

Professional and personal responsibility in higher education

An inquiry from a standpoint of pragmatism and discourse theory

Carsten Ljunggren & Ingrid Unemar Öst

In recent years, reports have drawn attention to an ongoing instrumentalization of academic actions, governed by economic power. In the light of these reports higher education in Sweden is analysed combining Deweyan pragmatism with the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe to construct a theoretical conception of professional and personal responsibility. At the beginning of the 1990s and the 21st Century, it is possible to observe a discursive domain filled with variations in language use – the existence of a classical academic discourse, a discourse of *Bildung*, a discourse of democracy and a discourse of economic globalization – that causes both conflicts and openness regarding the meaning of higher education and professional responsibility. The closer we get to 2007, the more this variation in language use is reduced and the narrower the meaning we find, owing to the hegemonic tendencies of the discourse of economic globalization.

Keywords: higher education, responsibility, individuality, discourses.

I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to investigate and discuss how professional responsibility in higher education can be understood in terms of self-reflexivity and personal responsibility. The questions investigated are theoretical as well as empirical:

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1. What kinds of arguments are provided by social theory regarding the role of higher education and self-reflexivity, and what concepts and views are suitable for a theory of personal responsibility in higher education?
2. Which specific cultural lifestyles for students and institutions of higher education emerge from the arguments advanced in educational policy in Sweden, especially in relation to self-reflexivity and personal responsibility?

To answer the first question, we will argue in the next section (II) for the suitability of combining arguments drawn from Deweyan pragmatism and from the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In section III we will then present some results from our analysis of Swedish educational policy texts. In section IV, finally, we will give a brief answer to the second question, in terms of potential cultural lifestyles in higher education.

In the present article we discuss the role of higher education in educating towards professional and personal responsibility. Higher education in Sweden has expanded considerably in recent decades, and has become what one might call a “mass” system of education – where the “mass” covers both the fact that higher education is populated by a more heterogeneous student body, and consists of general education as well as vocational education aimed at various professions, and the fact that different views concerning the role of higher education have emerged, partly as a result of an increasing number of private stakeholder investments in higher education. The aim of the article is not to discuss issues of professional and civic responsibility in relation to a specific educational programme or profession, but rather to discuss these issues at a general level and in a general sense. Or more simply – to discuss what it means to be a citizen and a person with a university education who assumes a professional responsibility. Why do we consider these questions important to investigate? Well, in recent times many researchers have drawn attention to an undemocratic instrumentalization of academic actions, institutional as well as individual. This instrumentalization of action, according to their reports, is driven by a negative economic power (see for example Slaughter & Leslie 1997, Slaughter & Rhoades 2004). We find these reports alarming, and they give us cause to stress the importance of considering the conditions for educating towards professional and personal responsibility. They also provide us with a reason to further investigate the Swedish context in the light of their critique. In addition, these reports of a critical/negative change in higher education

support our ambition to discuss what kind of societal analysis should form the basis for such an investigation. In our article we combine Deweyan pragmatism with the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, with the purpose of creating a new basis for investigation. We argue that a combination of pragmatism and discourse theory offers a radical concept of the individual and the role of individuals in history – a reconstitution of individuals as political beings and a reconstruction of institutions. The combination of pragmatism and discourse theory offers a number of basic arguments. The first stresses that personal identity (individuality) and the community are always in a process of becoming: neither the individual nor the community can be defined from any fixed substance, but from indefinite actions.¹ The second argument stresses that the social is a space of disagreement and dissensus, which can be of a shifting character, but which always calls for knowledge and judgement on the part of an individual who assumes her personal responsibility.² This leads to the third basic argument of the article, related to a specific understanding of pluralism, to be found both in the tradition of Deweyan pragmatism and in the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, in other words their respective critiques of the liberalist tradition. In both cases, pluralism is disconnected from consensus, which is to say that pluralism is the very point at which difference appears. Pluralism should therefore be understood as a situation calling for action (indefinite challenge, provocation, experimentation etc.). In our case, in such a situation individuality and personal aspects of acting and judging are therefore decisive aspects of professional responsibility.

