Projections based on historical relationships (bearing in mind the uncertainties of future projections) suggest that if all OECD countries could boost their average PISA scores by 25 points over the next two decades, the aggregate gain of OECD GDP would be USD 115 trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2010...Bringing all countries up to the OECD’s best performing education system in PISA, Finland, would result in gains in the order of USD 260 trillion. It is the quality of learning outcomes, not the length of schooling, which makes the difference. (OECD, 2012b, p. 90)

Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of Europe’s strategy to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie at the heart of the Lisbon strategy, at the same time as promoting personal fulfilment, social cohesion and active citizenship (European Union, 2009, p. 1)

A quality education throughout life is the birthright of every woman, man and child. In turn, education, particularly that of girls and women, aids progress across all-development goals.(UNESCO, 2011, p. 5)

Multilateral organizations, in the form of economic cooperation, political cooperation, or cooperation aiming at fostering peace and human rights, attribute considerable interest and funding into the field of education. Their impact on policies, public discourses, and research is considerable. It is therefore important to critically explore how these organizations conceive of education, and what this makes way for. The citations above point to education as a means to foster economic growth and progress, but also to education as a human right that increases opportunities for the learning subjects. This evinces simultaneous articulations of “competing paradigms” in educational multilateralism (Chan, 2007). According to Chan the multilateral educational discourses are the market discourse, human
rights discourse, and discourses on cultural identity. She found the latter in documents from the World Social Forum. This is not a formal multilateral organization, and therefore not included in the data for this paper. The salience of different discursive frames and rationales in the multilateral educational discourse that the citations evinces, have consequences for how to make sense of education in both a global and local perspective. What sort of education, who the education is for, and what the expected outcomes are. In this paper I will therefore raise questions concerning the possible subjectivities that emerge from how the organizations formulate objectives, aims, and means in the field of education.

OECD, EU and UNESCO are multilateral organizations acting on a global educational arena, setting the agenda for educational policies, and forming educational discourses. This agenda can be seen as both a result of and what has brought about, the power and salience of notions and expressions such as knowledge economy, human capital, knowledge capital, human resources, etc., i.e. a way of making sense of education as intrinsic to economic development (Robertson, 2005). This knowledge economy discourse, and by discourse I do not refer only to language but also to practices and materialities, fuses notions and practices of economy with those of education.

In the past years there has been a global movement of educational reforms dominated by neoliberal ideas (Ball, 2006; 2012; Buras & Apple, 2005; Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004). In order to explore if and how some of the most dominant multilateral organizations contribute to these reforms and the shifts in how education is dominantly perceived, this paper focus on (global) discourses on education in three multilateral organizations. The aim is to employ public discourses, in the form of policy documents from OECD, EU and UNESCO in order to explore how economic and political subjectivities simultaneously emerge and are obfuscated in global discourses on education. By using the
simple question “Why Education?” as point of departure I explore how education is constituted in the documents and what sort of subjectivities that are presumed and thus constituted in and by these documents.

**Perspectives and theoretical framework**

The paper draws on poststructural perspectives on texts and discourses (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The poststructural perspective points to a non-foundational and non-intentional approach. Consequently, the texts are not regarded as reflections of ideologies or specific aims. The focus of the study is therefore not to identify intentions or objectives, but to investigate how subjectivities and education are constituted in the text. This is further emphasized by viewing the texts from a posthumanist perspective which shifts the focus from regarding texts as human products to an approach where they are seen as productive materialities (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), i.e., a shift of interest from how they have been made and what their intentions are to what they make way for.

