluated as having ability to study. (SOU 1965:60: 85)

Here, there is a view that the individuals should be able to gain admission to adult education even if they do not have the formal merits. It is one's aptitude for studying that is to be evaluated. We can see how, besides the figure of thought concerning experience, there is a figure of thought where also the individual's aptitude to study in terms of ability are regarded as important. Someone should make the judgement about who will be permitted to study. This is based both on a notion about an individual's 'real' aptitude for studying and his/her formal merits. In the notion about real aptitude, there seems to exist a view that not everybody should be permitted to study because some people do not have sufficient ability**.** The evaluation is based on former grades, interviews, etc. The evaluation results in a division between the individuals with the aptitude for studying and those without. The main picture created in the text about municipal adult education is that the 'real' aptitude for studying should be focused on for admission to adult education. 'What is important is that the pupil has a real possibility of benefiting from the teaching.' (SOU 1965:60: 169) Through this talk about study aptitude the subject is fabricated as someone with or without ability.

These parallel ideas about ability and general experience are combined in <u>SweSAT,</u> which was constructed as an admission test for higher education. It is a general multiple-choice test, with similarities to an intelligence test. It could be described as a test of general ability, constructed to measure and rank the persons who take the test in order of preference related to the ability to successfully complete any higher education course or programme (scholastic aptitude). Thus, the test is used in the selection process, to gain admission. When the test was introduced in the 1970s, the target group was adults, the 25:4s who wanted to enter higher education and needed not only to be eligible but also to pass the selection process. (Since 1991, everyone can use the test result in the selection process.) The idea is that the test can measure general study competence – in order to select those most likely to succeed. A consequence is also that persons with this general competence are more likely to gain access to the most attractive professions.

The introduction of a scholastic aptitude test was expected to compensate for the fact that pupils from lower social groups were less successful at school, and to reduce the discrimination this leads to in the higher education selection process.

> Pupils from lower social groups do not do themselves justice in the same way as pupils with equal ability but from more favoured homes as regards conditions for study. The introduction of a test of study suitability as a complementary instrument of selection cannot, it is true, eliminate these problems, but at least reduce them. (SOU 1970:21: 220)

Notably, experience and ability are not used as separate alternatives. The 25:4 system gives eligibility and SweSAT is a ranking and selection technique. But in the selection process the idea of adding points for work experience <u>and</u> the test result is introduced – general experience <u>and</u> ability are equated with competence. A test could measure aptitude, but not all knowledge and competence gained from experience, and not the motivation to study which is expected to be the result of work experience (SOU 1970:21).

In this part of the article, we have discussed two different figures of thought present in the adult education discourse. On the one hand, we have the construction of the idea of experience meaning competence. There is a focus on acknowledging general experience as part of competence. This figure of thought, as will be discussed in the next part, dominates the discussion on validation today, but with a focus on specific rather than general experience. However, the notion of ability was also present in the 1960s and 1970s. People were construed as having different aptitudes for studying and these had to be addressed by society. In this talk, there is also a notion of equality. Persons from lower social groups should be recruited to higher education, and therefore we should not focus solely on their aptitude to study. All in all, this points to the fact that during this period of time, both experience and ability were construed as representing competence. The competent adult has the ability to study as well as working life experience. This period can be seen as having a conflict between two different figures of thought. The idea of ability is challenged by the idea of experience. This can be related to the constructed division between heredity and environment. During the 1950s the former dominated (ability as mainly a matter of heredity), and during the 1960s and 1970s, the latter dominated (experience from the environment). As will be seen in the next part, these changes continue to take place. Today, the environment dominates the discourse.

Specific experience means competence

Since 1996, there has been an explicit discussion about validation in the discourse of adult education in Sweden. In the official reports on adult education (municipal adult education and higher education) from the mid-1990s until the present day, there is a view that validation can take into account the actual or 'real' knowledge/competence/proficiency a person has. What is asked for is the competence gained from relevant and specific individual experiences.

This view thus means that a person's actual knowledge can be measured by means of different instruments. Knowledge is something acquired. It is not only produced in the formal school system, but a lot of learning takes place in a person's everyday life. Everyday, different experiences that produce knowledge are acquired. Learning takes place in different settings: formally, non-formally and informally. All this learning should, and can, be explored and measured.