To explain how we ended up combining pragmatism with discourse theory, let us begin with a note on the key references we use in section II. First of all, educating towards professional and personal responsibility is regarded in this article as the most important task of higher education. From this, our main thesis is that individuality and personal aspects of acting and judging are decisive aspects of professional responsibility. Our normative standpoint is in line with what Ronald Barnett (2003) and Gerald Delanty (2001) argue when they say that educating towards critical citizenship implies a space of disagreement and dissensus, as well as critical reflection. It thus calls for both institutional openness and a capacity on the part of the individual to be open to multiple understandings and to engage critically with them. Our aim is not to develop a comprehensive analysis of “critical citizenship”, but to specify just two aspects of it – in other words self-reflexivity and a view of personal responsibility in higher education – by briefly recognizing theories of reflexive modernity and, more thoroughly, the shift in vocabulary from individualism to

individuality in Deweyan pragmatism (Dewey 1916/1966, 1930). Further, we are inspired by “academic capitalism” and its thesis that institutions of higher education, teachers and students are governed by a negative economic power (Slaughter & Leslie 1997, Slaughter & Rhoades 2004). However, instead of regarding those institutions, teachers and students as victims of an inaccessible negative economic power, we hold the university to be a place of self-reflexivity in terms of responsibility. We base our study on arguments promoting the university as an open institution that supports students’ autonomy, as well as on a critical view which sees the education provided there as shaped by economic globalization (Ljunggren & Öst 2002). Our line of reasoning legitimizes higher education as a dynamic aspect of modernity, in terms of what Anthony Giddens (1991) defines as “institutional reflexivity”: in our case, entering a university means individuals sharing in a collective cultural lifestyle and manifesting a cultural competence, in which conflicts of responsibility are present and shape individuality. We are well aware of the risk and problem of eclecticism, when theories of reflexive modernity are confronted with discourse theory’s critique of their hegemonic tendencies. Despite Mouffe’s explicit critique of Giddens and Jürgen Habermas and their position in theories of reflexive modernity and modernization, reflexivity is to us a legitimate way to specify the meaning of individuality, argued from the vantage point of a Deweyan pragmatism. And, as will be demonstrated, there are several similarities between pragmatism and what Mouffe expresses in terms of radical democracy.

Our discussion is an attempt to conceptualize and understand changes in higher education in terms of contingency (in both the individual and the community). The analysis we undertake indicates a complex net of interwoven and ambiguous aims for higher education. From our findings, and in line with Peter Scott (1995), we conclude that we cannot assume the existence of identities related to any enlightened elite recognizable by a distinct canon. Neither can our analysis be reduced to a question of identities related to an oppressive economic power. We find such presumptions one-sided and sociologically outdated, and will therefore attempt another way of understanding the meaning of (potential) identities in higher education. We argue that concepts and views suitable for a theory of self-reflexivity in higher education are those that stress the positive aspects of institutional openness and individual autonomy. These are concepts and views that embrace the role of higher education as an institution where conflicts of responsibility are present, and where issues related to how to handle and manage risk and uncertainty come to the fore.

II. Self-reflexivity and personal responsibility

To set out the theoretical arguments, and a background to what should be investigated in an analysis of discourses of educational politics and policies, we will concentrate in this section on defining concepts of individuality and the meaning of being a person with responsibility. As will be argued, when defined on the basis of a Deweyan pragmatism, individuality is not a singular concept, but one that can be grasped only in relation to its outer side, that is, in relation to the community, concretized by language, habits, customs and so on. But – since pragmatism holds individuality and the identity of a person, like the community, always to be in a process of becoming – neither the individual nor the community should be defined on the basis of any fixed substance, but with respect to *indefinite actions*.³ This in turn is a dominant aspect of the pragmatic understanding of democracy as a way of living and of the (positive) freedom within it – democracy as something to be created rather than found; to be confronted with the individual, rather than integrated. Pragmatism holds the world to be a universe of uncertainty and contingency that is incomplete and that may be made this way or that according as people judge.⁴