Another point of departure are Fairclough’s notions of “interdiscursivity” and “medialization of politics” which point to how discourses are repeated in different contexts, drawing on each other, and hereby both affirming and displacing each other, and to how politics is presented and made intelligible in public media (Fairclough, 1995; 2000). I am fully aware of the differences between Fairclough’s view of discourse as ideology and a product of human interests and intentions, and the nonfoundational conception of discourse that signify discourse theory. Nonetheless, I have not so far been convinced about a definite opposition or incompatibility between discourse analysis as a methodology, and poststructuralist and posthumanist theories. I find posthumanist concepts such as territorialisation, retrerritorialisation, and molar lines working in a very similar way as concepts such as articulations, discursive formations, textuality, intertextuality, discourses
and hegemony. I find that these methodological and theoretical perspectives makes it possible to “map” or deconstruct intersections and “pluggings” of different practices, articulations and/or materialisations as open and undecided assemblages/discursive formations, and explore how these assemblages/discursive formations make possible and obfuscate differing possibilities in terms of the aims of education and subject positions of those who are to be educated. The difference between using a poststructural perspective and adhering to a more strict critical discourse analysis is apparent in relation to a previous study by Robertson (2005) where she used critical discourse analysis for analyses of documents from the World Bank, OECD and the UK government. The aim of her study was to ascertain the ideological underpinning of the documents, whereas the objective of the present study is to explore what the articulations of education make way for.

In investigating constitutions of subjectivity in discourses on education I am also indebted to Biestas’ analytical concepts of education as encompassing qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2010). These are useful in the analysis of how education is constituted and what these constitutions entail in relation to knowledge and subjectivity. Drawing on poststructuralist and posthumanist theory, and informed by the philosophy by Biesta, the paper is based on a notion of education as on the one hand practices, and on the other hand as politics. The latter make me ask the question about what subjectivities emerge from the notion of education that is constituted in the texts.

**Method**

The conclusions and arguments are based on discourse analysis of multilateral policy-documents. In line with critical discourse analysis, I have identified articulations of central concepts. The ambition has been to “map” intertextual articulations, that is how articulations are repeated and reiterated within and between the texts and how these
(de/re)territorialisations constitute differing concepts of what educations is and can accomplish. The aim of the analysis is to explore what economic and political subject positions are made possible in these differing sets of data. The focus is thus on the documents as productive, rather than as products.

Data

The data consists of OECD, EU and UNESCO documents. The choice of documents from these organizations is informed by an interested in how education and the subjectivity of those subjected to education are articulated on a multilateral global arena which are likely (or not) to have consequences for policymakers and individuals in different parts of the world.

The cooperation in the EU has two main and intertwined objectives. One is economic cooperation to ensure continuous economic growth, and the other is political cooperation in order to secure peace in Europe. The EU form common educational policies for Europe, influence national educational reforms, as well as fund educational projects within and outside the EU. The aim of EU documents on education is to use education in order to make Europe more compatible on a global market (European Union, 2009). EU educational initiatives have been – and are – influential in instigating policy changes. One example is the mainstreaming of higher education in the Bologna process.

The objective of OECD is “to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world” (UNESCO, 2013a). OECD is influential on the global educational arena not the least because of the Program for International Study Assessment (PISA), which is launched and monitored by the OECD. Like the EU, OECD is not an expert organization on education. Its’ objective is to sustain economic growth (Bank, 2012). As we all know, PISA is repeatedly referred to by policymakers and media-
representations of education in different countries. The outcomes of this global ranking is given importance in national and international education policies by the neoliberal stress on comparison and competition where besides PISA, rankings from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement; TIMMS and PIRLS, instigate and are used as arguments for educational reforms. These international ranking systems, how they are used to support neoliberal reforms, and the effects of these reforms have been subjected to severe critique by educational scholars (see e.g., Ball, 2006; Giroux, 2003; Hartley, 2008; Hursh & Henderson, 2011; Lundahl, 2002; Schuetze, 2006).

