Introducing Intersectional Theory to Activists

Challenging the theory/practice divide in a Swedish folkbildning context

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In solidarity,

Kicki
Abstract

This thesis explores how introducing intersectional theory to self-identified activists in a Swedish folkbildning context challenges the theory/practice-divide. The study has been carried out through thematically structured discussions with students and teachers at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, Gothenburg, Sweden. In this thesis I argue that the deconstruction of the theory/practice-divide is dependent on perceptions of what theory and practice entails, students’ expectations of Swedish folkbildning in general and Kvinnofolkhögskolan in particular and pedagogical considerations on how to teach intersectionality intersectionally.

Additionally, the thesis addresses issues of institutionalization, feminist pedagogy and the broadening of intersectional theory. Finally, the thesis highlights the need for extensively addressing the issue of the theory/practice divide in the curriculum, for students and teachers to discuss what is perceived as theory and practice respectively and for teachers to consider time and place as part of an intersectionally aware pedagogical practice.

Key words: Intersectionality, Swedish folkbildning, theory, practice, academia, activism, feminist pedagogy, Kvinnofolkhögskolan
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PART I: Introducing starting points and aims

Introduction

My first encounter with a Swedish folkbildning\(^1\) institution took place in the early 1990-s, when I enrolled at Kvinnofolkhögskolan\(^2\) in order to complete my upper secondary studies. My reasons for deciding to study at Kvinnofolkhögskolan were twofold: I wanted to study in a group centered way and I was also very intrigued by the school’s thorough feminist history and approach. In the end, I ended up studying there for three years, on a full time basis. For me, this was the start not just for my further studies, but also for my thinking about learning processes and pedagogy and student - teacher relations. To be a student at a folkbildning institution means you have to consciously reflect upon your own learning process and take responsibility for it. As a student you are urged to formulate you own thoughts and questions and thoroughly ponder the fact that studies are part of a lifelong journey. During the years I spent at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, with seemingly endless discussions about whose time it was to clean the classroom or what food should be served for lunch, it was of course not always fun and inspiring, but the possibility to plan and carry out my studies together with my peers, spurred a much bigger interest than what I had invested in my prior studies. Teachers who encouraged us not to be “parrots”, but to think for ourselves, and who did not see conflict and emotion as problematic but rather as an evident part of learning together with others, impacted very much the academic choices I came to make later. When my students ask me about how I think it was to study at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, I answer that it was the best and the hardest three years I have experienced so far. Often they nod their heads, recognizing what I say. There are of course as many stories about studying at a folkbildning institution as there are students, but for me it proved to be of great importance, and it also prepared me well for my further studies.

After finishing my studies at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, I spent some years completing my English, literature and gender studies, and seven years later I came back to the very same institution, now as a teacher. It was indeed a very peculiar and challenging time, as I needed to reorient my previous student - teacher relationships into seeing my former teachers as my colleagues. This was a joint effort, which on my part led to a great deal of reflections concerning teaching, both from the perspective of a student and a teacher. In many cases I

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\(^1\) Swedish folkbildning is also often referred to as Popular Education.

\(^2\) Kvinnofolkhögskolan can be translated as The Women’s Folk Highschool.
have come to see my experience as something very beneficial and I find myself referring to my own studies at the school when I have pedagogical discussions with my colleagues as well as when talking to students.

As for now, I have been teaching feminist studies at Kvinnofolkhögskolan for almost a decade. These years have been very rewarding and equally challenging on both a personal and a professional level. Teaching with an intersectional perspective, but also teaching intersectionality is something that I feel very passionate about. Intersectionality as a theory does allow for analyzing several (constructed) categories of power dimensions at once, taking into account both time and space. For me, intersectional theoretical perspectives have been of great importance, since I feel it helps me to understand intricate power relations in society as well as it enables me to pin point what changes I want to work towards. With its constantly changing and renegotiated form of a travelling concept, intersectionality always causes me to think further, to sharpen my arguments, but also at times take a step back and reformulate myself.

To teach with an intersectional perspective has for me been not so much a choice but an inevitable must. Inspired by, amongst others, bell hooks and Paulo Freire, I find it key to have this perspective in the classroom, although it is by no means an easy task. At times it seems almost impossible, and extremely demanding and puzzling to me. When moving on to not just teaching with an intersectional perspective, but also teaching intersectionality, these issues have become highly actualized for me personally. When starting to teach intersectionality at the course Azadi, which is the basis for this thesis, I at times asked myself if it did more harm than good, as I observed my students becoming hesitant and almost paralyzed due to their will of being intersectional enough. Therefore, issues concerning the theory/practice are the basis for my writing this thesis.

During the past three years I have been teaching intersectional theory and practice to self-identified activists, coming from various backgrounds which in a very simplified manner can be described as the feminist movement, the anti-racist movement, the transfeminist-movement and the animal rights movement, all movements intersecting in uncountable and unpredictable ways. This has caused me to have numerous challenging discussions concerning the risks and the benefits with introducing intersectional theory into an activist discourse. For example, we have discussed if there is a risk for activists to become paralyzed due to intersectional will and by the fear of not being “intersectional enough”. We have also seen the benefits of
intersectional theory when it comes to proposing well informed, although sometimes painful, limitations in activist work. Through theory it has sometimes been easier to challenge the utopian notion of an all-inclusive activism. I am interested in how this divide between theory and practice is challenged and negotiated within a folkbildning context, which in this thesis will be exemplified by the course Azadi. That is to say, I have concerned myself with thinking about intersectional theory and its role within folkbildning and how intersectionality in both theory and practice should and could be implemented in folkbildning work to, as Larsson defines it, “cherish the political person” (Larsson 2010: 230 my translation). My initial thoughts are that folkbildning could serve as a resourceful arena for studying intersectionality, but this also includes looking at folkbildning through an intersectional lens and dealing with what new perspectives one might discover.

Additionally, I have specifically when teaching Azadi, but also when teaching other courses, observed a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards theory and theoretical discussions amongst the students who identify as activists. I find this very interesting and at times equally challenging. For me, theory has been a way into activism, which I see as ways of organizing in order to change society through highlighting and challenging power relations and exclusionary practices which delimit people’s room for action. I have understood that this approach and use of theory is not evident to my students. Instead, I have observed a somewhat reluctant and at times suspicious stance towards theory and theorizing. Very often, theory is also linked to academia, and put in opposition to activism, keeping up the construction of the theory/practice binary. Coming from a working class background and having fought hard to feel comfortable within academia, I find this reluctance towards theory difficult to grasp since I believe that my being there contributes, even if it is in the smallest, most modest way, to the much-needed heterogenization of academia. Thus, the issue of the academia/activism and the theory/practice divide will be the main part of what I will discuss in this thesis.

**Starting points and aims**

I think we have all been there, when someone else refers to our practice so eloquently you start to wonder whether your practice follows the quote or if it is the other way around. For me, the process of writing this thesis and attempting to narrow down my starting points and aims was vividly captured in this quote by Paulo Freire;
Once again, there is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other. As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover (Freire 1998: 35).

At first, this quote might seem overly ambitious and almost romanticizing teaching and pedagogical work. For me, it with its big words, so neatly sums up my subject starting points, my position, as well as my aims with writing this thesis.

I come from a place of questioning. I have been questioning my entire life. As an adopted child in Sweden, so visually different, I questioned why I was told to “go home” when I was already on the bus on the way home to my Swedish suburb. I questioned why both children and adults wanted to know about my “real parents”. To make sense of my experiences, I turned to reading, which was not really a conscious decision; it was just something I took up, in spite of the fact that my family deemed reading as a waste of time and anti-social behavior. In my working class environment, reading was regarded as a leisure time activity, at best. My questioning was sometimes seen as healthy curiosity but more often than not as uncomfortable and demanding. It was not until I came to Kvinnofolkhögskolan that I realized that questioning has a purpose and a reason. The three years I spent within folkbildning as a student affected me in many ways, one being me actually thinking that I might have something to bring to academia, actually venturing that someone like me, with my experiences had something to gain from it as well. So, I gave it a go, and in a way I never left.

Questioning is also the basis for me writing this thesis. I have questions about my pedagogical practice and in what way this practice of mine challenges and/or perpetuates the constructed division between theory and practice. Further on, I want to relate these questions to a folkbildning context and also include the issue of institutionalization. I find this issue relevant as I am interested in the possible gains and losses connected to such an institutionalization, in this thesis exemplified by Kvinnofolkhögskolan. In her dissertation, Mia Liinason states that “there is to date no extensive study of the interplay between processes of institutionalization and the production of feminist knowledge in Sweden” (Liinason 2011: 27-28), she speaks of academia, but the same is valid for folkbildning, no such study has been carried out. The arena of folkbildning differs from academia in that is appears to have less limitations and regulations in relation to what can and cannot be presented with regards to course content and
form. Nevertheless it is an institution, and thus the questions of institutionalization can be addressed also within the folkbildning context.

My work with this thesis has essentially been guided by the principles of subject position and specificity. This thesis is in no way objective and does not aspire to be. Instead, it is to be regarded as a contribution to an array of narratives, together making up the ever changing feminist critical empiricism Donna Haraway (1988) elaborates on in her article “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”. Situated knowledge, the way I interpret it, is for feminists to responsibly situate themselves whilst at the same time taking care not to succumb to relativism. According to Haraway, partiality and situated knowledge is not universality and the difference is that partiality is a “view from the body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body” (Haraway 1988: 589), additionally “situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals” (Haraway 1988: 590). However difficult it has been at times, when sitting in solitude writing the paragraphs that in the end would form this thesis, that is how I have tried to regard it, as part of a joint work, as part of a community, where my version looks the way it does due to my particular situatedness. As I in this thesis engage with what can be identified as my daily practice, I have found some comfort in Lykke’s summary of Haraway, underlining that,

the researcher, through a conscious reflection of her or his situatedness and her or his research technologies, can obtain a partially objective knowledge, that is, a knowledge of the specific parts of reality that she or he can 'see' from the position in which she or he is materially discursively located in time, space, body and historical power relations (Lykke 2010: 5, my emphasis).

Whilst Haraway and Lykke both use vision as their metaphor, I find I like to use the snapshot as my figure of thought. Snapshots are also dependent on situatedness, time and place. An event can be documented by snapshots from uncountable angles and will together be able to present as much of a full picture as is possible. Still, the full picture is really only a compilation of angles, places and moments in time. Hence, my snapshot contribution, in this time and place is this thesis.

My aim in this thesis is to look into how teaching intersectionality to activists at a folkbildning institution impacts activists, activism and theories on intersectionality. I am interested in the processes taking place when introducing a theoretical framework like intersectionality in this context. A key concept in my thesis is the theory/practice divide which
I aim to contextualize within folkbildning and in relation to activists studying the Azadi course at Kvinnofolkhögskolan

When discussing the above presented issues with colleagues, students and gender studies scholars both within and outside academia, I have started to identify a field that seems to have been very little researched. The way I see it, intersectional theory as a field of study has always been well articulated in the theory deriving from societal process and feminist, postcolonial activist interventions. Additionally, teaching intersectionality to students (in various contexts) is often put forward as a good example of getting students to engage in self-reflection as well as making visible and challenging privilege. Within folkbildning and discussions on folkbildning’s role, intersectionality is sometimes mentioned but not very thoroughly discussed, and if it is, it is mostly in a discourse of inclusion and exclusion with regards to who is inclined to study within folkbildning.

What I aim to do in this thesis is to investigate what the dialogue between intersectional theory and activists/activism may look like and what questions it poses. I will do so by focusing on various processes taking place at a full time one year course given on three occasions at Kvinnofolkhögskolan during 2011-2014. The course is named Azadi - intersectional organization, and is introduced at the school’s website as a course “for applicants who are already active in a movement or an organization and want to deepen their theoretical and practical knowledge” (Kursbeskrivning [Course Description] my translation). With this course as a nodal point, and through discussions with former students and my colleagues with whom I planned this course as well as my own empirical experience of teaching this course, I will elaborate on three themes: increased intersectional awareness and increased theoretical intersectional knowledge, the theory/practice divide and contextualizing Azadi within a folkbildning context.

Key Questions

As I mentioned briefly in my introduction, my aim in this thesis is to investigate how teaching intersectional theory to self-identified activists in a Swedish folkbildning context impacts activists, activism and intersectional theory building. Through three themes, I aim to discuss my key question: How is challenging the theory/practice divide in a folkbildning context, by introducing intersectional theory to activists understood and negotiated by both students and teachers? The three themes which are the basis for my discussion in this thesis are
• Increasing intersectional awareness and increasing theoretical intersectional awareness
• The theory/practice divide
• Contextualizing Azadi within folkbildning in general and Kvinnofolkhögskolan in particular

Questions central for this my overarching key question of negotiating the theory/practice divide within a folkbildning context can be summarized accordingly:

A: How does the introduction of intersectional theory affect activists, activism as well as intersectional theory itself?

B: What are the gains, losses and problematic issues that arise from this context and how can they be addressed pedagogically in both theory and practice?

PART II: Practical and theoretical framework, methodologies and ethical concerns

Introduction

In this chapter I am going to introduce and discuss the theoretical framework for this thesis. I will also present my methodological approaches and choices as well as my ethical concerns when carrying out this study.

Regarding the first section of this chapter, I have chosen to divide my theoretical framework presentation in to four sub sections; Swedish folkbildning, intersectionality as theory and tool, teaching intersectionality and the theory/practice divide. Whilst doing this division, I wish to stress that this is just a construction with the purpose of introducing several angles framing my key question: How is challenging the theory/practice divide through, in a folkbildning context, introducing intersectional theory to activists negotiated by both students and teachers?

Undoubtedly, there are numerous links between folkbildning, intersectionality, teaching methods and the theory/practice divide. However, these fields also have their specific frameworks that lay ground for both theory and practice. Consequently, I introduce them somewhat separately here and will join the discourses together later on in the analysis of my
I will start the presentation by contextualizing Swedish folkbildning and its main origins, traits and aims. I will then introduce Kvinnofolkhögskolan as an example of Swedish folkbildning and as the setting for Azadi, the course in focus in this thesis, presented last in this section. Thereafter, I will discuss intersectionality as both theory and method, or analytical tool. I will in a narrowed down manner present a background and account for the international theorizing about intersectionality and then move on to the more extensive presentation and discussion about intersectional theory as a travelling concept. I will also discuss intersectionality as a perspective in activist work. The third angle I present is that of teaching intersectionality. In particular I will discuss the pedagogical takes and difficulties that such pedagogy might encounter. Finally, I move on to discuss the theory/practice divide and the impact such a divide has on both theory and practice.

Swedish folkbildning and Kvinnofolkhögskolan and the course Azadi as an example

Folkbildning has a long tradition in Sweden as well as in the Nordic countries. Swedish folkbildning is not easily defined although much research has been and is currently being carried out. However, in *Popular Education, Power and Democracy, Swedish Experiences and Contributions* (Laginder, Nordvall and Crowther 2012), folkbildning is very neatly summarized as “a distinctive Swedish tradition of lifelong learning, [which] has always concerned itself with the relationship between learning, power and democracy in society rather than having a purely individualistic and instrumental approach to learning for employability, which has dominated policy and practice” (Laginder; Nordvall; Crowther 2012: abstract).

Starting over a century ago, folkbildning met the need of the part of the Swedish population that was excluded from higher education due to poor and short schooling. In short, one can describe folkbildning as an answer to calls for lifelong learning and the possibility to become an active citizen in society. Folkbildning includes both study associations and folk high schools all over Sweden and receives funding from the government but folkbildning institutions are still relatively free to shape their courses in both content and form, in the way each association or school see fit. Core concepts of the folkbildning tradition can in short be...
summarized as group based, interactive, voluntary, student influenced learning with an extensive variation of content and method. All courses are free of charge and many allow students to apply for national student aid.

Currently, there are approximately 150 folk high schools in Sweden where adults study on both long full time courses qualifying them for further, higher education as well as short courses both as the schools’ own courses but often in collaboration with social movements and networks in line with the school’s profile. Approximately 170 000 students participate in folkbildning courses each year (Folkbildningsrådet 2010: 5-16).