In the foreground of this article are personal responsibility and self-reflexivity. Our approach to reflexivity can be summarized in two different meanings of the concept, though these are not elaborated in the article. One is related to epistemology, where knowledge opens up a context for action and where individuals are set free from structures while still related to community and interaction with others by intellect and cognitions. This means that reflexivity is concerned with a personal potentiality to redefine one's own context of action by self-awareness, where the self is engaged in a reflexive relation to the university and the production of (contingent) knowledge. This, to our mind, is similar to the way Habermas understands the reflexive situation in modernity, in other words through *epistemology*. Briefly, one could say, concerning the nature of epistemologically based reflexivity, that to us it is a problem similar to the way that *institutional* reflection (Giddens 1991) and a reflexive *community* (Lash 1993) pose a problem for an epistemological theory of reflexive modernity. Concerning higher education, we therefore argue that it must be understood not just in terms of *cognitive* reflection, but also in relation to *moral*, as well as *aesthetic*, reflection. What is important to us is that, theoretically, cognitive, moral and aesthetic self-reflections have their analogues in specific *actions* – in other words actions in terms of (cognitive) *knowing*, (moral) *judging* and (aesthetic) *self-creation*. From the standpoint of Deweyan pragmatism, the knowing, judging and self-creative person confirms

a specific individuality. Namely, an individuality where the outside of the person – that is, her relationship to a specific community – cannot be separated from her inside – that is, her knowing and judging of that community. To accept this kind of contextualized view of self and community is to say no to the philosophy of a fixed and substantial subject. And it is to say yes to action (communication/education) as the primary source of subjectivity and identity.

Action – individuality and contingency

John Dewey's resistance to a philosophy of the subject is shown in his critique of the psychology of original individual consciousness and his insistence that the old centre was mind while the new centre is (indefinite) *actions*. These indefinite actions are what is usually today, and is in Dewey's texts as well, referred to in terms of *contingency*. With Dewey, the contingency of the community and the person can be understood from the way he refers to the world itself as "a universe in which there is real uncertainty and contingency, a world which is not all in, and never will be, a world which in some respect is incomplete and in the making, and which in these respects may be made this way or that according as men judge, prize, love and labor" (Dewey quoted in Westbrook 1991, p. 362). Indefinite actions are what define being in the world and taking part in it without any guarantees as to what will be the consequences. In higher education, actions traditionally refer to scientific activities and the fostering of a scientific attitude. When related to indefinite actions, a scientific attitude becomes equivalent to *willingness* – a willingness to hold belief in suspense, and an ability to doubt. Dewey (1939/1997a) also defines it from the viewpoint of a willingness to go where the evidence points, rather than putting a personally preferred conclusion first, and to use ideas as hypotheses to be tested, rather than as dogmas to be asserted.⁵ Yes, higher education is, from a historical point of view, concerned with knowledge, judging and self-creation, served by such a willingness and such abilities. But not very many would agree with the assumption that judging and self-creation are equivalent to knowledge. Rather, a form of excellence defined by short-term market interests and positivist scientific knowledge dominate the meaning of higher education. How then can higher education, if interpreted primarily as a specific community of science, also be defended as a community for personal responsibility and self-reflection?

As we know, Dewey's kind of pragmatism acknowledges science for special reasons, i.e. to enlarge democracy through the moral po-

tential of society, and to enlarge it for the human desire which science makes possible. From that perspective scientific activities, science's indefinite actions, always produce a plurality of experiences in which the individual and the community are shaped and reshaped with no guarantee of survival, being as fragile as life itself.⁶ Because of the contingent character of scientific activities the person involved, in turn, can be characterized as being responsible not only for her own actions but for the community. She is also responsible for her own identity – an identity that is in progress, with, in our case, life at the university giving orientation and direction to self-reflection. This self-reflection is by definition a reflection of the relation between the subjectivity of a person (her aspirations and wills) and the subjectivity of a community (its ideals and norms). The community of higher education can then, in its idealized form, be defined in terms of *institutionalized habits*, personal habits being individualized versions of the social norms, modified by interaction and reflection. This in turn leads to the centrality of the concept of individuality.