Differing from the EU and OECD, which both are organizations for economic cooperation, the mission of UNESCO “…is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information”. (UNESCO, 2013a). UNESCO is important on the global educational arena by publishing global reports on education, and running educational projects in different parts of the world in cooperation not only with governments, but also with NGOs and companies. Like the EU and OECD, UNESCO is an influential agent in global education, not the least in the developing countries. The three organizations produce an immense quantity of documents and webpages on education. Considering that education often is regarded as a national task and endeavor this is interesting in itself. For this study I have chosen documents where the organizations present their work and their aims.

I have from the EU analyzed the document Education Today 2020 – ET2020– (European Union, 2009), where the commission presents its educational strategy to make the EU into “a world leading knowledge-economy” (European Union, 2009, p. 2). The OECD documents I have analyzed are the latest annual report “Education at a Glance 2012”
(OECD, 2012a) and the latest OECD reports on education “Education Today 2013” (OECD, 2012b). The latter is a summary report of OECD work produced in the recent years. Concerning UNESCO I have looked at the webpage for the directorate of education (UNESCO, 2013a) and the brochure where the work and goals of the directorate is presented (UNESCO, 2011). I regard these different multilateral documents as interventions in educational politics and policies.

The intended readers of these documents consist of at least four categories. This is salient in the OECD document Education at a Glance;

> Education at a Glance addresses the needs of a range of users, from governments seeking to learn policy lessons to academics requiring data for further analysis to the general public wanting to monitor how its country’s schools are progressing in producing world-class students. (OECD, 2012a, p. 3)

The category of officials, such as policymakers and politicians on national levels, are addressed in their capacity to influence the organization and content of national education. This is reflected in recommendations on what is needed in order to improve education. A second category is academics as us. The intention here is to present data for further research, i.e., to set the agenda for research on education. A third category, which is not salient in the quote above, consists of donors and representatives of members of the organizations. This is especially the case with the UNESCO documents. In addition, because the documents are published on the internet and thereby made widely accessible, they are also aimed at “the public” in a broad sense. This means that they on the one hand can be seen as tools to set the public agenda on education and on the other as means to strengthen the transparency of the organizations.


Education and/as economy

Retextualizations of central concepts and ideas

There are apparent similarities between how the objectives of education are constructed in these documents. One is how they all constitute education as a tool for prosperity and a better future. All three organizations also stress the need for lifelong learning as a process that begins with Early Childhood Education and continues through the whole life course. The terminology of strategic or overarching goals is also strikingly similar. The EU strategic objectives “lifelong learning”, “improving quality and efficiency”, “promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship”, “enhancing creativity and innovation” (European Union, 2009), are repeated in the OECD, and UNESCO documents with identical or similar wordings, constituting a common global discourse of education.

Furthermore, they all construct, and take for granted, that education should be arranged, monitored, assessed and financed by public means, by the governments in the different countries. Hereby they assert compulsory education as a part of a welfare society. UNESCO states that their mission is to “help countries to develop inclusive, holistic and balanced education systems from early childhood to the adult years” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 16). Although UNESCO recounts cooperation with NGOs and the private sector (UNESCO, 2013b), the responsibility for education is attributed to countries. This is also the case for OECD (OECD, 2012b, p. 11-13) and the EU, which asks “member states” to adhere to a common framework for “national education” (European Union, 2009).

Similarities between the documents are by no means surprising. There is a considerable overlapping of the constituency of these organizations. Most of the member states of the EU also are members of the OECD and UNESCO. Furthermore, they have a
history of cooperation on educational matters, not the least between the EU and OECD. In
addition, there is a fluctuation of staff between the organizations (Schuetze, 2006, p. 296).