In April 2013 the report *Folkbildning’s Direction & Intent* was adopted by both folk high schools and study associations. In the report, five prioritized themes are in focus. These themes are Enlightenment & context, Accessibility & inclusion, Citizens & civil society, Working life & lifelong learning and Culture & creativity (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 7-9). In this report, which is the outcome of extensive discussions held at folk high schools and study associations, it is stated and described what lies in the future for folkbildning and what should be prioritized. In relation to each of the above presented themes, both folk high schools and study associations defined possibilities and challenges as well as specified what they each individually can and want to do in the future.

As folkbildning in general and more specifically Kvinnofolkhögskolan is one of several perspectives that I want to present and include in this thesis, there is no place for an elaborate account for folk high schools’ discussions about these themes, I will rather summarize what I see as the most important trains of thought with regard to this thesis’ question whether folkbildning can be an agent for change and offer possibilities for deconstructing the theory/practice divide. I do this since *Folkbildning’s Direction & Intent* is one way of identifying contemporary folkbildning’s core aims as well as defining what might lie in the future.

In relation to the above presented themes, it can be said that folk high schools describe their strengths much along the lines of courses being voluntary, gathering heterogenous participant groups, offering a broad range of courses which have various aims, from university studies, vocational training to empowerment and knowledge of how to organize oneself and become an active citizen in society. As their future challenges, folk high schools mention the need for
progressive training of high school teachers, guarding folkbildning’s specificity, continually work to develop new global and interdisciplinary perspectives, work to decrease the digital divide and even more successfully seek to reach marginalized groups in society and be innovative in the manner this is executed. (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 15-58) Through this brief summary, I think it is fair to say that the strengths within folkbildning will need to be utilized more in the future, seeing the challenges that lay ahead.

**Kvinnofolkhögskolan**

Narrowing down and contextualizing folkbildning in the light of this thesis, I will now give a brief description of Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s place within Swedish folkbildning. I do so, because although all folk high schools have common denominators as described in for instance *Folkbildning’s Direction & Intent*, each school also has its own traits and points of departure. I think an account of Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s origin and core values will be of use when moving on to describe and contextualize the specific course Azadi which is my main empirical material in this thesis.

Kvinnofolkhögskolan is located in the center of Gothenburg, Sweden’s second largest city. It was founded in 1985 after almost a decade of planning and politically influential work, with its basis in a heterogeneous feminist movement. Kvinnofolkhögskolan is one of the 107 folk high schools defined as Popular Movement Folk High Schools, and it is the only one with a basis in the feminist movement.

Since 1985, Kvinnofolkhögskolan has offered a vast variety of both long and short courses, lecture series and various cultural and feminist arrangements. In the schools 25th anniversary publication tables show that more than 6,000 persons have participated in the school’s long courses between 1985 and 2009 (Corley; Mällbin: Rang; Wirén 2010: 130-139). Additionally around 4,000 persons have participated in other shorter courses and events that have been organized by the school.

On its webpage, Kvinnofolkhögskolan is described as a “a feminist folk high school attended […] by adult women and transgender persons of different ages, with various backgrounds, goals and study habits” (Om oss [About Us]), and offers courses on both elementary and secondary level as well as thematic courses, all with gender perspectives.
One of a kind, Kvinnofolkhögskolan is an institution with the possibility to present a unique environment for its students. Berit Larsson, one of the founders of the school, describes this uniqueness as a possibility to move beyond the difference between subjects, and also take in to account “the differences and inconsistencies contained within the individual” (Larsson 2013: 173). Drawing on Arendt, Larsson develops the argument, suggesting that what happens when we are exposed to and confronted with various differences in seeing and interpreting the world is that “the familiar and the habitual are exceeded, as there are no universal patterns of interpretation that can be applied to our lives. As a teacher or a student you are reminded of this every day, which perhaps has the most important impact on our work” (Larsson 2013:173).

Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s way of organizing folkbildning in a separatist room open to women and trans* persons has been and is still debated at many levels. In the school’s anti-discrimination policy document, the complexity of this issue, but also the staff’s interpretation of the same is presented through a problematization of the gender binary norm,

Kvinnofolkhögskolan is granted state founding as a folk high school with it offering activities for and by women. This emanates from the oppression of a gender binary norm which in itself is problematic since the gender binary norm limits the number of genders. The school exists in this feminist paradox – the gender binary norm’s political consequences contra the deconstruction and critique of the same. The school therefore addresses everyone defining as women or trans. (Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s policy against discrimination)

To summarize, Kvinnofolkhögskolan holds a unique place within the Swedish folkbildning tradition, much due to its basis in a pluralistic feminist movement and through its paradoxical position of challenging whilst at the same time negotiating the gender binary.

**Azadi**

Azadi has been part of Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s feminist studies long course program between 2011 and 2014 and the last class will finish their studies in July 2014. Azadi is a one year full time course focusing on intersectional theory and practice and is designed for self-identified feminist activist women and trans* persons who want to focus on and deepen their intersectional theoretical and practical knowledge.

Azadi was initiated by teachers at Kvinnofolkhögskolan who had been asked by activists in the school’s surroundings to offer such a course. Much time was dedicated towards planning a
course that would both challenge and strengthen activists from various sections within a diverse feminist community. When launching the new course, teachers said in an interview that the purpose of Azadi was to “promote discussion between people from different organizations and ideologies, in order for activists to have to learn to explain why they think the way they do” (Karlsson 2011, my translation). Teachers also wanted to expand the definition of what being an activist entails, stating that "activists are not necessarily the ones demonstrating out on the streets - it can also be an activist action to research or write” (Karlsson 2011, my translation).

Undoubtedly, pedagogue and educational activist Paulo Freire has been of much inspiration for me and many of my colleagues. One of the key features in his work is the juxtaposition of what he refers to as banking education in relation to problem-posing education. Freire stresses the importance of moving beyond traditional teacher - student relations and instead recognize that teaching is a dialogue between teacher and student where the tables can be turned and renegotiated countless times (Freire 1993/1970: 61-66). According to Freire problem posing education requires dialogue, and letting go of the notion of teaching being about transmitting knowledge from active teacher subject to passive student object. Much of Freire’s theory will be recognized in the empirical and analytical chapter of this thesis, and I will then return to and elaborate somewhat on this discussion.

The work in Azadi has its basis in problem based learning (PBL) pedagogy. This implies that studies are planned thematically and that students themselves formulate a problem that they want to work with within the theme. Themes presented over the years have for example been conflict, trans* feminism, boarders, crip theory and critical human rights studies. Students have presented their results in various ways, from traditional oral and written presentations, to organizing discussion cafés for the public, performances, poetry writing and workshops just to mention a few. Additionally, the course has engaged in collaboration with students in other courses at the school, and students have carried out field studies both within Sweden and in Europe.

**Intersectionality: an attempt to catch a travelling concept**

For me, intersectionality is a very interesting theoretic field and concept since it has, through its travelling over time and space, been subject to many (contesting) definitions.
Intersectionality has expanded from a Black feminist initiative to put focus on the relational processes between gender and race and its impact on the US legal system (Crenshaw 1991), and in the society on both structural and individual levels (Hill Collins 1998), to an extended interpretation and use of the concept.

As the concept and theory of intersectionally travelled, it has in various ways been renegotiated and expanded from a specific critical theoretical approach to specific power relations related to gender and race, mainly in the US context, to a global contextualization of power relations of a vast variation. Additionally, the concept also expanded from being a specific theoretical approach to also including a reformulation of historical pre-intersectionality feminist thought and activism, contemporary activist organizational practices, and inclusive societal policy making, just to name a few (Lykke 2010, Carbin; Edenheim 2013). This expansion of intersectionality as theory, method and analytical tool has to a large extent been welcomed and utilized within uncountable feminist settings, both within and outside academia. However, it should be underlined that this theoretical and practical expansion has also been criticized and said to be inconsiderate and ignorant of the origin of intersectionality as theoretical tool.

Theories and descriptions on how intersectionality has emerged and been debated in a Scandinavian and Swedish context have been discussed from various starting points, from a well-defined postcolonial perspective (De los Reyes; Mulinari 2005) to the more open notion of intersectionality as a nodal point (Lykke 2010). I also find the discussion on whether intersectionality should be used as theory, framework or politics (Carbin; Edenheim 2013) very interesting and of great importance for my thesis. The genealogy of intersectionality is also discussed by Lykke through the fruitful concepts of explicit and implicit theorizing of intersectionality as well as intersectional theorizing under other names (Lykke 2010).

As further negotiations, expansions and maybe also limitations of intersectional theory, discussions concerning the gender order, intersectional invisibility and the vagueness of the concept are contemporary examples. Several arguments questioning gender as a master category have been brought forward but also challenged yet again and the vagueness of intersectional theory is continually debated as such characteristics can be seen as both strengths and weaknesses in the theory (Bereswill; Neuber 2011). Additionally, there are ongoing debates related to intersectional invisibility (Knapp 2011), often in close connection to issues of recognition and re-distribution (Yuval-Davis 2011). Intersectionality is indeed a
much contested and debated travelling concept, which at the very least implicates to me that the risk for stagnation and canonization within the field is not a likely scenario in the near future.

To summarize and discuss the extensive work presented on intersectional theory during the past decades is a challenging and lengthy task and I do not see this thesis as the place for such a presentation. Instead, I will be engaging in a dialogue with Lykke’s definition (Lykke 2010:50) of intersectionality and trace a few angles that I find relevant for this thesis. This tracing is in no way complete or aspiring to be, but rather functions in the way of a series of snap shots, a mini-genealogy or a rhizomatic presentation, if you will.

Lykke defines intersectionality accordingly:

Intersectionality can, first of all, be considered as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations. (Lykke, 2010:50).

First I want to address the theoretical and methodological aspect of intersectionality. As a theory, intersectionality is as I have mentioned in the aims section of this thesis, a theory that is often presented as a theory close to, if not deriving from activism, work for change in society and with a somewhat revolutionary potential. More than once intersectional theorists have referred to historical events and activists with intersectional connotations, pre-intersectional theorizing. Examples of these events and activists are Sojourner Truth’s remarkable Ain’t I a Woman - speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851(Lykke, 2010:76), Alexandra Kollontai’s questioning of bourgeois feminism in the early 1900:s (Lykke, 2010:77) and the Combahee River Collective’s manifesto (Lykke 2010:83). However, voices have also been raised, questioning this self-image of intersectional theorizing. For example, starting from an article that Lykke wrote in 2003 about intersectionality as a useful concept within feminist theory, a debate concerning the applicability and usefulness of the concept was initiated in a Swedish context. De los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari were skeptical towards Lykke’s description and use of intersectionality and requested a stronger emphasis on postcolonial aspects of intersectionality (De los Reyes; Molina; Mulinari 2003).
Carbin and Edenheim highlight the different uses of intersectionality as either theory, framework or politics (Carbin; Edenheim 2013), and I see this discussion as highly relevant for this thesis, since I in my empirical material have encountered various ways of negotiating and applying intersectionality in different contexts. Students tend to talk about intersectionality as a verb, as a doing, and put it on themselves to act intersectionally when for example organizing a demonstration or a debate. In class, we tend to talk about intersectional awareness as the outcome of theoretically reflecting on one’s lived experience. We often identify a gap or a discrepancy between intersectional awareness and liberal intersectional organization, intersectional awareness implies both trying to be inclusive as well as consciously drawing the line for what can and cannot be included in the event in question.

Carbin and Edenheim have at a macro level seen what I experience in class and state that,

The concept [intersectionality] has moved from being a sign of threat and conflict to (white) feminism, to a consensus-creating signifier that not only made the concept successful but also enabled an institutionalization of a liberal ‘all-inclusive’ feminism based on a denial of power as a constitutive for all subjects (and non-subjects alike). (Carbin; Edenheim 2013: 234, my clarification in square brackets)

Carbin and Edenheim write from a poststructuralist feminist perspective, examining mainly the constructivist approach to intersectionality and what this entails when it comes to institutionalization and perhaps also de-radicalization of the theory/framework/politics. In their critical analysis of intersectionality as a travelling concept, they argue that a broadening of the concept, such as Lykke suggests when she in her genealogy of intersectionality introduces implicit feminist theorization of intersectionality and feminist theorization of intersectionality under other names (Lykke 2010: 68), risks neglecting the criticism from marginalized feminist groups that the concept itself derives from (Carbin; Edenheim 2013: 233-236).

The way I read Carbin and Edenheim, they problematize the notion or simplification of intersectional theory and practice as all-inclusive and ignorant of power dimensions in society. I agree with their analysis and also see, as I mentioned before, these tendencies in the classroom. However, my conclusion is not the same as Carbin and Edenheim’s, I do recognize these issues and risks, but do not see a safe guarding of the concept of intersectionality as a fruitful way to go. Having over the years read extensively about intersectional theory, I do not recognize this lack of acknowledgement for the origin of intersectionality; instead I find it well documented and negotiated within the theory building that goes on today. With this well-
articulated historical awareness of the concept, I can see risks with expanding intersectionality, but I believe these risks are substantially smaller than the gains such an expansion might allow. I also have confidence that feminist intersectionality theorists and activists can balance this dilemma through continuous debates, questioning and elaborations. Expanding theory, and in this case the concept of intersectionality, must always be done with great care, knowledge and much awareness, but this does not mean that it should not be done, rather that it should be carried out by many, suggesting oppositional interpretations, analysis and questions, moving the discussion and the theory building further.

An analysis of the development of the concept of intersectionality closer to my own interpretation and starting points is for example offered by Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall in their introduction to the 2013 Signs summer edition on intersectionality. It is worth noting that this outlook on intersectional development is co-authored by two of the early intersectional theorists, Crenshaw and McCall, that Carbin and Edenheim suggest have had their theoretical concept hijacked and de-radicalized through its broadening process.

In their introduction, Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall map out how intersectionality as a concept has travelled and over time and space evolved in to three approaches, the first one being the intersectional framing of research and project, the second dealing with discursive investigations of intersectionality as theory and method and the third one relating to intersectionality not only as an academic project but also as valid in relation to practice (Cho; Williams Crenshaw; McCall 2013: 785-787). These approaches are not to be seen as thorough divisions but rather as an attempt to describe the fluidity of the field, what could be described as three levels of engagement. Additionally, authors emphasize that when moving further and/or critically examining intersectionality it needs to be contextualized within the juridical field where it first was utilized (Cho; Williams Crenshaw; McCall 2013: 789). By doing so, intersectional theorists and activists can improve the chances that their further work will be relevant and in its core related to the origin of intersectional theory.

Specifically interesting for the purpose of this thesis are two points that are put across in the article, that of intersectionality as analytic sensibility and that of the key question for intersectionality in the future being related to subjects, categories and structures. When discussing the expansion of the field, Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall introduce intersectionality as an analytic sensibility, emphasizing that the mere use of the term intersectionality does not necessarily mean that it is grounded in the theory that encompasses
an intersectional way of thinking about categories, in any field of study which implies “conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is” (Cho; Williams Crenshaw; McCall 2013: 795).

To me, this is one of the key expansions and contributions to the broadened concept of intersectionality: whilst still being aware of and taking in to account the origin of intersectionality as a theory, it is also possible to apply intersectionally aware analysis within a vast field of feminist work both inside and outside of academia. Such an approach also suggests that utilizing intersectionality as a verb, as a doing, a particular awareness is indeed possible. This approach has many connections to how my students refer to intersectionality and intersectional awareness when they discuss their activist work and problematize the notion of carrying out intersectional work as a way of organizing.

With regards to the future of the intersectional arena, Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall define the key questions as related to how categorization is carried out and analyzed. This will in several aspects affect if and how categorization moves away from emphasis on the subjects and shift its focus on “the social dynamics an relations that constitute subjects” (Cho; Williams Crenshaw; McCall 2013: 796), which is interlinked to how identity politics is negotiated and understood.