Dewey (1939/1997b) maintains that *individuality* is formed by means of transaction based on what individuals have in common, in other words their culture in terms of their language, shared meanings, history and experience. In other words, individuality and association are, once again, articulated as mutually inclusive and interdependent results of indefinite actions. Persons become what they are by being and speaking together. But although individuals can be defined by what they have in common, because of contingency commonality will change, as will persons. This relationship between two acting subjects, in other words the individual and the community (here, the institution of higher education), is what Dewey takes as a central aspect of *experience*, saying that “individuals will always be the centre and the consummation of experience, but what the individual actually *is* in his life-experience depends upon the nature and movements of associated life” (Dewey 1939/1997b, p. 265). And these “nature and movements of associated life” are what we will try to define as we answer the questions about what cultural lifestyles lives in higher education refer to and what kind of responsibility being at the university entails (as defined by the text analysis in Part III). Of course, no answer can be delivered without an idea of what kind of society we are to refer to when defining different kinds of associated life in higher education. Although Dewey's (1939/1997b) critique at the time was concerned with the superiority of the state and the proclaimed situation where individuals owed everything to the state, we find quite similar consequences today arising from the totalitarian tendencies in the relation between the individual and totalitarian communities built on ideology

(political, religious or of other kinds). The typical consequences of this kind of “thick community” are that it hinders indefinite actions while promoting finite ones.⁷

Dewey’s longer argument for rethinking “the whole question of the relation of individual choice, belief, and action to institutions, to reflect on the kind of social changes that will make individuals in actuality the centres and the possessors of worth-while experience” (Dewey 1939/1997b, p. 265) is that history shows that democratic institutions are no guarantee of the existence of democratic individuals. This emphasis on the individual and individuality does not minimize *the dependence between individuals and the association with others*. Rather, in line with the kind of radical democracy we refer to, Dewey criticizes the market and the totalitarian state for dispelling the individual by a state collectivism and a private collectivism. In fact totalitarianism, and the neglect of individuals as active agents in history (not just one individual agent in the shape of the dictator, or one organization, one belief etc.), is a prominent argument and a reason why Mouffe and Laclau (1985/2001) formulated their new socialistic strategy and radical democracy, to which we shall return later. There is, from our point of view, a political philosophical juxtaposition between pragmatism and radical democracy, in several respects – not least in their respective emphasis on the importance of focusing on the individual and individuality in politics.

Personal responsibility and indefinite actions

From the above argumentation we can summarize some central concepts and their meanings, stemming from the principle of *indefinite actions* – that is, in a single phrase, *contingent experiences of individuality and community*. Proceeding from such an understanding, we have argued that students and teachers, by being at the university and taking part in institutionalized thought and actions, are confronted with personal responsibility and individuality – where individuality signifies what arises from experiences that are common and shared, but at the same time concretized by individual judgements. Such judgements we will refer to in this section in terms of (social) *intelligence*. We will here elaborate what Dewey in his educational philosophy often describes in terms of *interest* as the thrust of individual character and the direction of action. This kind of disposition for action is essential to morality, since morality is what develops the individual capacity for survival not only of the self, but of community as well. In our study of the consequences of the political discourses of higher education in Sweden, the focus is

on questions concerning the consequences for a person's individuality, i.e. the student's capacity for a self-reflexive responsibility in her doings. From a Deweyan point of view, personal and professional responsibilities interact through the way a person is able to act on the basis of her *interests* – interests as the direction of activity, in the sense of what one “wants to do” and what is “governed by the profession”. A person in education then needs to experience her interest in a relation where the general moral principles of a certain profession are integrated as well as challenged by the particularity of the situation (and individuality) on the basis of which the person has to judge.

Judgement, performed in a situation where the person is aware of the contrast between general principles and professional judgements, on the one hand, and particular interests and personal preferences, on the other, is similar to what Dewey refers to as *intelligence*, in contrast to *reason*. Reason can be seen as the artefact of what he discusses in terms of the quest for certainty, where he defines reason as something that “designates both an inherent immutable order of nature, super empirical in character, and the organ of mind by which this universal order is grasped” (Dewey 1929, p. 170). In contrast, intelligence is about knowing in a world without certainty and is “associated with *judgment*; that is, with selection and arrangement of means to effect consequences and with choice of what we take as our ends” (Dewey 1929, p. 170). So, what gives meaning to a person's actions and what thereby motivates and legitimates them is rooted in a certain kind of intelligence, which in our case points to the meaning of a student acting from a personal responsibility that is analogous to Dewey's definition of an intelligent person as a person “intelligent not in virtue of having reason which grasps first and indemonstrable truths about fixed principles, in order to reason deductively from them to the particulars which they govern, but in virtue of his capacity to estimate the possibilities of a situation and to act in accordance with his estimate” (Dewey 1929, p. 170). Estimation here should be understood in its wide sense of judging.