> Through validation the real and actual knowledge a person has acquired through formal learning, i.e. organized education in the official educational system, or through non-formal learning, i.e. education organized parallel with the official educational system or through informal learning, in working life, in everyday life, where learning often is an unplanned side-effect not organized in a certain way, is mapped out and documented. (Ds 2003:23: 21)

This means that it is the 'entire' subject that should be measured. This is carried out in many different forms; interviews, documents or earlier formal (but not accepted in Sweden) education or earlier experience on the labour market, etc. (SOU 2001:78: 56).

In this discourse today, it is more or less taken for granted that experience means competence. You learn through experience, which means that if you have experience, you also are competent. It was possible to some extent to measure this competence earlier, but it could be done to a much higher degree (SOU 1997:158).

What knowledge is construed as valuable? It is the individual, specific knowledge, discussed as competence. Experience and competence are not discussed on the collective level, as in the 1970s. It is the individual who has to have the specific experience and, consequently, competence.

In addition to this, the experience has to be from the 'right' area, for example in the working life, in relation to the type of knowledge asked for. It has to be specific. Experience per se is of no interest. Individual experience and the competence that has been developed should be assessed in relation to specific criteria. What is construed as competence is whether the subject is able to enter a vocation or a certain educational programme. Mechanisms of exclusion are in play. It is important to be competent, but it is also important to have good measures for sorting out who is competent enough. An example is the notion that an assessment of the specific competence in relation to Swedish criteria is necessary. It is not enough to look at documents of foreign formal vocational competence. As a result an examination and testing organisation is considered to be necessary (SOU 1998:165).

In the discussion on higher education, the traditional and general techniques of selection for admission to higher education are questioned on the grounds that they do not value specific and individual competencies.

> There is a large risk that applicants with good aptitude for the education programme in question, but with more unusual merits, will not do themselves justice if you only use grades and SweSAT in the selection process. In addition to this, there are in many cases other qualifications that are important for the education programme applied for than those measured by grades or SweSAT. The most obvious example is art education, where you traditionally make the selection based on entrance tests or samples provided submitted by the applicant. (SOU 1995:71: 84)

Another example is when/if work experience could help to gain admission to higher education. The real and specific merits are presented as being crucial. In contrast to the older but still used techniques described above, and this older model of mechanically taking into account work experience as a merit irrespective of what it consists of is questioned (SOU 2004:29).

In addition to this, the idea of specific selection tests for certain professional areas, 'subject area tests' or 'domain tests', is discussed (SOU 2004:29). The ambition is to find a better way of measuring ability and predicting success, compared with the general test used this far (SweSAT) as an alternative to grades in the selection process. Competence can be measured in a number of ways.

> Recently, there has been increasing interest in additional tests for admission to higher education. One reason for this is that other talents and abilities than those measured in grades and SweSAT are considered to be relevant in relation to even more educational programmes, and should be considered in the selection for a coveted higher education. (SOU 1995:71: 85)

Here, we can see how competence is discussed also in terms of specific 'talents' or abilities. But the figure of ability is marginalised to a high degree today when compared to a more central position in the earlier discourses analysed above. It should be noted that abilities are now discussed in a specific sense, in contrast to the more general ability to study focused on earlier. Thus, here we see a parallel with the shift in the discourse, where the idea of experience has changed, from general to specific.

In this part, we have discussed how the present discourse of adult education assigns value to individual, specific experiences, resulting in some sort of competence. Any relevant learning should be explored and assessed, which means that the entire subject could be measured as a basis of governing and self-governing. The idea of ability is marginalised but still present, and there is a shift from the general to the specific with respect to both ability and experience.

Back to the present

In this article, we have focused on validation as a technique for fabricating the adult learner. The results show that this technique is not new. Assessment has been a part of the educational system for a very long time. This contributes to knowledge production and objectification of the subjects. Actually, there is also a long tradition of 'validation' of literacy in Sweden. There were no schools for ordinary people in the 17th century, but literacy was assessed by the clergymen, through the institution of 'catechetical meetings' where they met and examined people in private houses. The results were governing people's private lives – if they failed the examination, they could be excluded from Communion and, as a result, not be allowed to get married (Johansson 1998).