**Teaching Intersectionality – Practice what you Preach**

As teachers at a feminist folkbildning institution I and my colleagues from time to time get questions about our feminist pedagogy and our feminist teaching methods. Most of us answer that there is no one feminist pedagogy or specific feminist teaching methods that work at all times. Rather, the core of a feminist pedagogical practice is that time and place and group constitution, matter and what is being discussed calls for a pedagogical take that cannot really be reenacted at another time and place. Instead, I would argue that feminist pedagogical approaches and starting points are more fruitful to discuss in this context. For me personally, these approaches are very much in line with intersectional theory. As a pedagogue, I must be open for what goes on inside (and outside) the classroom. What power structures are at work in the group? What subject positions are guarded? How can I challenge and bring forward these issues? Simultaneously I must also be aware of the fact that there are things going on
that I do not see or acknowledge, this can be due to my own position as a teacher, but also because I as a subject have a stronger sensibility for certain intersections at work, whilst being less receptive for others. Additionally, it is my responsibility as a teacher to at times draw the line with regards to what can and cannot be included at a certain point of time. More often than not, this line will be questioned and contested which is an inevitable part of an intersectionally aware process.

As presented above, to teach intersectionally or rather to teach with an intersectional awareness cannot be derived to a specific feminist pedagogy, but is a stance that needs to be brought in to every pedagogical situation with its own array of intersections at play, be it an English class, a history class or a class about intersectionality. However, teaching a class on intersectionality with an intersectional awareness brings more issues and expectations to the table. As an English teacher, I am expected by my students to know English very well, to be able to correct their speech and their writing as well as work together with them to challenge their insecurities, difficulties and knowledge gaps. Fair enough. As a feminist teacher teaching intersectionality, I am expected to know intersectional theory very well, to be able to discuss these theories and relate them to my students’ practice. Additionally I am expected to be intersectionally aware and responsible for how I plan and carry out the classes and for how I relate to my students and for how I handle power relations within the classroom. This is in many ways a fair expectation from my students but the implication lays in the fact that an intersectionally aware environment is not the work of one subject, but an ongoing process of negotiation and discussions among the members of the group.

In her study on how to teach intersectionality intersectionally in the context of the Social Work program at a Swedish university, Julia Bahner defines three components when she discusses how diversity should be taught. I interpret these as part of an intersectionally aware pedagogical starting point. Firstly, Bahner states that diversity needs to be thoroughly defined and described, secondly, the we/them binary needs to be challenged and deconstructed in order not to carry out a teaching about the Other whilst not recognizing that the Other is also part of the presumed “we”. Third, Bahner argues for a contextualization of the teaching sessions (Bahner forthcoming: 1-2). These are rather broad, however still challenging components to carry with oneself when teaching. How these points are addressed must vary depending on the teaching situation at hand. According to Bahner, this implies that “student centred learning should therefore […] include teachers’ reflexivity on themselves as well as on the context in which they teach. A related factor is the need to emphasise the structural and
symbolic level of intersectionality, rather than the individual perspective” (Bahner forthcoming: 7).

In her text, Bahner argues for a change in how intersectionality is taught at the social work program she has focused her study on. Bahner suggests that the way intersectionality is currently presented, taught and discussed, through presenting various intersections as if they can be understood and interpreted individually is actually an anti-intersectional way of teaching intersectionality. Instead, Bahner proposes that if intersectionality should be taught intersectionally, it needs to entail

a structure where overlapping themes are the binding structure in which differently privileged and oppressed groups are discussed simultaneously may fit the approach more adequately. In that way students learn to think about social problems not as related to certain groups of people, which are always heterogeneous anyway, but instead as related to structural dimensions of power that have different consequences for different people in different situations. (Bahner forthcoming: 8).

Much in line with Bahner’s discussion is Nancy A. Naples’ account for how she planned and executed a course on intersectionality, starting from the “desire to capture the complexity of social relations, experiences and structural dynamics that shape the diversity of women’s lives, situated knowledges and resistance strategies” (Naples 2009: 566). Through the example of a course on intersectional theory and approach Naples describes how she at first “struggled to go beyond the additive approach of race, class and gender that was dominant at the time to produce a more nuanced course outline” (ibid.). When Naples planned the course, her choice of themes and literature was guided by her own approach to intersectionality, starting from the point of view that

an intersectional framework should include attention to historical, cultural, discursive and structural dimensions that shape the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, national and religious identity, among other identities. In my view, the most powerful approaches to intersectionality also include attention to the ways in which these interactions produce contradictions and tensions across both these different levels of analysis and dimensions of difference (Naples 2009: 567).

This starting point then guided Naples’ planning of the course and was the basis for her choice of literature and the weekly topics that were introduced during the course (Naples 2009: 567). Naples opened the course with early articles on intersectional issues, for example the Combahee River Collective’s “A Black Feminist Statement” and Anthias’ and Yuval-
Davis’ essay “Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions” in order to demonstrate the various origins of the concept. Next, Naples focused on defining intersectionality and analyzing its different strands, approaches and contextualizing the usefulness of these variations. Further on, she also wanted to make sure that the “discussion of intersectionality included sensitivity to contemporary globalization as it shapes conceptualizations of difference, feminisms and positionalities” (Naples 2009: 571). Other perspectives that Naples introduced where those of sexuality studies and disability studies, all done to meet Naples own requirements of how intersectionality studies should be planned and carried out in an intersectional way (Naples 2009). I recognize much of Naples’ description of planning a course with a conscious intersectional awareness. Such awareness implies taking responsibility for limitations that arise and acknowledging that all-inclusiveness is not possible, but rather than one has to deal with the choices made and invite critique.

The Theory/Practice and the Academic/Activist Divide

First, I want to address the fact that I, in my initial work with this thesis, used both the theory/practice and the academic/activist divide as figurations. I did so in order to somewhat be able to show the differences and interconnectedness between these binaries. However, both binaries need to be contextualized, and when doing so it also draws attention to the fact that these two variations are not enough to cover the discussions presented in this thesis. I regard the academic/activist binary as constructed very much within academia as a way to problematize and discuss the institutionalization of gender and feminist studies. Within this context I find it to be very fruitful for pin pointing some of the processes that the institutionalization of a political movement might entail.

As for the theory/practice divide, this should be seen as my own formulation of what I have experienced when teaching students at Azadi. This binary is somewhat of a simplification, which in a way all binaries are, but it is this figure I use when trying to formulate the resistance towards certain theories and theoretical work methods and approaches that I have experienced together with Azadi students. However, I wish to underline that this division is not necessarily a well-recognized binary amongst the students, who on the contrary revolve more around the binary of academic - theory/activist - practice, in their discussions, linking theory to academia in a very firm way, thus constructing activists and activism as non-academic practical work. This binary is however too heavy to be a useful figuration of
thought, since it in itself is both paradoxical and pragmatic and this is also the reason for me leaving this binary out of the discussion, not in content, but as an actual formation.

When theorizing issues linked to the academic/activist as well as the theory/practice binaries, challenging these binaries and thus identify them as constructions, I see it as key to go back to the basic starting point that before institutionalization, specifically institutionalization of feminist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic, etc. work, theory and practice where in many cases much seen as dependent on each other. bell hooks describes this pre-institutionalization era as starting from the conviction that “everything we did in life is rooted in theory” (hooks, 2000:19), which derives from the eradication of the constructed oppositions between theory and practice, since as hooks describes, before institutionalization, women formed feminist groups which “were the first to begin to create feminist theory which included both analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of interaction”, that is, theory derives from practical experience, and strategies to cope with these experiences derive from collective theorization of the experiences in question. Thus, theory and practice are not binaries, but interdependent and inseparable. Societal boundaries and separations then, much, but not all, which can be related to the institutionalization process of for example feminist studies, introduced the binary approach to theory/practice and to academia/activism, perceiving them as different, and as part of different arenas. hooks, through her description of her own childhood and her attempts to understand her place as a black girl growing up in a patriarchal, white supremacist society engages with theory as a place for healing, for understanding her own position (hooks 1994:59-63) and with time she came to look at theory and theorizing as possible intervention, a way to challenge status quo (hooks 1994: 60).

When engaging in hooks’ discussion on theory and theorization and how it could be both misused and used within the feminist projects, I see a lot of connections to the key questions in this thesis. hooks, the way I read her, has strong and firm belief in theory as part of a liberating practice, whilst at the same time being well aware of, and willing to challenge the misuse of theory that she identifies. hooks emphasizes that within academia there is a risk for theory to become hierarchized and elitist and more a way of perpetuating class division and power relations than being part of a forceful liberating feminist movement (hooks 1994: 64-66), however, hooks does not see this issue as cause for turning to anti-intellectual up-keeping of the theory/practice divide. Instead she argues for recognizing that this hierarchization is a risk and a problem which needs to be questioned and renegotiated in diverse ways. However, there is no need for perpetuating this division, since this only serves to keep “internalizing the
false assumption that theory is not a social practice” creating yet another hierarchy “where all concrete action is viewed as more important than any theory written or spoken” (hooks 1994:66). As I will argue in this thesis, through the analysis of students’ and teachers’ discussion groups, this is where much of the tension lies. Important questions in relation to these tensions will then also be if folkbildning, through its traditions and its view on learning processes can serve as an arena for a theorization or rather theorizations that can, in hooks’ words, “claim theory as a necessary practice” (hooks 1994: 69).

Elaborating on a similar theme as hooks, Naples presents “intersectional feminist praxis” (Naples 2009: 573) as a concept in relation to intersectionality and intersectional practices, which she sees as a way to move away from the theory/practice divide. According to Naples, intersectional feminist praxis focuses on activism as the basis for knowledge and does not allow for this connection to be ignored as well as highlighting the deconstruction of for example academy/activism, local/transnational, which is key for intersectional analysis (Naples 2009:574).

As for activist identity, activism and its (dis)connection to theory, I think it is necessary to deconstruct the theory/practice binary much in line of what Liinason defines as “a continuous critical reflection over feminist teaching and research as oppositional, radical, and transformative” (Liinason 2011: 18, italics in original) and through this approach challenge the notion of this view which “is based on a series of taken for-granted and highly problematic ontological dichotomies, including mind/body, theory/practice, reason/emotion, abstract/concrete and ‘ivory tower’/ ‘real world’” (Eschle and Maiguashca 2006: 119).

In their honest and self-reflexive description of their quest to become more activist oriented university teachers, Eschle and Maiguashca start their discussion in the academic/activist divide guarded and perpetuated by both academics and activists, at considerable loss for both ”sides”. Eschle and Maiguashca claim that this division is constructed by both academia and activists since,

in both activist and academic characterisations of what it is that they do, we find the frequent assumption that academics theorise and write, while for activists ‘action is the life of all and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing’; academics exercise their cognitive skills, while activists are animated by passion (Eschle and Maiguashca 2006: 119).

Defining themselves “as two feminists working in British universities” (2006:120), Eschle and Maiguashca aim to challenge this divide and they do so by engaging in what they call
politicized or critical scholarship which they define as practices “openly driven by political commitment” (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2006:120).

As Eschle’s and Maiguashca’s pedagogical adaptation of activist teaching methods in to academia will be developed in the analytical part of this thesis, I will here just give a brief account of which practices Eschle and Maiguashca identify as either academic or activist in their form and content. I see this as an important account, since it is these constructions that essentially perpetuate the divide between academia and activism. The bridging of this divide and the merging of practices will be thoroughly developed in the aforementioned analytical part of this thesis.

Working as teachers in an academic environment, Eschle and Maiguashca tentatively describe the disciplinary restrictions they deal with. To summarize, the issues they find most problematic are connected to canonization of knowledge production, content and literature, methods of teaching and methods of measuring students’ knowledge production (Eschle and Maiguashca 2006: 121-126).

As for the various forms of canonization that Eschle and Maiguashca bring forward in their article, they point to several aspects. Institutionalized knowledge production is measured by the help of certain standards which are closely connected to parameters and criteria of a certain discipline (in Eschle’s and Maiguaschca’s case Global Politics) which impact what is taught and in what ways.

Regarding teaching methods within academia, Eschle and Maiguashca emphasize that these are closely linked to the canonization. For example, big classes tend to lead to teachers being inclined to transmit their knowledge to students, not taking in the differences between students or students’ prior knowledge and experiences. There is also a major focus on textually based knowledge which impacts the way classes are structured. Written examinations are also what are used to measure students’ knowledge and skills. This leaves little room for other methods than those resting on texts.

Moving on to the activist part of teaching as described by Eschle and Maiguashca, “activist education is a collective rather than individual enterprise. It is also driven by an ethos that is political: it is not agnostic or neutral about the power relations analysed but committed to challenging them. (Eschle and Maiguashca 2006:126). Thus, this demands an array of various teaching methods, material and ways to share knowledge. Eschle and Maiguashca provide
several examples of teaching methods, all starting from subjects’ experiences. However, even though situated and grounded knowledge positions are the basis for feminist activist forms of teaching, the authors underline “that while feminist educators start from individual experiences and emotions, they do not end there. Many of our interviewees argued for an analysis that systematises and makes sense of diverse narratives” (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2006: 129-130). The core step here then, can be said to move from the private and sometimes individual experience and into the political, collective arena.

In their article, the authors attempt to merge or bridge this division between academic and activist knowledge production. As mentioned before, I will return to their discussion later on in this thesis. As for now, the presented examples should be seen as ways of describing the academic/activist divide and its main traits.

Liinason presents a somewhat similar angle in her dissertation *Feminism and the Academy. Exploring the Politics of Institutionalization in Gender Studies in Sweden*. However her context is the Swedish Gender Studies programs and courses. Through a compilation of seven articles, Liinason discusses what impact and effect institutionalization has had on feminist knowledge production. Liinason’s discussion is tightly linked to the academic/activist divide and she asks “how does the knowledge that becomes institutionalized in gender studies work? What relations are created through this knowledge, and what does it enable?” (Liinason 2011: 21). Although there are similarities between Liinason’s and Eschle’s and Maiguashca’s analysis of feminist knowledge production within and outside academia, Liinason focuses more on the feminist knowledge production within academia and in a way stays in that context. Unlike Eschle and Maiguashca, Liinason looks more closely into how feminist knowledge production is negotiated within academia. However, she sees the same tensions as do Eschle and Maiguashca,

these circumstances sketches [sic] a difficult and complex situation for the enterprise of integrating feminist knowledge into the academy: while the feminist knowledge project is described as aiming at producing emancipatory knowledge and developing working models with an explicit aim to move across and often also beyond disciplinary and institutional borders, the academy has been understood as a site governed by a hierarchical structure where knowledge often is described as organized along a monodisciplinary model. (Liinason 2011: 22).

To further develop this tension, Liinason underlines the positive connotations with an academic feminism, creating a professionalization of feminism and also a secure basis for
gender studies. The initiative came from feminists and was, as Liinason describes it, part of a “a dual strategy to institutionalize the subject field in the academy – both autonomously organized and integrated in established disciplines” (Liinason 2011: 36).

However, Liinason also presents the possible negative effects that such an institutionalization might lead to. Negative effects, according to Liinason are the potential risks of co-option and de-radicalization (Liinason 2011: 56). In order to further define the academic/activist divide in the context of the Swedish gender studies programs and courses, Liinason introduces “a number of classical ‘splits’ among feminists that have made it difficult to theorize academic feminism, such as those around the relationship between theory-politics and academy-activism, which are splits that both construct and are constructed by ideas around feminism’s past, present and future” (Liinason 2011: 59). Starting from these splits, Liinason presents various takes on what impact institutionalization has had on feminist knowledge production in the tension between academia being a center for education and feminism being emancipatory, subjective and political. However, feminism and feminist knowledge production within and outside academia cannot be juxtaposed that easily, since they are very much intertwined. Ahmed, who does not agree with this split, states that “such a construction refuses to recognize that feminism has always posed theoretical and critical demands in its very practical demands” (Ahmed 1998: 16 italics in original, quoted in Liinason 2013: 64).

To summarize, through the examples of Eschle and Maiguashca, Liinason, hooks, and Naples it is evident that the theory/practice divide is in no way an easily defined construction. Thus, it is also not easy to deconstruct. In many cases it is unclear in which way academia and activism influences, enables, disables and/or co-construct each other. There is no fine line between the two; instead I see this divide as a process, intertwined and perpetual, depending on time and place.