Our emphasis in this article is on defining the meaning of personal responsibility emanating from pragmatism and our analyses of discourses on personal responsibility in educational politics in Sweden. Personal responsibility in relation to self-reflexivity has thus far been dealt with by outlining some key concepts, the most prominent of them being *individuality*. We choose individuality as our central concept for two reasons. First, individuality and the individual are at the centre of the debate about how to radicalize democracy, which will be illustrated with reference to Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001). Second, by defining individuality in line with pragmatism, it is possible not only to keep in touch with radical democracy, but also to specify

the democratic aspects of education, which will be illustrated with a final reference to Dewey (1916/1966) below.

Dewey (1916/1966) often connects his philosophy of *democracy* to action where the relationship between individuality and community does not demand conformity to an already prevailing practice – to something already done. Rather, as in the case of democracy and education, action related to self-reflexivity must be based on the moral conscience in existing institutions, habits and beliefs. He criticizes the split between the inner and the outer in theories of morals. This is clear from his formulation of the central educational and didactical concept of *interest*, whose etymological meaning of inter-est (“being between”) also gives a clear hint as to the way that a person’s interest positions her in a specific context where she has to do something – to act.⁸ Dewey’s first statement about “interest” in education is that it is a correlative aspect of activity having an aim. Further, interest should be understood in two ways – one that says that words like concern and interest denote a twofold attitude in the agent, in other words “(i) solicitude, anxiety concerning future consequences, and (ii) a tendency to act to assure better, and avert worse, consequences” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 125). Dewey’s distinction between the agent as a spectator and as an inquirer tells us that the spectator lacks interest and concern other than of an instrumental kind, while the inquirer does not. From this it follows in our case that interest and concern, if present in higher education, correspond to personal responsibility. This responsibility, anchored in personal interests and concerns, is in the first instance a self-reflective responsibility and a demand to the self to give things a specific direction. With the words of Dewey (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 125), we can say that “interest and aims, concern and purpose, are necessarily connected” and that “such words as aim, intent, end, emphasize the *results* which are wanted and striven for; they take for granted the personal attitude of solicitude and attentive eagerness”. For an active being, i.e. “a being who partakes of the consequences instead of standing aloof from them, there is at the same time a personal response” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 125). Of course we must not confuse response and responsibility, but Dewey’s reasoning, about why we should be aware of the response coming from an active being, corresponds to what has been said about the self-reflexive nature of personal responsibility. Self-reflection, as mentioned, is not a single occupation flowing from a narrow self. Rather it is a relation between the individual and the community in which interest and aims, concerns and purposes are connected, and in which “the meaning that is shaded in one set of words is illuminated in the other” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 125). Dewey’s pragmatism offers a kind of linguistic turn, but, even

more clearly, a denotation of *indefinite action* and of communication as an ontological premise. The point here, though, is that words such as interest and concern indicate an attitude of personal preference and that “they are always attitudes toward *objects* – toward what is foreseen (and) we may call the phase of objective foresight intellectual, and the phase of personal concern emotional and volitional, but there is no separation in the facts of the situation . . . our desires, emotions, and affections are but various ways in which our doings are tied up with doings of things and persons about us” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 125). Again: this is our “individuality argument”, which says that personal and professional responsibility cannot be separated.