The construction of the competent subject today is made by means of, amongst other things, the technique of validation. The figure of thought constructed, when making the subject competent, is specific experiences. You are seen as an adult with experiences that are to be evaluated and formulated, and this process makes you competent. This figure of thought about experience was also present, but constructed a bit differently, in the 1960s and 1970s. A general value was assigned to experience in the construction of application to and selection for higher education and municipal adult education. At the same time, the idea of ability was present, something which is marginalised today. The aim was constructed as a broader representation from different social groups in the educational system, in addition to which a broader representation of ability was also needed. One of the conditions of possibility to talk in this way about the adult subject was the will to change society. During this period, there was a focus on getting the less educated people sufficiently competent to be at the disposal of the labour market (SOU 1975:59). This figure of thought regarding ability was also present, and much stronger, in the 1950s. Then, it was the talented adult who should study, and ability in itself was viewed as constructing a competent adult. The focus was on people with ability/talent and they were constructed through the talk about them. The construction of ability tests was based on taken-for-granted notions about the talented subject. This subject was inscribed in the tests at the same time as the tests constructed the subject.

The construction of knowledge (experience/ability) and subject expressed in these documents has consequences for how the subject is governed. The subject is constructed as being aware of the wide range of experience gathered in his/her lifetime. It is up to the subject to seek adult education guidance so that he/she can be measured and made aware of his/her knowledge and competencies. In this way, the subject is measured more thoroughly than before. There is a governing of the soul (Rose 1999b) going on, where the subject is expected to be autonomous and self-governing. By opening up our inner desires in conversations with experts like study counsellors, psychiatrists, doctors, etc., we get advice on which paths we

can choose in our lives. Commercials, television, magazines, etc. also present these choices. In all this, we ourselves have to choose, and in this way we are created as autonomous subjects. In the process of validation, you are also made aware of the fact that everything you do counts and can be subjected to assessment/evaluation. This is a way of governing from a distance where no one tells you what to do. Instead, you make the decisions yourself. The rules laid down by society are thus in themselves ways of governing the adult subject. You know what is required and then you try to acquire it.

> Let us start by stating the following: all social systems and rules result in adaptive behaviour and optimising strategies! This is true of social insurance and taxes as well as rules for admission to higher education. We should not believe anything else. (SOU 2004:29: 71)

An awareness of how the rules govern the adult learner emerges in the discussions in the official documents today. This quotation in itself constitutes a break in the discourse. The construction of the idea of validation has been dominated by the idea of a reactive assessment of what has been learnt before. Here the idea of proactive governing is clearly visible. The subject is not constructed solely through the expectation of studying and gaining formal competence; nor solely through the additional expectation of validating prior learning. The construction also includes adaptation and strategic action when it comes to learning and acquiring knowledge/competence.

Assessment, including validation, is a technique that colonises the human as a knowledgeable subject; he is created as a subject by being an object of knowledge production. One way of reasoning about this colonisation of the entire subject is the objective of knowledge. Formal knowledge has been, and is, a way of controlling the subject. The documentation in itself is an objectification of the subject and is the starting point from where techniques of governing are set in motion. Knowledge about the subject to be governed is the basis of all governances (Foucault 1991) and therefore informal knowledge has not been given the same attention. What we now see is a trend where the informal and non-formal competence/knowledge should be transformed into formal knowledge. Consequently, this knowledge will also be the foundation of governing and control. Everything you do, lifelong and lifewide, constitutes experiences that are part of the construction of the competent adult. The subject to be governed is constructed as a different subject than was previously the case.

If we look at the discourse of adult education in general, there is a strong emphasis today on adults educating themselves and being part of lifelong learning. Those persons who risk being marginalised should be included in lifelong learning by attending adult education (Fejes 2005) and/or through validation. What is created in the discourse is the competent adult; a person who takes responsibility for his/her own learning, is autonomous, self-directed and active (Fejes 2005), and who has valuable experience and wants to be assessed according to prior learning as well as future learning.

Notes

1. Per Andersson and Andreas Fejes have contributed equally to this article.
2. Validation: SOU 1998:165, SOU 2001:78, Ds 2003:23. Municipal adult education: SOU 1948:27, SOU 1965:60, SOU 1974:54, SOU 1975:59, SOU 1996:27, SOU 1997:158, SOU 1998:51, SOU 1999:141. Admission to higher education: SOU 1952:29, SOU 1970:21, SOU 1974:71, SOU 1985:57, SOU 1995:41, SOU 1995:71, SOU 2004:29.
3. Higher education could be seen as part of adult education to a higher degree in Sweden than in many other countries. 50% of the students are over 25 years old, 30% are over

30 years old, and 10% are over 40 years old. The 'untraditional' students are not fewer than the 'traditional' students (traditional in the sense that they have a background of direct transition from upper secondary school) (SOU 2004:29).

Acknowledgements

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