*Education as investment and/or human right*

But there are also differences. There is a contrast between the OECD-documents and the
EU-documents on the one hand, and the UNESCO documents on the other (cf. Schuetze,
2006, p. 295). The aim of education is in the former dominantly formulated within the
framework of an economic discourse. The latter points to education as a means to elevate
poverty, foster democracy, and strengthen individuals and subordinated social groups (not
the least women) (cf. Robertson, 2005). Although the three organizations all emphasize
what education can do for the nations or countries (UNESCO), member states (EU), or
economies (OECD), OECD and EU stress education as a prerequisite for economic
progress, while UNESCO emphasize elevating poverty, foster democracy, and empowering
individuals and subordinated categories. OECD and EU hereby dominantly constitute
subjects in relation to an economic market focusing on how learners can contribute to a
growing economy, whereas UNESCO constitutes political subjects who can contribute to
society both by political interventions and economic development. The difference of
emphasis is salient in how OECD and EU use the term “growth” for the economic benefits
of education, in contrast to UNESCO which uses the term “development”.

*Education as economic resource*

Education is in the documents subordinate to the economy, and hereby made into a tool in
the interests of global capitalism. The heading for the editorial of *Education at a Glance* reads
13). This is repeated in ET2020 which is described as a subdocument to “Europe 2020”, the
EU’s strategy for “smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth over the coming decade”
(European Union, 2009, p. 1). In accounting for the indicators of the situation of education in the OECD member “economies” it is stated:

The indicators provide information on the human and financial resources invested in education, how education and learning systems operate and evolve, and the returns to educational investments. (OECD, 2012a, p. 17)

People labeled “human resources” are placed in juxtaposition with “financial resources”, and both forms of “resources” are “invested”, and because they are “investments” the investors can expect “returns”. This is a reiteration of the human capital and knowledge economy theory which expect great yields from investments in education (cf. Schuetze, 2006), and which can be seen as a recontextualization of an economic discourse to an educational discourse, or as Fairclough once termed it “a colonization” of education by the economy (Fairclough, 1993). The overarching rational for the OECD is consequently constructed as monitoring and steering education through the PISA, PIAAC, and TALIS systems and global reports and evaluations of educational outcomes, in order to produce subjects that both serve and are served by the interests of a global economic market. The economic benefits of education are in Education at a Glance not only or primarily constructed as benefits for “the economies”. The document strongly stresses the economic benefits of education for individuals. It states that those with longer education cope better in a situation of economic recession. This argument is supported by figures of unemployment: “For all OECD countries together, the unemployment rate in 2010 was roughly one-third less for men with higher education than for men with upper secondary education; for women with higher education, it was two-fifths less.” (OECD, 2012a, p. 13). The document then goes on to present figures that not only show that those with higher education are more likely to find jobs even in bad times, the jobs they get are also better paid.
The gaps in earnings between people with higher education and those with lower levels of education not only remained substantial during the global recession, but grew even wider. In 2008, a man with higher education could expect to earn 58% more than his counterpart with no more than an upper secondary education, on average across OECD countries. By 2010, this premium increased to 67%. Similarly, in 2008, women with higher education had an average earnings premium of 54% compared to their upper secondary-educated peers. By 2010, this premium grew to 59%. (OECD, 2012a, p. 13)

The citation makes individual economic interests into a major argument for higher education. This is further stressed by figures in dollars on the economic gain of a tertiary degree. For men it is stated to be, on average in the 28 OECD countries, USD 388 300 and for women USD 250 700 (OECD, 2012a, p. 162). In addition to individual economic benefits education is also claimed to bring about better health and a longer life expectancy (OECD, 2012a, p. 202). The accounts of individual economic benefits are followed by renditions of how society benefits from the higher tax returns that the high earnings induce, and a relation between high education and low demands for social welfare, which is an additional gain from the perspective of society. The constitution of learners as predominantly economic subjects is consequently dominant and strong in this document, and so is the constitution of society as predominantly an economic institution or entity.