In the light of personal responsibility, this means that higher education, or better still the university, is a specific (cultural) community where participants are involved in a responsible way with each other as well as with ideas (knowledge). It also means that desires, emotions and affections tied up with the community are not a purely personal realm. In pragmatism the self and world are connected – they are inside and outside of one and the same thing, where an active being who, as mentioned, partakes of the consequences instead of standing aloof from them, is responsible for her self and for her relation to the world and the people in it (Dewey 1916/1966, p. 339, cf. p. 179). Dewey’s theory of knowledge and educational philosophy offer a clear understanding of why *indefinite action* makes sense in a definition of personal responsibility. Since a longing for authority and a trust in dogma are similar to the quest for certainty and for *finite* actions, they take away the responsibility of directing one’s activity by thought – one just has to follow the rules. On this point, we will comment briefly on how the concepts of hegemony and radical democracy can be related to individuality and indefinite actions.

Hegemony and radical democracy

What is supposed by us to be radical in the concept of radical democracy can be interpreted with respect to the way individuality has been dealt with so far. Robert Westbrook (1991) concludes, like Sidney Hooks (1995), that Dewey, if pressed, would admit that he was a socialist. Dewey’s first interest was in reconstructing liberalism. His text on individualism, in terms of its old and new meanings (Dewey 1930), and also his critique of capitalist society in his discussion on liberalism and social action (Dewey 1935), lend a radical potential to liberalism. Argued for with very much the same kind of arguments as Mouffe uses today, this provides a radical concept of the individual

and the role of individuals in history. The key difference between their respective lines of reasoning is on the subject of antagonism, which is of course a major difference, even though their aim – to show how liberal ideals no longer legitimate capitalist society, but rather are a potent force for its delegitimation – is obviously the same. We understand Mouffe’s transformation of antagonism into agonism as significant to her theoretical position, the most prominent concept to be reconstructed being the individual (Mouffe 1992, 1996, 2000). In line with her arguments, one of Dewey’s opinions is that political democracy, narrowly considered, cannot guarantee individuality without a democratization of the institutions by pluralism, but a pluralism that is constrained by democracy.⁹ We think it is fair to say that Dewey and Mouffe have the same opinions, not only about fundamentalist religions, elitist classes and isolationist nations, but also about the traditional (historical paternalist) family as undemocratic, but that they may differ in their respective opinions on what should be legitimate claims on civic unity and common values. Although Dewey cannot be quoted from the position of antagonism in its political sense, we think he can from the general sense of antagonism as an “anti-hegemonic approach”. This is demonstrated in his acceptance of contingency as “clashes” between, and within, individuals and community, rather than between groups and fixed identities. The ambition of both to fight against undemocratic instrumentalization of action, their belief in the reconstruction of institutions and their reconstitution of individuals as political beings are common hallmarks.¹⁰ The radical concept of democracy to be found in pragmatism is also demonstrated in Dewey’s understanding that pluralism and conflicts are the very energies that make individuals and communities move, democracy being seen not just as a form of experimental living and contingent experiences, but as a way of practising *intelligence* of the kind discussed above. To practise intelligence in turn is a way not just to solve urgent problems, but to overcome unavoidable conflicts and antagonisms in general. This is a parallel to the way Mouffe uses hegemony to understand what make stabilization provisional in politics, and to stress contingency. One of Mouffe’s first points in her discussion of democracy, and one in which she leans on Carl Schmitt’s concept of the political, is that conflicts are constitutive of liberal democracy (Mouffe 2000). As she sees it, there is a paradox between democracy and liberalism (more simply: equality and individuality), and the tension between them should be reconstructed to give it an integrative, and we would add *indefinite*, function.

Our normative standpoint, put forward in the introduction to this article, was a reference to Barnett and Delanty saying that to educate

towards critical citizenship implies a space of disagreement and dissensus. Following this statement we can now conclude that dissensus here (in the situation of being at university) is a dissensus of a shifting character, but one which always calls for knowledge and judgements on the part of an individual who assumes her or his personal responsibility. What makes such a situation not antagonistic in a strict political sense, not even to Mouffe we believe, is that in *agonism* the friend–enemy relation and the identification of us and them will oscillate, i.e. change in time and space. Agonism is then a word with a meaning that holds that the motive to act (to say and to do things) starts with thinking in terms of relational engagement between the self and the world (objects and subjects). In the words of Mouffe and Dewey, relations are political in the sense of being a problem to be solved, where one person has to do something by challenging another. What will come out of these challenges no one knows in advance, not even what will be the effect on one’s own identity. For a situation to be agonistic implies that the individuals involved share a common symbolic space. From an analytical point of view, we understand higher education and the university to be a situation of shared symbols, but at the same time a situation where there are conflicts about how to organize them. In the next section we will demonstrate examples of four organizing categories – in terms of discourses – within the domain of Swedish higher education policy during the period 1992–2007.