As for the focus of this thesis, I also want to point out that the theoretical background presented in this chapter is very closely linked to academia as in universities. Folkbildning has not, to my knowledge, been researched in a similar way, which is somewhat surprising. Although folkbildning at large differs from university and academia, it is still an institution which will no doubt impact its knowledge production, how this effects the perpetuation or dismantling of the academy/activist divide remains to be seen.
Methodology, Methods and Ethical concerns

For my work in this thesis, I have combined various methods to gather my empirical material. The majority of the material was gathered during two group discussions and then complemented with my own empirical experience and documentation.

One group discussion was held with my colleagues with whom I planned the course Azadi, and another group discussion was held together with former students. Additionally, I also use my own entries in a collective teachers’ log, kept during the time of the course. This log is used for various kinds of information, for instance pedagogical reflections on a class or as a message board for the other teachers. I believe this to be a valuable documentation of the process of teaching a course whilst continually evaluating it.

When dealing with how to carry out my group discussions as well as how to handle the information in the teacher’s log and my own notes, I base much of my choices on Lykke’s discussion on the interconnectedness between methodologies, methods and ethics (Lykke 2010). Thus, this is how I will introduce them. In this section I aim to explain with some detail what choices I have made regarding methods and methodologies as well as how I have ethically considered my choices. This interconnectedness should also be put in relation to my situated knowledge and my effort to regard this thesis as a snapshot guided specific situatedness, which I elaborated on in the starting point section of this thesis.

For my thoughts on how to structure the group discussions as well as how to handle the information in the log, I find it important to think thoroughly about how to situate myself and take responsibility for both power structures and ongoing representational practices (Wolf 1996) affecting or influencing these meetings as well as how I read and interpret for example my colleagues’ notes. Situatedness is also important when it comes to discussing why I pose the research questions I do, as well as how I am constituted as a knowing subject (Ramazanoğlu; Holland 2002, Aull Davies 1998), which is the reason for me expanding the discussion of my subject position in the starting point section of this thesis.

My ethical concerns in relation to my thesis subject are many and I am well aware of the fact that I need to work thoughtfully with these issues.

Initially, I thought long and hard about whether I should keep the learning institution Kvinnofolkhögskolan anonymous or not. However, since it is the only one of its kind in
Sweden and since my research concerns a specific course given exclusively at that school, I did not find this possible. If I would still persist on doing so, I believe it to be a false anonymity that would only serve as a safety device for me not to engage in certain ethical problems. Instead, I choose to be very open about this and the implications it will have on my discussions with both teachers and former students as well as for what I can refer to from our log and from my own personal notes.

Identifying the institution also presents certain ethical dilemmas when carrying out the group discussions. As for my colleagues and their anonymity, I discussed this with them prior to us meeting. As it is a rather small institution, anonymizing their names does not provide a very realistic anonymity which they are very well aware of. Consequently what is said and what can be quoted from the group discussion will reflect this reality.

As for my discussion with former students, I chose the group very carefully. The course is given during three years, each year with an entirely new group of students. I did not want to choose students from the first group that took the course since it is my experience that the first time a course is given it is subject to more extensive changes than if it has been taught before. This work is of course very fruitful and a large part of my pedagogical work is to continually evaluate course content and methods together with my students, but as this process takes much time and effort I think a group discussion with the first group would focus too much on this, and not give time and space for the questions I want to pose. I also ruled out the group currently taking the course, since they are in the process of participating in it at the moment and thus cannot reflect on it in its entirety. It would also be problematic for me to conduct research in this way with students whom I teach at the same time. This left me with “group two”, since they were not part of the initial starting up of the course and they have had almost a year for reflection after the end of the course.

Concerning the anonymity of the students, I gave them the possibility to choose an alias for themselves, but no one took me up on that offer, thus they are now referred to as student A, B, C and D. I also asked them to write a short description of their activism which I will use to present them as a group. By carrying out both discussions carefully and of course letting both teachers and students read my quotes and summaries of discussions before submitting my thesis, I hope to have avoided any major ethical pitfalls. All quotes are presented in their original language in the appendix of this thesis.
Lastly, in relation to my own notes and log entries, I intend to use them in a general more than specific way, facilitating them when attempting to describe a certain issue or discussion.

PART III: Material and discussion

Introduction

For my thesis I gathered empirical material in different ways. I carried out two group discussions, one with four prior Azadi students and one with Azadi teachers. I also used my own writing log which was written during the specific year teaching Azadi, that I have decided to focus on. The two discussions were recorded and then transcribed. After listening to the recordings of the discussions, as well as reading through the transcripts I structured the material thematically, going back to the three themes I introduced during the discussions. As the themes are inevitably interlinked and considering that during the discussions the conversation moved back and forth and was anything but linear in their form, this was an important step to carry out.

The themes are:

- Increasing intersectional awareness, increasing theoretical intersectional knowledge
- The theory/practice divide
- Contextualizing Azadi within folkbildning in general and Kvinnofolkhögskolan in particular

Through thematically organizing my material I was able to discover links between the discussions and the themes that were not obvious from the start. Consequently, I did the same thematic organization of my own writing log material.

I will present my material and my discussion thematically, however it should be underlined that the themes interact on numerous occasions and that the lines between them are in essence only a construction to structure my lines of thought.

Students’ group discussion
As I have previously mentioned in the methodologies section of this thesis, I chose to ask students who finished their studies at Azadi about a year ago if they were willing to participate in a discussion group. In the end, four of them were able and willing to join the discussion. Prior to us starting the discussion, I asked them to fill in a form to define their main activist engagements. For all of them, it was difficult to mention just one specific issue, however issues like animal rights, feminism, crip-related questions, anti-racism, socialism, lgbtq-questions, anti-capitalism, collectivism, queer-feminism and asylum politics were mentioned. The multitude of issues that students mention are in themselves interesting as they entail an intersectional approach to activism in general, moving away from one-question organization.

The students’ discussion was held at Kvinnofolkhögskolan and lasted for about two and a half hours. Students seemed to be glad to have this time for discussing and reflecting on the course they had completed about a year ago. The atmosphere can be described as happy and comfortable, although students also articulated being somewhat nervous, having the feeling of being back in class. Their feeling of coming back to school was also the reason for the discussion being considerably longer than the 1.5 hours I had anticipated. Initially, the discussion was a bit hesitant but as time went on, students tended to elaborate more and this was also when they started to discuss possible negative aspects of Azadi. In the thesis, students are referred to as A, B, C and D and all translations are made by me.

The group discussions were semi-structured, that is I introduced the central themes described above; intersectional theory and activism, the theory/practice divide and contextualizing Azadi within folkbildning in general and Kvinnofolkhögskolan in particular and let the participants discuss these themes in a free manner. During the discussion I remained rather quiet, trying not to voice my own opinion or my interpretation of what was said. I positioned myself in this way since I did not want to impact the discussion more than necessary. What I offered was summaries of what was said, and presentations of new themes to discuss. In this discussion I looked at my own role as somewhat of a moderator.

**Teachers’ group discussion**

The second group discussion was held with two of the teachers with whom I had planned the course. These two colleagues of mine are much experienced feminist pedagogues and have
been teaching within folkbildning as well as academia for several decades. They are also part of the large group that contributed to Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s formation in 1985. In this discussion I positioned myself as “one of the teachers” (which I also am) and was part of the discussions, voicing my own opinions, thoughts and interpretations. This discussion was in many ways similar to our regular teachers’ meetings, and the atmosphere was comfortable and energetic. Apart from acting as one of the discussants, I also took on the position of a moderator, summarizing discussions, asking for clarifications and introducing new themes to move the discussion forward. Teachers are referred to as A, B and C, and all quotes are translated by me.

**My writing log – an “in-the-moment”-account**

I have also, apart from group discussions, carried out a thematic textual analysis of my log entries during the year of teaching Azadi that is the focus for this thesis. During the course, teachers have a joint web based writing log where notes can be shared with the other teachers. How often each teacher writes in the log differs substantially, from never using this space, to making entries after each lesson. What is written is equally different depending on the teacher. To summarize, the most common entries are summaries of lessons, reflections on what went according to plan and what needs to be followed up, either by the teacher writing the log entry or by another teacher. The log also contains a lot of emotional outputs varying between frustration, worry, excitement, affect and pure joy and amazement.

In this part of my empirical material I have used only my own writing log entries and not the other teachers’. I have done so for two reasons. Firstly, the entries were never thought to be anything else then quickly jotted down messages for the other teachers to respond to or to be the basis for teachers’ meetings. In this context I did not think it fair to ask the other teachers if I could use their entries in my thesis work, since I felt it might impact the way we will relate to our current and future teachers’ writing log. I did not want to risk this, since the writing log for me personally is an important tool for communicating with my colleagues. Secondly, I needed to limit my empirical material in order for it to fit the spatial limitations of this thesis. Since I myself was the one who wrote the most entries during the year, I found this to be a logical limitation. This material is in no way as rich as the material from the two discussion groups, but I include it since I see this as another way of presenting reflections whilst being in the moment, and not as a joint memory work as is the case for both discussion groups. My log entries were, so to speak, written in the midst of everything, just after finishing a lesson. They
are to be seen as my immediate reflections on what just happened. For the purpose of this thesis, I have translated my entries from Swedish to English.

**First Theme: Increasing intersectional awareness, increasing theoretical intersectional knowledge**

“Nuances, that’s what I think this year has been about - moving away from black or white, and it is lovely, since that describes the world better” (student D, my translation).

I have decided to identify the first theme out of the three that I will present, as dealing with increased intersectional awareness and increased theoretical intersectional knowledge from both students’ and teachers’ perspectives. I make a distinction between intersectional awareness and theoretical intersectional knowledge where I look upon the first as the possible outcome of the latter. I have come to this conclusion when talking to my students as well as when I myself have reflected on the discussions in class. For the students in general, increased theoretical intersectional knowledge seems to be the starting point or the basis for how they look at their future activist work. They refer to this increased knowledge as a possibility to become more intersectionally aware activists. To organize and to carry out activist actions with an intersectional awareness, paying attention to power hierarchies of various sorts, and to be able to plan events in a more inclusive way is a common topic permeating students’ discussions. Initially, when students first come to Azadi, many think about intersectionality as being an “all inclusive” theory, as a possible way of including everybody all the time. As time goes on, and discussions deepen, the term intersectionality is renegotiated and reformulated into intersectional awareness, implicating paying attention to how activist work can be more inclusive as well as taking responsibility for its limitations and doing so in a conscious and responsible manner. An example of this process is when students after a theme dealing with crip-theoretical questions discussed accessibility. Their experience was that accessibility such as hearing aid, sign language interpreters and wheel chair access frequently was missing in activist contexts. Often it was left out due to lack of funds and time, and the reasons were understandable but still unsatisfactory for the students who wanted to change this. As part of the Azadi course content, they planned and carried out an event, an evening discussion café, focusing much on accessibility when doing so. The event was successful and well-attended and they were satisfied, but afterwards they did not see this as a realistic reflection of activist work, since they as Azadi-students had substantially more time and money to plan the event,
than what they usually have. Discussion went back and forth, and intersectional awareness was referred to at numerous occasions. Together they formulated their own activist strategy, dealing with the painful task of recognizing and dealing with boundaries. In a society where for instance personal assistants and sign language interpreters need to be ordered many days ahead, and where some public meeting places still do not have hearing loops or easy access for wheelchairs, accessibility is a difficult goal to achieve. Thus, taking part in less accessible events and demonstrations to put attention on such issues ought to be done by those who can. A student summed up the discussion by saying that if one has the possibility to join, one cannot sit at home during for example a demonstration about accessibility because it in itself is not accessible enough; it is the responsibility for those who can to take part and work for this change to become a reality.

The way students relate to intersectional theoretical knowledge and intersectional awareness respectively, has several similarities to how Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall (2013) discuss and exemplify what they define as their third categorization of intersectionality. This category describes the intersectional work largely situated outside of academia and encompasses a variety of demands for change in society, challenging exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender, class, race, nationality etcetera. According to Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall, this adaptation of intersectionality allows “scholars and activists [to] illustrate how practice necessarily informs theory, and how theory ideally should inform best practices and community organizing” (Cho; Williams Crenshaw; McCall 2013: 786). Thus, the Azadi students’ discussion is very much in line with this perspective of intersectionality presented by Cho, Williams Crenshaw and McCall and they can to some degree be said to “embody a motivation to go beyond mere comprehension of intersectional dynamics to transform them” (ibid.), in their activist work.

In relation to the discussion concerning various ways of engaging with and making use of intersectional theory, be it within or outside academia, I would like to go back to the argument of the de-radicalization of intersectionality as it is put forward by Carbin and Edenheim. I briefly introduced their critique in the framework section of this thesis, and I find it important to return to it in this context. In their article,”The Intersectional Turn: A Dream of a Common Language?” (2013), authors argue that the all inclusiveness and consensus-driven use and theorization of intersectionality as theory, framework and politics risks leading to a deradicalization of the concept. In relation to how students interact with intersectionality, as framework, politics and theory in combination as well as respectively, I can not really find
support for their argument. Rather, as I have accounted for, students tend to come to Azadi with the preconception of intersectionality being consensus-based and a way of including everyone, but when taking part in theoretical discussions and intersectionally oriented organizing, they re-radicalize the notion of intersectionality. It then becomes evident that intersectional activism needs to inhabit limitations and conscious exclusion, far from the utopian notion of full intersectional all-inclusiveness. It might be that my students and their intersectional experiences prior to joining Azadi are not the examples that Carbin and Edenheim refer to, this seemingly being exemplified by a society that clings to intersectionality as were it a magic formula. Intersectionality being the buzzword it undoubtedly has been for several years, invites all sorts of possibilities to opt for intersectional perspectives without really acknowledging the radicality the concept presents. In such cases I agree with Carbin’s and Edenheim’s claim that such an adaptation of intersectionality might lead to de-radicalization. However, as for their suggestion to because of this, narrow down intersectionality by going back to its origins, I do not agree. As I have stated earlier, I argue that the origin of intersectional theory is well known and thoroughly acknowledged by most, if not all intersectional theorists, be it within or outside of academia. The genealogy of intersectionality is undoubtedly the basis for current and probably also for future intersectional work. However, as new contexts develop, so must intersectional theorization. If it does not, I believe the fears of Carbin and Edenheim might come true in the form of de-radicalization and forced consensus.

In the Azadi context of folkbildning, I see it as important that through the theorization of students’ intersectional experience move away from this flattened out and safe way of relating to intersectional work and instead present limitation and conflict as undisposable parameters in radical intersectional work.

It is rather clear that students are to a large extent quite satisfied with what a year at Azadi has meant for them, even though they have defined both positive and negative aspects with regards to their continuous activist work in whatever shape and form it has taken after completing their studies at Azadi. Teachers are also positive at large, but seem to identify more problematic issues than do students, many related to who they thought the course would be useful for, and how the combination of theory and practice would be carried out during the course.
Students were very eager to discuss this theme when I introduced it to them. As I asked them to think about in which way, if in any, their increased intersectional awareness and theoretical knowledge had impacted them and or their activism after a year at the Azadi course, their examples were many and both positive and negative in its form. Several of the students express that they gained a more grounded self-esteem which they relate in part to the intersectional discussions that were a large part of the course. They give examples such as having the confidence to "take other roles, in like organizations and groups, or like take on other tasks, which I wouldn’t have done before, and feel like I can contribute to discussions in another way" (student A, my translation). They also describe their increased intersectional awareness as a way for activist work to become more efficient since "if everyone has the same concepts, it’s sort of quicker, you don’t have to tell the entire example, but just like, well, this is this concept that we have talked about before " (student B, my translation). These reflections can be seen as similar to my point about intersectional awareness, as well as acting from this perspective, having its basis in increased theoretical intersectional knowledge. Efficiency, in the way it is described here, can also be seen as contextualizing experience, thus being able to sharpen the analysis of what should be done and how. However, students also see this efficiency as a possible risk if everything just becomes concepts which are not part of an ongoing discussion, student B underlines that “one still has to keep, I mean remember the example, because otherwise it will be really elitist” (my translation). A core theme for the students in their discussion was the risk of elitism within activism, this with regard to their own increased theoretical knowledge. Teachers did not comment much on this during their discussion, rather they were invested in challenging this notion, which was discussed in depth in relation to the theory/practice divide, and will be elaborated later in the theory/practice section. When discussing the issues of increasing intersectional awareness and theoretical intersectional knowledge, students seem to focus on both of these aspects simultaneously, whereas teachers mainly discussed the theoretical part of the questions, however not without providing references to practice.