The OECD economy discourse of education is reiterated in the ET2020. As mentioned earlier, the overall objective for a common strategy for education is to “make Europe into a world-leading knowledge economy” (European Union, 2009, p. 1). This emphasis on the economy is however slightly mitigated by also bringing forward other values, such as “the personal, social and professional fulfillment of all citizens”, and “...democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue” (European Union, 2009, p. 2). The former of these objectives points to an intrinsic value of
education, and as valuable for individuals not only in economic terms. The latter positions education as an asset for the nation state, in that it brings about social cohesion, i.e., brings about loyal and active citizens. There is a tension between economic and personal benefits also in the formulations concerning lifelong learning. ET2020 states

The challenges posed by demographic change and the regular need to update and develop skills in line with changing economic and social circumstances call for a lifelong approach to learning and for education and training systems which are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world” and ..the establishment of more flexible learning pathways… enhancing people's employability and adaptability, (European Union, 2009, p. 3).

These are formulations that make way for subjects that are willing, in their own and society’s interest to learn new things, start over, move on, and to adapt. Although this could be seen as mainly in the interest of the economy, it is simultaneously made into the interest of the individual. This reasoning presumes that technological innovations, market fluctuations, recession, and changes on the labor market are results of a natural force, rather than consequences of economic and political decisions and activities. The economy is hereby constituted as foundational.

A taken for granted neoliberal discourse on economy and education

Mundy claims that the economic discourse of the OECD documents on education is better described as “a social and institutionally embedded liberalism” rather than as neo-liberal (Mundy, 1999, p. 28). She states that differing from the neo-liberal educational discourse there is no emphasize on market solutions to educational insufficiencies. Although I agree that the neoliberal educational discourse might not be is explicit in the documents, it is implicitly taken for granted. Although the emphasis on education as intertwined with
economy in the OECD and EU documents can be seen as a reiteration of a general capitalist market economy rather than a neoliberal ideology, there are formulations, not the least in the OECD documents, indicating that the neoliberal educational reforms in some cases are taken for granted or promoted. This is not only evident by the promotion of the PISA system as a means to assess quality in education, but also in some of the policy directions in *Education Today 2013* stating; “Develop skills for *effective school leadership* (my italics) and make it an attractive profession”; “Increase *job differentiation* (my italics) between new and experienced teachers to improve *effectiveness*” (my italics); “Manage *school choice* (my italics) to avoid segregation and increased inequities”; “*Target low performance* (my italics) regardless of background”; Make better links between educational research, policy and practice” (OECD, 2012b, p. 12-13). These formulations repeat expressions and notions common in the neoliberal educational discourse. They refer to the management ideology, the stress on competition and excellence, school choice, differentiation and practices based on research and evidence. I find the reference to school choice of special interest, because although it can be seen as an implicit critique of segregating effects of school choice, the suggestion is not to abolish these reforms, but to manage them.

*Social goals, education and politics*

In documents from the three organizations there are simultaneous articulations of a discourse of education as a tool to achieve prosperity and economic growth and as a tool to enhance democracy and create social justice. These discourses inform and are often intertwined with each other. For example following the rendition of societal and economic benefits of tertiary degrees the OECD document *Education at a Glance*, moves on to non-monetary benefits such as longer life expectancy, increased voting rates, and more supportive attitudes towards equal rights for ethnic minorities (OECD, 2012a, p. 14). The
articulation of voting rates together with tolerance can be seen as constitutions of learners as political subjects, although the political subjectivity is limited to aspects that foster social cohesion and loyalty to the political system of the nation state. The political subjectivity thus becomes, just like education, subordinated to the economy which benefits from social stability.

Social goals are also subordinated economic goals. *Education Today 2013* states: “OECD analysis has shown that there need be no contradiction between equity and efficiency, and indeed has underlined how damaging to economic as well as social goals is the phenomenon of exclusion and widespread under-achievement “(OECD, 2012b, p. 100). This subordination of the social to the economy is also salient in the arguments for investments in Early Childhood Education: “Strengthening equity in education is cost beneficial, and investing in early years yields high returns, since it makes it possible to reap the benefits and reinforce equity efforts made at subsequent education levels” (OECD, 2012b, p. 101). This is in contrast to the UNESCO documents where education for all is represented as a right, regardless of economic benefits.