Students describe how they now at times feel as intersectional observers or coaches in their activist groups. It sometimes prevents them from taking part in certain activist settings; one describes it as if it has become more difficult to be impulsive. This is also linked to the loss of a “very simple rhetoric” (student C, my translation) with an easily defined “we”, fighting an equally simplified enemy, which is reductive but also inspirational in one way. To have an easily defined enemy is in some cases easier than not having one, and it is also one of the
sources for mobilization. When an intersectional awareness comes into the picture, complexity, heterogenization and contextualization does as well. Students agree that this is a positive thing, but it also poses difficulties for an activist organization, seeing that “one has to compromise with a lot of things all the time and everyone has to do it and everyone has different strategies and then it’s easy to just feel like one wants to isolate oneself” (student A, my translation). However, this does not seem to be an option, instead students try to see the benefit of an intersectional analysis in their work, here described by student D in relation to anti-racist activism; “maybe it’s impossible to do something totally correct, I mean, things will be problematic since there is a damn whiteness-norm permeating society, but to not handle these questions, to not discuss racism at all is the worst, just for things to become quiet” (my translation).

To students, this seems to be the main negative or problematic issue and they refer to it frequently. They sort of check themselves; making sure they do not commit to elitist speech and referencing while at the same time recognizing that the merging of theory and practice is of great use for them. This does not seem to be an issue specific for this Azadi-group, but is a reoccurring theme, described very eloquently by the Azadi-group of 2014, who, when interviewed for the final paper issue of the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research’s publication *Genus*, describe the benefits of intersectional analysis alongside the risk of it paralyzing activist work. The telling title of the article being “Smarter but slower with intersectionality”, it describes students’ negotiation process in relation to intersectionality and activism. For the students there is a relief to recognize theory in relation to their own practice and activist work, whilst at the same time theory risks limiting activist practice due to the will of being intersectional “enough”. In the article students pose a very relevant question concerning what demands intersectionality puts on direct action in relation to accessibility and they argue that intersectional awareness must also imply recognizing that full inclusion is not possible, whilst still carrying out the direct protest, demonstration or what is on the agenda. Students see this as core in an intersectional practice and that taking this position, open to critique, is the responsibility for the privileged individual in this specific event. In another event, at another time and place, it is someone else who has room for action enough to be part of the process while yet others need to take a step back (Molander 2013: 20-21). The way I see this, much of this discussion can be referred back to the opening quote of this section and to what one of the students defines as nuances, as a stepping away from the simplistic notion of right and wrong and of an easily defined enemy. Although students refer to this being a
process which started during the course, I would like to offer an alternative interpretation of this notion. Students come to Azadi with a vast array of experience of organizing, be it maybe not from as heterogeneous background as teachers had anticipated. In their activism they most likely have been forced to problematize their portrait of the enemy on more than one occasion. What increased intersectional awareness might have contributed to is the systematization of these events, before perhaps more seen as individual non-related discussions and decisions. Thus, I argue that the nuances can be seen as the connections between processes, as a way of theorizing the links between them, moving from solitary events to a mapping out of a larger scale of looking at and understanding activist practice. This definition of intersectional awareness can then also provide a way of moving away from the risk of elitism, since if the core of intersectional awareness is indeed to connect actions of various sorts, it does not propose to be of much (if any) worth without a multitude of actions, theorization, debates and planning as its basis.

Teachers’ discussion started, after I had introduced this theme, with why we started this course and what we wanted to do with it. Some had been thinking about such a course for several years, whilst others came in to the discussion just as the course started to take shape. The initial initiative for starting a course like Azadi at Kvinnofolkhögskolan was much due to discussions with activists close to the school who asked for such a course. Teacher 2 elaborates on the purpose of the course,

My thoughts or vision then, were maybe that they (activists) would come from different directions and also have various practices, would have been in various practices and would have a need for, feel need for, to together with others, with other experiences reflect and both create theory and adapt other theory, sort of a further training for activists (my translation).

Teacher 1 agrees with this analysis and recollection of why the course was initiated and adds, “my thought was that those who apply for such a course come from intersectional practices, they have that experience. And in that practice there are theories one can distinguish and clarify somewhat, different theories depending on what intersections we talk about” (teacher 1, my translation). In the discussion it became clear that the teachers agree upon who they thought a course like Azadi would be useful for, we identified the group as activists with activist experience of various kinds and with the will to through the combination of theory and practice reflect upon their activism together with others.
In the recruitment process, much thought and work was put on creating possibilities for heterogeneity amongst Azadi applicants. For example, the name Azadi was chosen carefully to possibly attract and create interest among persons speaking other languages than Swedish, since Azadi means freedom in Persian, Kurdish, Azerbaijani, Urdu and Hindi. Thus, the name was a small effort to move away from the Western centered outlook on feminist studies and intersectional theory and practice. Additionally, information about the course was distributed in other networks than those close to the school, and effort was also made to recruit nationally and not just in the Gothenburg area. Information about Azadi was sent to several feminist events all over Sweden.

During our discussion we also reflected on what turned out the way we thought and planned for, and what did not and how we handled this. Much had to do with the applicants not being such a diverse group as we had anticipated, they can in a somewhat simplified manner be described as coming mostly from a queer feminist background, and not all had much experience of organizing. The groups were also substantially smaller than we had expected. Due to lack of applications, groups were between eight and twelve participants whereas we had expected between sixteen to twenty students.

Teachers saw it problematic that the group turned out to be more homogenous than anticipated, creating less of a basis for a heterogeneous outlook on both theory and practice, whilst this did not seem to be a problem for the students who saw the closeness and similar backgrounds within Azadi as beneficial and important for them finding the confidence to try out things they had not done before. This confidence has also stayed with them after the course’s ending and is something they often return to during their discussion. It should however also be emphasized that students, although recognizing their homogeneity, also identified more differences between themselves than the teachers did, and when talking to each other remembering conflicts and long discussions as tiresome and challenging in the moment, but rewarding in the long run.

The content of the course is partially planned by the teachers, but as often is the case in folkbildning students have great impact on both form and content which means that teachers provide what could be seen as a framework related to time, teacher’s schedule and similar formalities. This process is closely related to Paulo Freire’s notion of problem posing education where teaching entails a constant dialogue between teacher and student and where these positions can be reversed and changed time and time again. Freire states that for
teaching and learning to take place it requires a context where “students – no longer docile listeners – are [...] now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students expressed their own.” (Freire 1993/1970: 62). The way I understand Freire, this refers to both form and content, and that was at large how we related to the two during the course.

We also provided, on a monthly basis, a more detailed schedule which was open for discussions and alterations. However, during our group discussion it became clear that certain methods and topics were important for us, either individually or as a teacher group, to include in the course. Examples of such methods are that much of the education should be of problem based orientation, that is, the students themselves should define and work with a specific problem within a certain form. We also discussed the necessity for Azadi as a group to meet other groups, other forms of organizing and doing activism than what they were used to, this could be done through field work, through planning and arranging activities open for others at the school etc. Concerning content, we thought it important to include both past and current feminist struggles, and to work in a norm critical way. Important issues that we wanted to introduce were amongst others, postcolonial perspectives and an array of perspectives on inclusion and exclusion in numerous contexts. This was done in various ways, for example through introducing themes on conflict and boundaries and through interacting with other groups and networks. Our approach to formulating the Azadi curriculum had many similarities with how Naples’ describes her planning of a university based course on intersectionality where she assumes that “an intersectional framework should include attention to historical, cultural, discursive and structural dimensions that shape the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, national and religious identity, among other identities” (Naples 2009: 567). Interestingly enough, we did start the courses with trying to untangle certain intersections with the intention of later combining them. Julia Bahner, looking at how intersectionality has been thought at Social work education at Swedish universities, argues that this approach in itself can be said to be anti-intersectional since it might suggest that intersections can really be untangled and analyzed separately. Instead, Bahner suggests starting in the midst of it all, discussing all present intersections simultaneously, thus underlining that they are indeed inseparable and intertwined (Bahner 2013: 8). Evaluating Azadi, with the purpose of developing it after this initial trial period of three years, I would say that teachers at large agree with Bahner. Pedagogically, it might make sense to start in the
respective parts of a theoretical framework, however, this strategy might not lend itself to intersectional theory since it risks keeping up the notion of categories as being distinctively distinguishable.

In relation to teaching methods, the freedom folkbildning institutions inhabit regarding these issues becomes evident when looking closely at the different methods we used during Azadi. We worked in many different ways, using lectures, fiction, theoretical texts, films, magazines and joint experiences as the basis for our discussions. We had reading circles, writing workshops, philosophical discussion groups open for others, time for organizing discussion evenings, flash mobs, field work, and collaboration with various networks, activist organizations and academic institutions. Students also had weekly scheduled time without teachers, which they used for preparation, activist work, and meetings of various kinds. Within folkbildning there are no specific state regulated limitations regarding what methods to include or exclude in a course. Additionally, Azadi being a one year course, not qualifying students to get a prognosis\(^3\) regarding their further higher education, it can be said that we are even more free to choose since students did not need to qualify for general competences\(^4\) during their Azadi year. With this said, our chosen methods, although diverse and somewhat non-traditional, were perhaps less inventive and imaginative than one might expect. Freedom is to a very large extent a positive and encouraging starting point when planning courses; however it also becomes evident that while there might not be any concrete boundaries and limitations, teachers seem to have issues leaving more traditional curricula behind in its entirety. This was also the case when planning Azadi; we came with several set ideas on what to address and how to do it. Although one could argue that the above presented methods differ quite a bit from traditional courses, we could have elaborated even more. Another contributing factor, given that my colleagues and I can be deemed somewhat experienced teachers, my colleagues much more experienced than me, was that we could assume what expectations students would come with. Our plan then became a balance act between our own pedagogical considerations and possible student expectations.

To work dialogically and problem based as we did most of the time at Azadi requires pedagogical presence, a sort of being in the moment whilst also keeping track of the macro

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\(^3\) As a student at a folk high school, certain long term courses, referred to as General Courses, qualify students for a prognosis called Eligibility for Higher Education concerning their further studies.

\(^4\) General competences (for example Swedish, English, Mathematics, Science and History) are required for students who want their Eligibility for Higher Education prognosis in order for them to be qualified to apply to university-based studies.
perspective of what goes on. Returning to my teacher’s log, the entries as much in the moment as they can be, I can trace this process. After a couple of hours in class, I wrote enthusiastically, “It was like a whirlwind in the classroom, I just walked in, and was thrown out after two hours, happy and dizzy” (teachers’ log, my translation).

From what I can see, now returning to my log more than a year after writing it, this was a reoccurring feeling after being in class teaching. It was a positive feeling, although exhausting, and it demanded that I was able to balance between control and letting go of the same. On numerous occasions I came to class prepared with certain material and for certain discussions, but the students pushed in a different direction, having other pressing issues they wanted to discuss. The folkbildning tradition of student centered learning really came to its core and for me personally, this was both amazing and challenging.

Teachers also reflected on the fact that the target group in mind when introducing the course and drawing its framework was somewhat different from the actual applicants, in the way that they had less intersectional experience and also were less diverse as a group than what teachers expected. Due to these circumstances, changes in the course plan were done and effort was put on creating those experiences that students did not bring with them into the classroom in the quantity teachers had expected. In short, it can be said that students did not bring with them the basis for what Naples identifies as intersectional feminist praxis, before mentioned in the theoretical framework part of this thesis. Such praxis “foregrounds the ways in which activism or experience shape knowledge” (Naples 2009: 573-574). This re-structuring of the course seems to have been somewhat more problematic for teachers than for students. On one hand, teachers saw the obvious benefits with creating joint experiences within Azadi, such as the group becoming a close and creative space for discussing, arguing and formulating theory and practice. On the other hand, teachers also at times identified the group as too close, leaving narrow space for critical reflection on the joint practice. Pedagogically this might have been an easy risk to define, for the students it seemed to come as a bit of a surprise. An example of this is when students, during their discussion, refer back to their work prior to a short field study that they carried out.

This work included extensive preparation for the coming field work, where they were divided in to pairs and asked to visit an organization, group or network of their choice, during a week. The group visited various organizations, for example a norm critical theatre ensemble and the municipal district administration working with care for the elderly. One group chose to visit
an organization working with young persons in one of the suburbs of Gothenburg. This organization offered leisure activities to girls and trans* persons. This information was known to the students because of their own contacts and networks. However, when prior to the field study, they examined the information material provided by the organization, they were very skeptical since it did not articulate that girls and trans* persons were its target groups. Students saw this as excluding and a way of making trans* persons invisible. Thus, when preparing for the field study, several of their questions revolved around the issue of trans* inclusion. Much time was put on reading the information material they had been given by the organization and on formulating critical questions around what they at the time defined as trans* exclusion. One of the students describes this vividly, “we wanted to confront them, we were like- they don’t write that it is trans inclusive! Damn! And then we went there, and when we came back, we just, woah …” (student C, my translation). In elaborated form, the woah is remembering how their own analysis, very well worked through and analyzed intersectionally, was done so in what might be described as an Azadi-context. In their discussions, although having occasional conflicts, they agreed upon the basis for their analysis – trans* inclusion implies visibility and recognition. Meeting the persons working at the organization they were introduced to a rather different analysis, based in another context where the outcome was radically different. According to the staff, not focusing on making visible the trans* inclusive aspects of their activities provided a possibility for trans* persons to take part in them. In no way was this non-visibility strategy carried out due to ignorance, but it was rather a strategic choice, keeping participants from being forced in to a possible coming out process.

Another trait in both students’ and teachers’ discussions is connected to what aspects of intersectionality and intersectional categories that was introduced to the course over the year. Teachers were quite clear on that they wanted certain aspects to be part of the course, such as postcolonial perspectives, crip theory, and snap shots of the genealogy of feminist work both nationally and internationally. Students complied with these aspects being a part of the course, offering their own additions which also led to the inclusion of for example sustainable activism, anti-racist activism and femme-activism in the curriculum. Important aspects that students identified as missing or only briefly discussed, was for instance transfeminism and speciesism. One could argue that since the course was to a very large extent open for revision and restructuring, students could have asked for these aspects to be included. Looking back, this might have been partly possible, but it must also be recognized that teachers, as do
students, come with their own sensitivity for certain intersectional power relations whilst being less attentive to others. Additionally, this is also part of what I argue that intersectional awareness entails, not all, since I regard them as infinite, intersections can be included. When I look at all three Azadi classes I can see how the focus has varied very much depending on what happened in society at large during the course. Certain intersections where also highlighted due to what events Azadi took part in. When a large Human Rights conference was held in Gothenburg, Azadi took part and thus issues connected to human rights became central, another Azadi class was visited by femme-activist and academician Ulrika Dahl and were very inspired by this which led to them working extensively with issues of class and femininity. The current Azadi class focused during their field studies in Budapest and Warsaw on the conditions for Roma and my guess is that it will become an important part of their continuous intersectional discussions. Maybe it can be said then, that teachers did not influence which intersections were included to a large extent, but certainly they also contributed to what was included and excluded in one way or another.

Second Theme: The theory/practice divide

"I'm thinking that theory is just kind of the words, one might have gotten it, but now one gets words for it, to be able to talk about it" (student B, my translation).

For the second theme I asked both students and teachers to reflect upon the theory/practice divide. I have during my teaching at Azadi, as well as in other courses where I have been teaching, identified a contradictive pattern where both students and teachers sometimes seem to perpetuate this binary whilst at the same time challenging it. As I mentioned before in the theoretical framework section of this thesis, this binary is articulated and referred to in various ways. It is at times defined as the academy/activist binary and sometimes as a theory/practice binary. The way I interpret discussions concerning this subject, both figurations focus on a construction of reality, shaped by institutionalization of previously non-institutionalized work against various forms of discrimination and power structures. Many have challenged this construction and in doing so they have made visible what such a construction perpetuates with regard to exclusion and limited room for action. For example, bell hooks stresses that keeping up this divide will lead to great loss within the activist as well as the academic community. Instead, hooks emphasizes the interconnectedness of theory and practice and regard them not as opposites but as dependent on each other and thus inseparable (hooks 1994: 64-67). For
me, the input from teachers and Azadi students here serve as an opportunity to further discuss this division and look closely at what impact it has had on the studies at Azadi.