Differing from most proponents of neoliberal educational agendas, the OECD and EU both stress education as a means to achieve social cohesion, which is constituted as important both for the economy and the nation states. ET2020 asserts that:

> Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners — including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants — complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning.(European Union, 2009, p. 4)
Despite the above recognition of marginalized categories, the emphasis is not on the rights and needs of these persons but on the threat to social cohesion that marginalization entails. Education, rather than economic redistribution is constituted as a means to overcome this marginalization. This is evident in the following citation:

OECD analysis has shown that there need be no contradiction between equity and efficiency, and indeed has underlined how damaging to economic as well as social goals is the phenomenon of exclusion and widespread under-achievement. (OECD, 2012b, p. 100)

It is consequently in the interest of the economy that social tensions and distressed is to be avoided. This makes ambitions such as equal education for all into economic goals rather than social or political goals.

The OECD and EU documents do not address aspects of education that are related to social circumstances and the politics of nations. Education as a means to increase individual life chances and induce “social benefits” is in Education at a Glance constructed as isolated from social backgrounds and the prerequisites this entails (OECD, 2012a, p. 202). In constituting the length and level of education as the sole determinate of wage level, life expectancy, willingness to vote and a general supportive attitude to society, there is a problematic mix up of causes and effects. The claimed benefits of education could just as well be attributed to the social background of those who are most likely to receive a tertiary degree as to the degree in itself. This is further enforced by the avoidance of class in descriptions of an increasingly segregated society. The solution for increasing unemployment is instead presented as more education, in this case, not tertiary education but vocational and non-formal education (OECD, 2012a, p. 15). The recession and consequences of the recession are not addressed as political issues or as a problematic aspect
of market capitalism, but as a managerial problem where education is brought forward as a solution to both societal and individual problems. The divide between those earlier mentioned with jobs and high wages and those who are unemployed or work for low pay in unskilled jobs, is not addressed. Differing from how OECD and EU constitute the relation between education and economic and social benefits, UNESCO constitute lack of education, and in this case referring to literacy and primary education, in terms of poverty and gender, stating

But a number of obstacles, including poverty, still keep 67 million children of primary-school age out of school, 53 per cent of whom are girls and almost 43 per cent of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa. Enrolment rates are slowing and being eroded by dropout, particularly in countries affected by armed conflict where over 40 per cent of out-of-school children live. Gender disparities continue to hamper progress in education. Around 17 per cent of the world’s adults – 793 million people, of whom two thirds are women – still lack basic literacy skills. (UNESCO, 2011, p. 6)

This constitutes prerequisites and outcomes of education as dependent on social and political factors. Learning outcomes are not seen as solely inducing economic benefits, but also as dependent on economic and political prerequisites. Peace, wealth, gender equality, political stability, and social equality are constituted more as prerequisites for “education for all”, rather than as effects of “education for all”. This is further enhanced by the two priorities that are presented in the document; Africa and Gender. However, the UNESCO document also recounts several projects where education is employed as a tool to combat poverty, reach peace, and acquire stability in the wake of disasters. Elevation of poverty is
thus made sense of as simultaneously a prerequisite for and an effect of education (see e.g., UNESCO, 2011, p. 14).

Concluding discussion

The neoliberal presumption of competition and differentiation as the engine for both individual and social development means that despite all the benefits that education is asserted to induce; it will never bring about social equality. A paradox in the argumentation, especially in the OECD documents, is that the call for more tertiary education, based on higher earnings for those with exams, does not take into account that this effect is likely to decrease when more and more people get this education. This is partly addressed in Education at a Glance which states that it is the overall wage dispersion that drives much of the returns for both the individual and the public sector, and that “a compressed wage structure will typically generate lower returns to higher education” (OECD, 2012a, p. 171). This evinces a contradiction in the argument for a general increase in tertiary education. In order for the argument for increased earnings to work there need to be big wage differences and limited access to higher education. These two preconditions are however never explicitly stated or argued for. Instead the document put forward an increase in higher education as a means to economic benefits for both individuals and society in general. This demonstrates that although there are articulations that stress the need for more equity, the whole argument presumes, and thereby affirms, a society signified by considerable inequality and wage differences. This makes the demand to use education as a tool to counteract segregation and marginalization rather hollow.

An important question in relation to the theme of this conference is if the construction of education and subjectivity in these documents offer any promise of education as a means to overcome poverty. The intersection of education and economy in
the documents and work of the UNESCO is directly connected this question. Although there is an apparent assumption that “education for all” will result in economic progress, this is in the UNESCO documents expressed by the term “development” in contrast to the term “economic growth” employed in OECD and EU documents. This signals not only differing points of departure for the expected economic progress, but also differing views on why the progress is important. In the case of OECD and EU it is a matter of ensuring a continuous economic growth. In the case of UNESCO it is a matter of elevating people from a life in poverty. This is however hampered by the reiterations of the economic discourse on education together with the rights discourse, and the striking absence of political analysis of lack of education and gender inequalities in the developing countries. The human rights discourse is consequently put in the front without compromising the neoliberal core assumptions (cf. Chan, 2007). Furthermore, UNESCO is a large multilateral organization with an ambitious program to reach the goal “Education for all”. However, the programs are short of funding (see cf. Watson, 1999), and one way to find money for education projects in developing countries is to cooperate with NGOs and donors from the private sector. This can, as described by Martinsson (this session) and Ball (2012) undermine the ambition to use education as a means for national and individual empowerment. In a critical review of UNESCO’s work on education Mundy maintained that UNESCO is strongly influenced by a neoliberal approach to social reforms (Mundy, 2007). This is impossible to verify or refute in a limited study such as the present, but the reiteration of the economic discourse of education that is found also in the UNESCO documents, point to a subversion of the rights discourse on education.

The notion of education and the possible subjectivities that emerge from the documents are dominantly constituted as economic. Education is constituted as a commodity within a knowledge economy. The learners or students that are subjected to
different educational interventions are primarily constituted as economic subjects, both in the sense that they are motivated by personal economic interests and that they are supposed to be assets for “the economy”. The analysis hereby evinces that there is little room for the subjectivation that Biesta describes as a desirable outcome of education in a society signified by diversity and pluralism (Biesta, 2010). One reason for this is that it is not diversity and pluralism that is depicted as significant for the world in which the students are supposed to participate, but rather technological innovation, globalism, and economic growth. The economic discourse on education hereby gives little room for recognition of the need to foster not only loyal citizens, but also political subjects. Although there are openings for the political in formulations such as “active citizenship” and “tolerance”, the absence of recognition of conflict, struggle, and differing interests limits the outcomes of education to qualification and socialization (cf. Biesta, 2009; Mouffe, 2005). The subjectivities made possible can thereby be described as loyal and obedient rather than political subjects.

The economic rationale in the OECD and EU documents cannot be a means to obliterate poverty. This rationale is based on the implicit precondition of competition between nations and individuals. Not all countries can have the highest scores on PISA. Not all countries can stay ahead in the race for economic growth. Not all citizens can have tertiary education and reap economic benefits from the exams. Competition needs losers in order for there to be winners. This is salient in the arguments for the economic benefits of tertiary exams which presume a socially and economically segregated society (world).

Education is a powerful political tool that can be used for different purposes. The neoliberal forces (desires) are strong. I don’t totally deny that education that constitutes economic subjectivities might counteract poverty, especially not on an individual level, but I
want to pose a warning that it by subordinating everything to the economy might simultaneously abolish politics, active citizenship and vigorous democracy. Education focused at constituting political subjectivities would have better prospects to abolish poverty – although in a different manner – and simultaneously strengthen democracy and citizenship participation.

References