Going back again to the purpose of Azadi, to offer a kind of further training for activists, and space for them to theorize their practical experiences, it might at first glance, look as if this division between theory and practice is part of the purpose from the get go. This, however is to simplify the issue and to take for granted that Azadi starts with the presumption that the theory/activism divide is a correct description of the world. That is not the case. Instead, Azadi, the way it was and is discussed among both teachers and students, should and could challenge this binary construction. This is also much in line with pedagogy within folkbildning, described in *Folkbildning’s Direction & Intent* as being a place where “the boundaries between theory and practice, academia and society, the arts and other disciplines, are constantly being crossed” (Folkbildningsrådet 2013: 17).

At many times I think the classes at Azadi have served this purpose, but at other times it has complied with the construction, which is not very surprising since this construction is very much part of society at large. Paulo Freire connects this up-keeping of the binary to a pedagogy that regards the teacher as transmitter of knowledge, and students as somewhat of an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge transmitted from an omnipotent teacher. This is what Freire refers to as banking education and which he contrasts with problem posing education (Freire 1993/1970, 1998). According to Freire, the banking approach holds in itself “a tendency to dichotomize everything” (Freire 1993/1970: 61). Freire argues that banking approaches to education and learning processes relates to theory and practice “as immobilizing and fixating forces [which] fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings” (Freire 1993/1970: 65), whereas “problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (ibid. italics in original). In order to achieve this process of becoming that Freire refers to, the connection between theory and practice must be acknowledged at all times. If theory, or practice for that matter, is disconnected from the other, de-radicalization of the two is indeed a perceivable risk.

As I introduced the theory/practice theme to the students, they seemed to recognize this at once; however it was initially difficult for them to articulate their experience and pin point their thoughts concerning the subject. The conversation became more hesitant and
formulations seemed to be hard to find. Eventually this became a “thinking together-session” for the students, initiated by student C’s initial thoughts on the subject:

I’m thinking about this with dividing theory and practice and if it’s possible, and I’m thinking sort of no, it might not be possible to divide it because one talks in theory about what one does in … it depends on what one means by divide and about what one means by theory and practice, maybe there is a theory detached from practice, which one in practice can never reach, like with accessibility for example, that one just, it should be accessible for everyone, well, okay, intersectionality does not really agree to that, it is not about getting everyone on board, and at the same time it is still a way of trying to see power. And then I wonder if there still isn’t something in intersectionality that is just possible in theory, but impossible in practice (my translation).

This lengthy quote illustrates very well what the discussion looked like. The students were at first somewhat hesitant in articulating their thoughts regarding the theory/practice divide, but eventually in their conversation, it became clear that they had been thinking about and negotiating this divide quite a lot. Much of the discussion was about how theory was introduced, often in comparison with university based gender studies. Student D elaborates; “what was great was how theory was applied so much more and we talked about practical examples and it was really, really liberating and helped me a lot and also that we had field work and stuff” (my translation). Applicability and relation to life experience is key in this discussion, Freire refers to this important connection as “critical reflection on practice [being] a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply ‘blah, blah, blah,’ and practice, pure activism” (Freire 1998: 30). Theory as it was introduced in Azadi, with time for discussion and thinking together as well as practical examples and the possibility to apply theory to experiences during field work seems to be a positive experience. However, theory also seems to complicate things, and again the notion of exclusion and how the call for theoretical reflections needs to be addressed in activist settings comes in to the discussion, here summarized by student D, “it’s almost like a status thing, sort of who knows intersectionality the best, and I’m thinking that this is super-excluding even though it is important with analysis, like it’s easy not to see ones background and just, oops, my whiteness makes me miss a lot of things” (my translation).

As the discussion moved on, I could see that even though students had many ideas and reflected much on how theory should be taught and discussed, such as giving practical examples and give generous time for discussion, they did not really challenge the notion of theory and practice as divided. Instead they put focus on how to relate one to the other. They
seemed to agree upon the fact that both theory and practice has its place in the activist contexts, theory very much seen as a way of improving practice. This point of view correlates well with their approach to intersectional theory, which often was referred to as a possibility to increase intersectional awareness in activist work, as it was discussed in the Increasing intersectional awareness, increasing theoretical intersectional knowledge section of this thesis. Still, seeing theory and practice as inseparable is not discussed, although one could argue that the previously presented quote by student C, the starting point of what I defined as a thinking together session, very much is revolving around this deconstruction of the theory/practice binary. Yet, it is not really thoroughly articulated; instead the discussion reflects theory and practice as being two different entities. The reasons for this being the case are not easy for me to detect, however I believe that one aspect might be related to society at large constructing and perpetuating this divide. This is done in various ways, for example in the way high school studies are divided into being either theoretically or practically oriented. Also, I have observed many persons, on an individual level referring to themselves as either practically or theoretically predisposed.

Unlike the student discussion group, the teacher group had no problems directly identifying and discussing the theory/practice divide and how they experienced and handled this issue. In general, one can say that teachers looked upon this division as very much part of society of today, also in connection to “a problem of our time, that has to do with time, that has to do with this ‘just-in-time-person’, where nothing can be extended over time, but all should be effectuated at once, effects should be visible at once and should be measurable basically the next week” (teacher 1, my translation). The issue of measurability is often returned to in teachers’ discussion, since it seemingly is in conflict with core values within folkbildning, for example, lifelong learning, strengthening and developing democracy and increasing the possibility for people to work for social development with their own lives as the starting point. The core values of folkbildning do not lend themselves to immediate measuring and outcome calculation. Instead they call for a very different contextualization of what teaching and learning processes might incorporate. In such a contextualization the division between theory and practice is yet again challenged. Berit Larsson, in dialogue with bell hooks and Chantal Mouffe, states that within radical folkbildning, theory and practice presupposes one another and that this is necessary in order to keep plurality and critical dialogue, which is how Larsson defines border pedagogy (Larsson 2009/2010: 230).
Even though teachers, like the students in ways dealt with theory and practice as separable and well defined parts of a binary, they also elaborated on their thoughts on how this construction did not serve its purpose of portraying activist experience within a folkbildning context, which is much more complex than this binary allows.

Most students being relatively young, most having experience from Swedish high school where each lesson is guided by goal orientation and measurability, it is no surprise to teachers that for students, at times, theoretical discussions in need of time and continual reflection is put in opposition to practice which often has a direct visible outcome. Pedagogically it is indeed a challenge to problematize these priorities and expectations among students. Students’ expectations are inevitable a great consideration for all teachers. All student groups come with varying expectations and inclinations in relation to theory and practice. Some come with academic self-esteem and thus the ability to engage critically with theory, some come with bad and problematic experiences of teaching and learning situations and view theory and theoretical work as middle class, old fashioned and the opposite of radical activist work. Liinason addresses the issue of students’ expectations by referring to a workshop on memory work at a gender studies master’s program. In relation to this, Liinason discusses how students’ expectations influence the learning process, and how their resistance towards bridging the split between theory and practice was articulated. Although Liinason in a way can be said to describe the opposite of what I experience at Azadi, since she usually meet student groups who typically prefer theory to practice, regarding practice as non-academic, I find the example relevant in several ways. Liinason, experiencing the other side of the dichotomy, also identifies risks and losses with the theory/practice divide. Liinason describes her experience of students’ expectations becoming “a restraint on the use of experience-based work in an academic context” (Liinason 2011: 289). Further on, Liinason also reflects on how a conceived feminist (academic) classroom can strengthen the theory/practice dichotomy. It might be that academic feminist classrooms differ from feminist classrooms within folkbildning; however I believe them to put focus on the same issues, be it from two different perspectives. Additionally, I would argue that any feminist classroom will differ from the next one, be it within or outside academia. Liinason refers to the fact that “the division between theory and experience-based work, in return, is a well-known division among academic feminists” (Liinason 2011: 299), and I would argue that the same goes for activist settings. Thus, both sides take part in withholding the theory/practice binary. This gatekeeping will limit the room for action for all, whether identifying as academic or activist feminist.
During the teachers’ discussion much revolved around how, pedagogically, the theory/practice division could have been challenged. Issues like how the teachers’ lesson content was also sorted according to this division, both by teachers and students, how certain teachers had either just theoretical lessons and others had only practically oriented lessons and how these differences were referred to came up in the discussion.

In the curriculum presented to the students, teachers made an effort to show how, pedagogically, they had planned the course. Apart from a term overview, students were given detailed schedules prior to each theme introduced. These schedules were typically four or five weeks in length. The majority of the classes during such a thematic period was devoted to the theme, but there were also what we called parallel sessions, which ran over a longer period of time, for instance over a whole term. Examples of such parallel sessions are feminist philosophy and reading circles. At times these sessions were incorporated in the theme and sometimes they were separate from it. In all, four teachers had classes with the group, where two had substantially more time teaching the group, the other two each met the group once a week. All taken into account, both teachers and students began defining classes and also teachers as either theoretical or practical.

Returning to my teacher’s log, I can see that I was very much part of this definition process. I, as well as my students, defined my work at Azadi in particular and at the school in general as very much theoretically oriented. That is where my interest, knowledge and pedagogical starting points are situated. I would say that I make effort to challenge the theory/practice divide, but often end up perpetuating it. This can be illustrated by this telling excerpt from my teacher’s log; “We approached McCall’s text in a more practical way which was appreciated. They worked in pairs to define main features of anti-categorical, inter-categorical and intra-categorical complexity. Then, they began an intersectional analysis starting from these perspectives” (teachers’ log, my translation). Entries similar to this are a common trait in my log. I can see now, that I, in the way I explained what we had done also perpetuated the theory/practice divide in various ways, sometimes as in the above presented quote, where I in a way distinguish between the text being theoretical and the approach practical. I tend to define certain methods as more or less practical or theoretical; still I have an understanding that such a division is a construction. What we did prior to me writing the log entry, was that after them having read and discussed McCall’s text *The Complexity of Intersectionality* (McCall 2005) I presented them with person portraits that I had formulated and asked them to think about what they could and could not say about these persons’ plausible positions,
depending on whether they did so from an anti-categorical, inter-categorical or intra-categorical starting point. I describe this process in my teacher’s log as a more practical approach towards theory, here represented by McCall’s text. In hindsight I would say that this division is clearly an adaptation to the always present binary of theory and practice.

Another perspective of the up-keeping of the theory/practice division derives from different ways of ordering and categorizing what is studied and how. Teacher 3 reflected on how this division, although it is partly perpetuated by both teachers and students, is interpreted differently as well;

I think it is very much, that I think of as practice, but students don’t. For instance, if we sit and have read a fictional text and we have a conversation about this and one never knows what will come up, but issues will arise and then we discuss them. For me this is practice, I mean, thinking is practice for me!” (teacher 3, my translation).

What I think this quote illustrates is that if the interpretation of what goes on in the classroom is theoretically or practically oriented differs, there is also a risk of perpetuating and maybe also strengthening the binary division. If I as a teacher, similar to the teacher quoted, look upon thinking and reflecting as practice, but my students regard this as theoretically oriented work, this will impact not only how we relate to the content but also how we relate to theory and practice respectively.

I would also like to address students’ ambivalent approach towards theory, which they in general regard as less radical and having less potential to change society than do practice, which is often used to describe activist planning of various events.

Drawing on the purpose of Azadi, the combining of practice (activist experience) and theory, teachers discussed the ambivalence in this will to succumb to the theory/activist divide whilst simultaneously giving theory a somewhat elevated position. Teacher 3 tries to describe this ambivalence amongst students accordingly:

But it is like both in a way, like no – theory is not for me, I’m a doer, there are many students saying that and at the same time they have such belief in theory to solve life, sort of like, now we have read and discussed this, now I can handle for example conflict, but reality is that the basis for conflict is that there is something we were not able to handle (teacher 3, my translation).

What this quote illustrates is related to the ambivalence towards what is perceived as theory-based. Simultaneously, many students prioritize practice over theory, seeing themselves as
practitioners, activists, while also putting extensive trust and hope towards theory to solve inequalities and problematic issues in society as well as in their relations. Additionally, this hierarchization might impact what effort one is willing to put on what one regards as either theoretical or practical work. If a theoretical text shows resistance, challenges the reader, it is not always certain that as much effort is put on engaging with the text as if the resistance would come from someone or something within a practical context, maybe in the form of critique towards a planned event.

Teachers discussed what they identified as the ambivalence towards theory, resulting in contradictory strategies vis-à-vis theory and theoretical discussions, as possibly deriving from students not having as much activist experience as we anticipated. This might also lead to students’ focus on joint practical experiences, more than on theorizing prior experience, while simultaneously putting immense trust in theory. In much, I think this complicated relation to theory, regarding it as subordinate to practice, but still thinking it has answers to why practice turns out the way it does, is captured in this short dialogue between teachers 1 and 3;

“1 – To understand what one is part of, one can be helped by others’ thoughts and reflections, theory, but it doesn’t solve …

3 – It doesn’t solve life!

1 – It does not solve life, no.” (my translation).

At first, this might seem as a generational difference, where teachers, in this case substantially older than students, with certain nostalgic and sentimental tones look back at their own subject positions in relation to theory and what it did and did not solve. However, this is not entirely the case, since this dialogue is part of teachers’ discussion on how students seemed to put un-proportionally emphasis on theory as guideline and facilitator in life. Teachers articulated that theory cannot be distinguished from practice, from life if you will, and it can therefore not be anticipated to solve life, which it is inevitably part of.

Maybe student C catches the dilemma, when in the group discussion emphasizing that how one relates to theory can also place theory differently with regards to practice and its possible political force, stating that “it is really about how one views intersectionality, if one just ’ooh – theoretical tool’ or actually, this is political!, and I’m thinking that several of us see intersectionality as political” (my translation).
Lastly, I want to present a quote that I think also relates to the theory/practice divide and where both my and the students’ ambivalence is present. The entry is written in the teachers’ log after having had the concluding lesson before they had a one week field work at different organizations and networks.

“I talked about methods for field studies and about what feminist methods might and might not incorporate. Also about dilemmas in connection to their specific field studies/observations/interviews. They are somewhat hesitant, but as always willing to try, and I talked a lot about that they should feel confident in that they HAVE problematized and discussed beforehand and that when they are there, in the situation, they should try to just be there and observe what happens” (teachers’ log, my translation).

After a long period of theorizing and discussing before doing the field work, the insecurities and the divide between theory and practice became visible once again. Even though we had spent a great deal of time talking about dilemmas in fieldwork and identified feminist methods and their heterogeneity, the insecurities were still there. Theory, in one way given much attention, although somewhat reluctantly approached, did not, when faced with empirics offer much comfort or security. In one way this might be inevitable, insecurities are part of intersectional work, but when we had the session I referred to in my log entry, it was as if all the confidence and the amazing theoretical reflections carried out by the students had totally disappeared. It made me think that it was as if theory was so disconnected from life, that it had no place in the end. Luckily, the students were willing to proceed with their field studies in spite of their insecurities and when they came back, we had the possibility to discuss this interesting discrepancy. When they returned from their fieldwork, students held seminars where they presented what they had experienced. During our discussions at these seminars, they did not seem to have any difficulties applying theory to practical experiences. Through their experiences, theory became useful, but only then.

To me, this illustrates once again rather clearly the necessary connection between theory and practice, or rather the weakness in the binary construction of the two. Apart from insecurities being part of field work and of venturing something new in general, it became clear that not until theory was thoroughly connected to practice did it offer ways for the students to deepen their theoretical as well as their practical knowledge. According to Eschle and Maiguashca, this binary evidently needs to be renegotiated and deconstructed, since it otherwise will allow for perpetuating the notion that “academics are impartial commentators on the world while activists are partisan, polemical advocates; academics work in elite institutions while activists
are embedded in the everyday, ‘on the streets’ or at ‘the grassroots’” (Eschle; Maiguashca 2006: 119). Such a divide between various sorts of feminist work is far away from any feminist intersectional starting point, where it also has to be taken into account that different strategies will serve different purposes and will be dependent on subject positions as well as time and place.

**Third Theme: Contextualizing Azadi within folkbildning in general and Kvinnofolkhögskolan in particular**

“I knew from the beginning, that it was a nodal point, more than just a school, it was a social place too, a step into the movement” (student C, my translation).

The context for where the course Azadi was given was the third and final theme that I initiated during both students’ and teachers’ discussions. As presented in the Theoretical framework section, Kvinnofolkhögskolan is part of the Swedish folkbildning tradition but is also one of a kind. I wanted to get information on if and to what degree the specificity of Kvinnofolkhögskolan impacted the students’ choice to apply for the course. I also wanted to find out what expectations they had on both Kvinnofolkhögskolan as an institution and folkbildning in general. I was interested in how folkbildning was understood by the students prior to them attending Azadi, and in which ways these preconceptions were met and challenged during the course. Equally, I wanted to during the teachers’ discussion, track back our planning process, when we planned the course. I wanted to see if it was possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our pedagogical choices in relation to students’ expectations. In a larger context, I also wanted to address issues concerning folkbildning in general, and think about in what ways folkbildning offers space and methods to challenge the theory/practice divide.

In their article on how to bridge the divide between academia and activism, teachers Eschle and Maiguashca (2006) turn to the activist arena to get inspiration to change their own teaching practices into becoming more critical. Their description of this activist setting which they get their inspiration from has numerous similarities with folkbildning practice, thus I find it relevant to elaborate on their discussion somewhat. For instance, when discussing preferred methods of teaching, Eschle and Maiguashca refer to smaller groups as one way to deepen students’ analysis through increased active participation. I recognize this assumption that smaller groups are beneficial for student participation and that it will give room for subjects’ experience to be related to the theoretical discussion in question. Many times, this may be the
case, and I realize that Eschle and Maiguashca might consider a small group being much larger than I do, since their reference is the university. In a folkbildning context though, groups can also be too small. Teachers at Azadi have discussed this issue on several occasions, since we saw it as problematic when the group was less than 10 students, leaving little room for a creative, collective process. Instead, the students related to each other on what seemed as bordering to a private level. In larger groups of 20 to 30 students, this is seldom the case.

Eschle and Maiguashca also refer to the constraints of university based pedagogy, describing their limited influence on reading lists, group size, syllabus and form of examination. Indeed, I see the problems such limitations will cause, and since these restraints are not as much a part of folkbildning I would like to explore how and to what extent this room for action is being used within folkbildning. It might be that Eschle’s and Maiguaschca’s analysis of what could be done is somewhat idealistic and naïve, but it also holds a lot of hope, radical thought and will. According to Eschle and Maiguashca, activist pedagogy and teaching is defined by teachers, “whether they were facilitators of dialogue or more directive transmitters of an analysis, [as] committed to a political point of view and made that commitment explicit” (Eschle;Maiguashca 2006: 131). Throughout their article they stress the importance of starting from individual experiences, which then will be analyzed in a larger context. This incorporates for Eschle and Maiguashca to move away from dull lectures and to try their best to make room in the syllabus for students to choose parts of the course material out of their own interest. In essence, what they describe is a rather straight forward folkbildning context. Seeing that the grass always tends to be greener on the other side, I would like to explore if this is really what folkbildning does? Within the folkbildning setting, much less regulations than what Eschle and Maiguashca refer to, restrain our teaching practice. To what extend do we make use of it?

Students had various reasons for applying for Azadi, but evident was that the place where it is located was for many an important factor. When asked what they thought it would entail to study at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, students expressed much confidence in the school being grounded in feminist analysis, separatist organization and political activism. Through their friends and acquaintances, students had been introduced to Kvinnofolkhögskolan. Several, if not a majority, knew someone who had attended Azadi or other feminist courses at the school, prior to them applying for Azadi. In general, it seems as if students regard Kvinnofolkhögskolan as an important part of the contemporary activist arena in Gothenburg.
and Sweden. I recognize this view however I am sometimes surprised that while this seems to be the case, the institution often tends to struggle to recruit enough students to its courses. Those who do apply seem to, as I have previously discussed, come from a somewhat narrow activist context, not as diverse as might be expected. This makes me question if there is a missing link or a somewhat faulty analysis on the school’s part when it comes to what feminist oriented courses should be offered as well as how they should be promoted.

As for more general folkbildning traditions, students highlighted the benefits of teachers not being lecturers and authorities but the course being open for student influence and possibility to change plans according to what was needed and in focus at the moment. They compared Kvinnofolkhögskolan to own experiences from the traditional Swedish school system, university studies and studies at other folkbildning institutions. Expectations concerning teaching methods seem to have been well met. Students underlined group based learning, extensive time for discussions and non-formal as well as norm critical perspectives and methods as essential for them defining the course as within the folkbildning tradition. They exemplified this by us using fiction and film to move further in intersectional theoretical discussions, teachers referring to own experiences within the feminist movement and collaboration with students from other classes in the school as well as organizations and persons from outside the school. Generally, students seem to be well acquainted with folkbildning prior to them attending Azadi. Their expectations are along the line of what they themselves define as non-traditional forms of teaching and engaging with material and thoughts. The possibility to influence the studies in both form and content is often referred to in a positive manner. However, I have also met students, over the years who have asked whether studying at Azadi also entails planning the entire course from scratch, thinking this is too laborious and time consuming. Looking back at the first year of Azadi and of how we presented the course to possible applicants, I see it was a fair question. Our initial pedagogical assumption was that activists applying for Azadi would appreciate having much to say about how the course should be planned and carried out. As it turned out, they instead came to ask for a suggestion from teachers which they could discuss and revise. Thus, over the three years of teaching Azadi, we have moved from a very open and transparent way of structuring and planning the course towards more of a teacher initiated course plan, open for and subjected to students’ revision.

Moving away from traditional academic approaches to feminist theory, in form as well as in content, seems to be one of the strengths with Azadi being situated in a folkbildning context.
As a folkbildning institution, there is room for challenging and questioning the form of theory production which bell hooks describes as “metalinguistic, creating exclusive jargon” (hooks 2000: 22) produced by “a large body of feminist thinkers banded together to form an elite group writing theory that could be understood only by an “in” crowd” (ibid.). This is indeed very far from the feminist education, both inside and outside of academia, which hooks argues instead should be closely related to life and which entails that teachers “have to reach beyond the academic and even the written word” (hooks 2000: 23). For folkbildning this is indeed a possible and, I would argue, desirable route to take. I do not see this as moving away from complex theory in various forms, but rather as approaching it in numerous ways, consistently starting from life experience and persistently insisting on the link between the two. However, I have had occasional heated discussions with students regarding my approach, since for some of them, relating to written theory at all is problematic. The way I understand them, relating to what they perceive as written academic theory at all implies keeping up the elitism that hooks refers to. My analysis of the matter is the opposite; I have strived and still strive for relating practice to theories presented within academia. For me, to leave them is in a way to back down, and perceiving them as “not for me” is playing an anti-intellectual losing game. Instead I insist on regarding them as my property as much as they are the property of an academic intelligentsia. At times I think I manage to get my point across to my students, other times I might as well end up perpetuating the elitist stance that they so intensely despise.

An example of what I have tried to describe above, and which with some variation, has occurred in all of the three Azadi-classes is when we have had a theme on postcolonial feminism. For this theme we have used two Swedish anthologies with texts from various postcolonial theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Trinh T Minh-ha, and Gayatri Spivak just to name a few. These texts are undeniable rather complex and some of them are highly theoretical. Usually we divide the texts amongst the group, each student choses a couple of texts that they find interesting or intriguing in some way. They then team up in pairs and are asked to read the texts either separately or out loud to each other. After this, they discuss the text and then prepare an oral presentation for the rest of the group. Each week during the theme, we then meet for these presentations and thereafter we discuss issues arising from the text read and presented. I should underline that students are not expected to present a complete analysis of the text, but rather pose questions and draw attention to what they find interesting and want to discuss further with the rest of the group. As the texts are many and discussions tend to take a long time, these meetings are usually a reoccurring event each week during the postcolonial
theme. My role is often to pose questions and make short summaries of what has been said. Additionally, I am also very frequently asked to clarify the meaning of certain terms and to contextualize them. I do so quite happily, and much time is sometimes spent on this. When working with texts in this elaborate way, we have great discussions, deepening all of our knowledge, but these classes are also often the cause of great frustration and irritation on some of the students’ part. Usually they voice their frustration along the lines of this time being devoted to academic, theoretic, elitist nonsense with no connection to their activist work, and that to sit and learn or discuss why and how certain terms are used, is truly a waste of time. I, then argue against this, much deriving from my position which I have previously accounted for. I find it equally a waste of time (and knowledge) to discard amazing texts with mind-blowing activist content, just because it is written within a specific setting. I personally am not willing, and do not have that position of doing away with texts just because they pose difficulties for me when reading them. Rather, together with others, I want to overcome these difficulties as I believe this will help me to intellectually develop and sharpen my feminist arguments. Again, sometimes I manage to make frustrated students understand my point, and sometimes I am simply discarded, along with the texts in question.

I would say that teachers at the school are very much aware of students coming to the institution with different expectations on for example teachers, teaching methods and lesson content. They are absolutely right in doing so, an institution which in its mission statement emphasizes improving and deepening democracy, transforming society and stimulating debate and difference of opinion (Interpretation of Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s mission), should see these expectations as a key feature in feminist folkbildning practice. Thus, these expectations on the institution are a common topic for discussions within the collegium. During the teachers’ discussion the preconditions for pedagogical practice at Kvinnofolkhögskolan was summarized by one of the teachers stating that “They also come with preconceptions and some ideas about the school and lots of expectations and wishes and needs to be met here” (teacher 1, my translation).

This quotation is an essential part of a reality for teachers working at Kvinnofolkhögskolan. Due to its unique placement in a folkbildning and activist feminist context, many students come to the school with high expectations of it being something specific. All teachers, no matter what institution they work at, will need to meet and relate to students’ expectations concerning what the institution in question is perceived to represent. What sort of expectations students have when it comes to Kvinnofolkhögskolan varies vastly, and can be
anything from the school being a safe place for preparing for further studies, a separatist environment, a feminist center for networks and organizations, a center city school with easy reach via public transport, a feminist institution with a high level of expertise in all feminist questions, and a place where staff agree upon complicated feminist issues and discussions.

Teachers interpret part of these expectations as coming from Kvinnofolkhögskolan being a “women’s institution”, teacher 2 says that “had we been ABC-folkhögskolan, giving a course on intersectionality, I think it would have been different” (teacher 2, my translation). As she elaborates, teacher 2 argues that Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s unique position within folkbildning, being the only folkbildning institution organized on a separatist basis, as well as the only one deriving from the feminist movement, demands and expectations on the institution and its teacher are high. To present a course on intersectionality then, will probably raise expectations further, allowing for applicants to think all activities at Kvinnofolkhögskolan are thoroughly intersectional in its nature. If this is perceived from the more liberal “getting-all-on-board” notion of intersectionality, which for example Carbin and Edenheim (2013) refer to, the expectations are both overwhelming and impossible to live up to for both teachers and the institution as a whole. Additionally, students are bound to be disappointed and discouraged.

To Kvinnofolkhögskolan students come whilst in processes of transformation of various kinds, and the school becomes more than an institution; it is also a place for social interaction and in many cases acts as the basis for starting to formulate feminist ideas which will also affect subjects’ lives. Students’ processes are both personal and political in its form, and often tightly interrelated and joint. As such, it is difficult to always balance the individual experience and the collective learning processes taking place. Teachers’ work then, is to with great care and emphasis help to keep this balance.

In their conversation, students talked about the expectations they had on the institution and how they in some cases were and in other cases were not met. One example has to do with Kvinnofolkhögskolan’s recent (2012) efforts to include trans* persons. Several students felt this seemed to be more of a symbolic act than a thorough negotiation within the institution which was a disappointment to them. Nevertheless, even if it entailed frustration it was of great value and a positive experience for the students to know that “this is not a place that is unanimous, conflicts are ongoing, in one way one can talk about Kvinnofolkhögskolan as an institution, but the teachers are not at all agreed on everything” (student C, my translation).
Student C’s quote is very much in line with what Freire describes as an extremely important part of teaching, namely for “students to perceive the differences that exist among teachers over the comprehension, interpretation, and appreciation, sometimes widely differing, of problems and questions that arise in the day-to-day learning situations in the classroom” (Freire, 1998: 24). This notion of difference is part of the teaching process and is the way I see it, inevitable when teachers move away from a perceived object position and instead enter the classroom as subjects, relating to other subjects, and where as I have previously discussed, teaching is not a one way process, but a collective and mutual one.

Another example relates to the students’ reflections regarding the general atmosphere at the school. They thought it negative to see and hear how much teachers and staff worked and also felt that they were at times introduced to too much material and events. Student B comments, “well, many of us were really worn out. That is easy to forget now. It wasn’t a long term strategy; this was for a year but one would not have been able to continue like this” (my translation). The reasons for this being the case were discussed; some thought it might be a matter of generations, summarized in this quote by student D,

People who like were organized in the seventies, that was sort of a different time, like Internet did not exist and now we are just surrounded by like thousands of impressions all the time, it might not be about us not getting information, but rather about us having to delimit ourselves, and I would have liked to, sort of see more positive role models showing us this is how you can make this long lasting. Instead of hearing like, the teachers work super hard, that creates a stress like, if you want to be an activist, you have to give up your life (my translation).

The discussion continued and an intersectional perspective on who can be an activist was brought up, students felt that teachers sometimes had a tough approach when it came to activism, along the lines of “it’s tough to be an activist” (student C, my translation), and this made students question who could be an activist,

Do you need to be fully functional, and not have like any other things that you are bound to, like if you have children or whatever? It feels like a pretty narrow norm, who can be here then, and work here – who was able to start “Kvinnofolk”? And then, of course it is more complex than that, but it was sort of that feeling (student D, my translation).

The above presented quotes do definitely pose questions regarding how teachers refer to their previous and current work. From the students’ discussion it seems to me as if teachers with good intentions overwhelm students with information about interesting events or suggestions
on how students could carry out their studies. Within the collegium, we often refer to this as presenting a smorgasbord of opportunities and input to the students, from which they can choose. For students, this instead seems to be a stress factor. Maybe teachers do not clearly enough underline that input from teachers in this context should be regarded as suggestions which can be worked further with or left unattended. My thoughts are that while teachers see students as equal partners in the teaching process, students might have difficulties to ignore previous experiences of teacher authority. If this is the case, it might be problematic for students to not regard all input from teachers as something that they should incorporate in their studies, in order to be “good students”. It becomes evident for me then, that from a seemingly privileged position it is always easier to do away or disregard power relations and hierarchic structures being part of one’s practice even though the purpose of this practice is to challenge and ultimately eliminate such structures. If this is not taken into account, the outcome might, as described here by students, be overwhelming instead of the inspiration it was intended to be.

I also find the reference made by student D, concerning the information flow of today of much relevance. For teachers, as for everyone who were active prior to the internet era, I would say the problem was the opposite. I remember a constant struggle on my part during the early 1990-s to get hold of information regarding the political questions close to my heart. This has since then inevitably changed, and as student D points out, the problem is now quite the opposite. Information is now available in abundance which means constant limitations and choices have to be made. In relation to the above discussion regarding teachers’ perhaps somewhat excessive input, this suggests to me that teachers need to address issues of limitation for activist work to be sustainable and accessible.

Lastly, I want to address the aspect of Kvinnofolkhögskolan symbolizing the institutionalization of a political movement. Concerns about what this institutionalization might do to the movement and how it might be too much of a privileged position having been a student at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, especially amongst those activists who have not been students at the school, were raised during the students’ discussion.

To institutionalize parts of a political movement is a fastidious task to take on. Institutionalization of parts of the feminist movement in its broadest sense has taken place both in academia through the establishment of gender studies, and in folkbildning through the start of Kvinnofolkhögskolan. With institutionalization come benefits and recognition as well
as boundaries and limitations. hooks views “academic legitimation [as] crucial to the advancement of feminist thought” (hooks 2000: 22), but also addresses the negative aspects of this process, her main point being that due to the institutionalization of feminist thought, the audience also changed. Academia introduced a new way of relating to feminist theory and, according to hooks, “women and men outside the academic domain where no longer considered an important audience” (ibid.). Thus, the knowledge production within academia risks losing some of it revolutionary capacity since it tends to be “written in a sophisticated jargon that only the well-educated can read” (hooks 2000: 112). Continually, hooks argues that as a result of an elitist society as a whole, teaching at universities being ranked higher than teaching children and adults outside of academia, to write feminist children’s books etc. most “feminist thinkers/theorists do their work in the elite setting of university” (hooks 2000: 113). The outcome then, is a narrowed down recognition and understanding of feminist theory. It could then be said that folkbildning, in this thesis exemplified through Kvinnofolkhögskolan, can be one of the alternatives that hooks is looking for. However, students come to Kvinnofolkhögskolan, anxious of it also being part of this institutionalization process. Their concerns are understandable; the school is an institution with state funding and rules and regulations to consider and comply to. The question is then to what extend this institutional position influences the ongoing knowledge production at the school? Is the school and its teachers able to balance the freedom of folkbildning and the restraints of institutionalization, and if they are, are they also able to describe this balancing act to the students? As far as I know, not much research has been carried out on how folkbildning institutionalization has affected popular movements and their development. I think such research should be carried out, and I would be very interested in seeing if this form of institutionalization differs from the academic one. As for now, the folkbildning specificity of institutionalization is often left out, since institutionalization is mostly discussed in relation to the research carried out in an academic university based context.

In this academic context, Liinason has thoroughly discussed the strengths and problems with the institutionalization of feminist studies in Sweden. Much like hooks, Liinason believes this implementation has” succeeded in establishing an oppositional space for radical knowledge production in the academy” (Liinason 2011: 311). The negative aspects concern de-radicalization and co-optation which, according to Liinason exist simultaneously with the positive outcomes, thus creating a paradoxical project (Liinason 2011: 310-311). It appears then, as if institutionalization indeed presents both possibilities and difficulties for engaging
PART IV: Concluding remarks

Focusing on the theory/practice divide, this study has showed that the introduction of intersectional theory to activists at the course Azadi was negotiated in various ways, by both students and teachers. What I found in my study was that students typically came to Azadi with the expectation that intersectional theory will provide answers and possibilities for carrying out an all-inclusive intersectional way of organizing. However, deepened intersectional theoretical knowledge instead led to students regarding intersectional knowledge as the basis for an intersectional awareness which entails responsible limitation. They came to understand that each single activist activity cannot in itself be carried out fully intersectionally; instead it should be seen as part of a bigger intersectional context. Through this contextualization, activists can highlight injustices and demand that changes are made. Such an approach is far from the de-radicalized intersectional approach that is often discussed as being part of a broadening of intersectionality as a concept. No students expressed that they see intersections as finite, instead they regard them as infinite and contextually constructed and hierarchized.

I also want to address the issue of planning a course on intersectionality in an intersectional manner. Teachers planning Azadi did so with an intersectional perspective and extensive effort was put on reaching outside of the institution’s closest networks. However, the implication of time and space do not seem to have been fully considered. Since Azadi was planned as a full time one year course, it provided unnecessary limitations regarding who could attend the course. The outcome was that those applying also saw Azadi as a place for gaining much of their intersectional practical experience, thus they put less emphasis on their prior experiences. When being part of a small scale full time course, much of students’ time is and needs to be invested in that group, thus less time is left for intersectional practice outside of Azadi. When planning the course, teachers did not really identify this issue, perhaps because the standard format of courses at Kvinnofolkhögskolan is full time courses. This is related to state funding, the view on pedagogical processes and student aid.

Courses with similar content as Azadi will now be offered as part time distance courses and as an evening course. What is taken out of these courses when compared to Azadi is the work
with creating joint experiences of intersectional practice. My analysis shows that offering the courses on a part-time basis will be of interest to applicants who are already part of intersectional practice in another context. Additionally, students not meeting every day but rather every week will create a less close group which pedagogically will enhance the possibilities for nuanced discussions related to a variety of intersectional practices. As I am currently going through applications for these courses and reading applicants’ presentation letters, they seem to be much more of a heterogeneous group than Azadi. My initial impression from these presentation letters is that applicants seem to have more activist as well as professional experience of intersectional practice.

Regarding the theory/practice divide, there seems to be somewhat of a discrepancy between how teachers and students relate to theory and practice. Students express ambivalence towards what they identify as theory, on the one hand regarding it as important for increasing intersectional awareness and on the other hand as academic jargon and elitism. Teachers continually aim to challenge the theory/practice divide but at times end up perpetuating it. Teachers and students do not always regard the same methods or course content as being either theoretical or practical. This is for instance exemplified by teachers viewing thinking and discussions as practical work, whereas students do not. The theory/practice divide indeed seems to be difficult to deconstruct, also since it is very much part of society at large. I therefore propose that this discrepancy is thoroughly addressed in the curriculum, providing space for teachers and students to discuss various ways of relating to theory and practice respectively. If such a discussion is an ongoing process during the course, it will increase the possibility of an even more fully contextualized deconstruction of the theory/practice divide.

Students come to folkbildning with high expectations hoping these studies will offer them something different from their previous studies. Common expectations are that learning processes will start from individual experience and for groups to be sized as to give time for reflection and discussions. Expectations regarding Kvinnofolkhögskolan as an institution vary vastly, however it entails committed feminist teachers and non-traditional ways of teaching. During Azadi the student-teacher dialogues seem to be of great importance. Equally important are folkbildning oriented methods, for example problem based learning and substantial student input on course content and forms of learning. A main trait and possibility for folkbildning institutions is the freedom to choose content and forms of teaching. What is of interest for this thesis main argument is questioning whether this possibility is utilized purposefully. In many ways the course seems to meet students’ expectations, however at
times pedagogical assumptions have guided the studies more than necessary. For example, the pedagogical choice of initially engaging with various intersections as were they separable, might have further perpetuated the theory/practice divide since this perspective is merely a theoretical construction. Starting from an intersectional practice is a key feature when aspiring to bridge the theory/practice divide. For students then, contextualizing their own experience became more of a challenge than what was needed.

Challenging the theory/activist divide in a folkbildning context must inevitably start from the assumption that theory is part of life. Students come to folkbildning with various prior experiences and as they are put together, systematized and analyzed, theory is also created. Thus, without experience, there is no starting point for theory. Within folkbildning, the rules and regulations are minimal if compared to other institutions and this freedom also entails responsibility. In my study, I have argued that this responsibility needs to be in the form of constant attempts to bridge the theory and practice divide. In doing so, folkbildning can indeed provide a space where theory and practice are seen as interlinked and connected and where neither can be detached from subjects’ life experience.
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Appendix

Quotes in original language.

P. 33, "nyanser jag tänker att det typ på nåt sätt året har gått ut på mycket på nåt sätt att inte göra saker svartvitt utan så himla mycket såhär å vilka perspektiv och vilka intersektioner och alltting, liksom och att det på nåt sätt är verkligen så himla fint för det beskriver ju världen mer"

P. 36, "kan ta andra roller i liksom organisationer eller grupper eller så, eller såhär ta andra arbetsuppgifter, som jag inte skulle vågat göra innan liksom och att jag kan känna typ att jag kan jamen såhär bidra i diskussioner eller vara med i diskussioner på ett annat sätt"

P. 36, "om alla har samma begrepp så går det ju fortare att prata om liksom, alltså då behöver man inte ta hela exemplet utan bara ja men det här begreppet som vi har pratat om innan i gruppen, det blir som nån slags effektivisering"

P. 37, "då måste man ju ändå behålla, alltså komma ihåg vad exemplet var för att annars blir det ju verkligen såhär elitistiskt"

P. 37, "väldigt enkel retorik"

P. 37, "att man måste kompromissa med en massa saker hela tiden och att alla måste göra det och alla har olika strategier eller liksom att då ja jag vet inte det är lätt att man bara såhär, vill isolera sig"

P. 37, "det kanske inte går att göra nåt som är helt rätt, alltså saker kommer vara problematiska för det är en jävla vithetsnorm som genomsyrar samhället men det, bara att inte ta dom här frågorna, att inte diskutera rasism är ju det värsta liksom, att bara få en tystnad kring vissa saker"

P. 39, "min tanke eller vision då, kanske var att dom skulle komma från lite olika håll också och ha olika praktiska, varit i olika praktiker eller vad man skall säga då, och skulle ha, känna kanske ett behov av att stanna upp av att tillsammans med andra med andra erfarenheter reflektera och både göra teori liksom och ta till sig annan, som en slags fornbildning då om man kan kalla det för på ett sätt för aktivister"

P. 39, "min tanke var ju att dom som söker en sån kurs kommer från intersektionella praktiker, dom har den erfarenheten. Och i den praktiken så finns det teorier som man kan
utkristallisera och man kan förtydliga dom lite grann, dom kan se lite olika teorier beroende på vilka intersektioner vi pratar om"

P. 42, ”det var som en virvelvind i klassrummet, jag bara gick in, kastades ut efter två timmar, glad och omtumlad”

P. 43, ”vi ville ställa dom mot väggen bara – dom skriver inte ut att det är transinkluderande! Fan! Och att när vi kom dit och när vi åkte hem därifrån vi bara - woah”

P. 44, ”jag tänker att teorin är bara liksom orden att man kan ha fattat men att man bara får ord för det, för att kunna prata om det”

P. 46, ”jag tänker också på det här med att dela upp teori och praktik och om det går att göra det, jag tänker lite såhär att nej, men det går nog inte och dela upp för man pratar ju i teorin om samma sak som man gör i … det beror ju på vad man menar med dela upp och det beror på vad man menar med teori och praktik, det kanske finns en teori som är fristående från praktiken som man i praktiken aldrig kan uppnå, ja men det här med tillgänglighet till exempel att man bara, det skall vara tillgängligt för alla, alltså okej och intersektionalitet går ju inte med på, det handlar ju inte om att alla skall med, samtidigt som det ändå är ett sätt att försöka se, ja men så jag undrar om det ändå inte går så att det finns nån slags intersektionell, jamen nånting i intersektionalitet som bara är möjligt i teorin, men i praktiken omöjligt”

P. 46, ”som var bra att vi applicerar teorin och pratar om praktiska exempel på ett helt annat sätt så det var jätte befriande och jätteskönt och hjälpte mig mycket och också just att vi har haft som såhär fältstudier och sätt”

P. 46, ”Att det nästan blir nån sån statusgrej av det hela liksom vem som har mest koll på intersektionalitet och jag tänker också att det är ju sådär skitexkluderande även om det är sådär viktigt med analys men också att det kan vara lätt att inte se sin egen bakgrund eller bara oj, men min vithet eller det här gör ju att typ jag missar massa grejer”

P. 47, ”det här är ju också ett problem i vår tid va, som har med tid att göra, som har med den här ”Just-in-time-människan, där ingenting får vara fördöjt över tid, allt skall effektueras bums, effekterna skall synas genast och det skall kunna mätas i stort sett veckan efter”

P. 49-50, ”Vi angrep Mc Calls text på ett mer praktiskt sätt vilket uppskattades. De jobbade i par med att själv definiera kännetecken för det Mc Call benämner antikategorisk komplexitet,
interkategorisk komplexitet och intrakategorisk komplexitet. Efter detta började det göra en intersektionell analys från de olika perspektiven."

P. 50, "jag tror att det är jättemycket som jag tänker är i alla fall, som jag tänker är ”praktik” som deltagarna inte alls uppfattar, att för dem, är det såhär att nu sitter vi här och vi har läst den här skönlitterära texten och så har vi ett samtal kring den och där vet man ju aldrig vad som kommer upp, men där kan ju komma liksom grejer och så diskuterar vi. För mig är det ju en praktisk tanke, alltså att tänka är ju praktik för mig!"

P. 51, "men det är ju som både och på nåt sätt, nå, men teori, det är inget för mig, jag gör, det är ju flera deltagare som säger så och samtidigt en jättetilltro till att teorin skall lösa hela livet, alltså nu har vi läst och diskuterat såhär, nu kan jag hantera en konflikt, alltså, grunden i konflikt är ju att vi inte kan hantera nånting"

P. 51, "1: förstå vad man är med om va så kan man ta hjälp av andras tänkande, men det löser ju inte…

3: det löser inte livet

1: det löser inte livet va"

P. 52, "det är hur man ser intersektionalitet om man bara ohh teoretiskt verktyg eller om det är så här, hm, det här är politiskt, jag tänker att flera här tycker att intersektionalitet är politiskt”

P. 52, "Pratade om metoder för fältstudier och om vad en feministisk metod kan sägas vara?? Dessutom dilemman utifrån deras specifika planerade fältstudier/observationer/intervjuer. De är lite osäkra, men som alltid villiga att försöka och jag pratade mycket om att de skall vila lite i att de HAR problematiserat och diskuterat innan och når de väl är i situationerna bara vara där och se vad som händer”

P. 53, "jag visste från början att det var som ett nav, att det var mer än en skola bara att det var en social plats också, ett steg in i rörelsen”

P. 58, "dom kommer också med förförståelser och rätt så mycket föreställningar om skolan och mängder av förväntningar och önskan och behov som skall tillfredsställas här”

P. 58, "om vi hade hetat ABC-folkhögskolan som hade en kurs om intersektionalitet hade det varit annorlunda”
P. 59, ”det är en plats som inte är enig, att det pågår konflikter i den här platsen, på ett sätt kan man ju prata om Kvinnofolkhögskolan eftersom det är en institution såhär men att lärarna är inte alls överens om allting”

P. 59, ”alltså många blev ju väldigt slitna, slutkörda. Det är ju lätt att glömma nu. Det var ju inte hållbart, liksom och såhär det var ju en grej på bara ett år, men man hade ju inte kunnat fortsätta så liksom”

P. 59-60, ”folk som typ varit med och organiserat sig på sjuttitalet att det var en ganska annorlunda tid, typ inte internet fanns och nu blir vi bara omgärdade av typ tusen intryck hela tiden, och det handlar kanske inte om att vi inte får information om allt utan snarare om att vi måste typ såhär begränsa oss och att jag nog hade velat få såhär, ja men se mer positiva förebilder kring det liksom att såhär faktiskt göra det mer hållbart istället för att höra typ om just att såhär lärarna typ jobbar skitmycket och att det skapar en stress i sig, jo men om man skall jobba som nåt aktivistiskt måste man då ge upp hela sitt liv.”

P. 60, ”det är hårt att vara aktivist, typ”

P. 60, ”Måste vara såhär helt funktionsfullkomlig du måste typ såhär inte ha några andra grejer som du är uppbunden till, som om du har barn eller vad som helst det känns som att det blir en ganska så smal norm, vem som då kan vara här och kan jobba här och vem som kan starta upp Kvinnofolk liksom. Sen tänker jag att det är så mycket mer komplex än så såklart, men det var lite ändå den känslan.”
**Abstract**
This thesis explores how introducing intersectional theory to self-identified activists in a Swedish folkbildning context challenges the theory/practice-divide. The study has been carried out through thematically structured discussions with students and teachers at Kvinnofolkhögskolan, Gothenburg, Sweden. In this thesis I argue that the deconstruction of the theory/practice-divide is dependent on perceptions of what theory and practice entails, students’ expectations of Swedish folkbildning in general and Kvinnofolkhögskolan in particular and pedagogical considerations on how to teach intersectionality intersectionally.

Additionally, the thesis addresses issues of institutionalization, feminist pedagogy and the broadening of intersectional theory. Finally, the thesis highlights the need for extensively addressing the issue of the theory/practice divide in the curriculum, for students and teachers to discuss what is perceived as theory and practice respectively and for teachers to consider time and place as part of an intersectionally aware pedagogical practice.

**Number of pages:** 75.

**Keywords**
Intersectionality, Swedish folkbildning, theory, practice, academia, activism, feminist pedagogy, Kvinnofolkhögskolan