III. An analysis of discourses in higher education politics and policies in Sweden

The arguments provided by social theory stress the role of higher education in educating towards critical citizenship. The notion of critical citizenship is closely linked to questions of professional and civic responsibility, and it is argued that individuality and personal aspects of acting and judging are decisive aspects of those responsibilities. In this section we will investigate the conflicts concerning issues of self-reflexivity and responsibility that are present in educational policy in Sweden. The study is based on a theory of discourse – inspired mainly by Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory – and on the idea that our way of understanding, creating meaning and producing knowledge is dependent on discourse (cf. Laclau & Mouffe 1985/2001). Discourse positions subjects, and provides guidelines for actions. To us, this means that different discourses (re)produce different understandings, meanings and guidelines for action concerning higher education and student life, and have different consequences for issues of self-reflexivity and

responsibility. The analysis is also based on the idea that discursive struggles are basic social conditions. This opens the way for pluralism and contingency regarding social life – there is not a single source, or force, on the basis of which social identity is decided, or from which people are given guidelines for action. However, there can be blocks in the field of discursivity, and this happens when a specific discourse hegemonizes the field, partially fixes identity and meaning, and thereby also becomes the sole source of guidelines for action (cf. Laclau & Mouffe 1985/2001). In the last section (IV), we will say something more about hegemonic tendencies and their consequences for higher education and student life.

Discourse is produced and reproduced through articulation, and the aim in this section is to investigate articulations stemming from a specific discursive domain – educational policy in Sweden. The analyses that follow are established in the light of two aspects of theory – the first one, already mentioned in the introduction, says that you can do nothing as an inquirer without having an idea of what kind of society the problem at hand is related to. We have taken this first step through the references in section II. The other aspect of theory says that what theories bring about is methodology. Our interest, from now on, is in investigating the arguments found in educational policy in Sweden by performing analyses of texts with reference to discourse theory. In our analyses, we will use concepts drawn from discourse theory – in other words analytical concepts such as articulation, nodal point, master signifier and myth – closely connected to a view of an existing society. We find that Laclau and Mouffe's (1985/2001) discourse, and the theory in itself, differ from several established discourse analyses by being a "theory of discourse" that is explicitly methodological, rather than being a method. By methodological we are referring to the fact that their theory of discourse emanates from a specific theory of society, by which aspects of other theories of society are analysed using concepts derived from a post-structuralist view of antagonism and hegemony. In our analyses we will try to understand the different meanings, relating to higher education, self-reflexivity and personal responsibility, produced by different discourses within the domain of educational policy. All in all we have so far argued that personal responsibility in its idealized mode is a situation where individuals challenge themselves, and by so doing challenge the institutions and the community at large through self-reflexivity and self-criticism. What we will now try to do is to keep in touch with our theoretical construction, in other words our argumentation about how and why personal responsibility should be defended as a characterization of higher education, and then let the text speak to this resonance. First of

all, though, we will concentrate here on what will be the result when the policy texts studied are read from the perspective of discourse theoretical concepts – here, nodal points, myths, master signifier and to some extent also elements.

The analysis is based upon a reading of nine different texts, produced within the domain of Swedish higher education policy during the period 1992–2007. They include government bills (4), as well as official government inquiries (3) and departmental reports (2).¹¹ The text analysis undertaken may best be described as a process of reading texts slowly, thoroughly and many times – each time posing different questions to them. In this article we present only a short summary of the two final stages of our analysis. This means that several earlier stages¹² and possible points for discussion are omitted. Our summary of the two final stages of the analysis was prepared after going through all the material several times, and from this being able to draw conclusions about the four different discourses found within the discursive domain: (1) the classical academic discourse, (2) the discourse of *Bildung*, (3) the discourse of democracy, and (4) the discourse of globalization. The first stage is mainly a descriptive analysis of the content of the different discourses. In this stage we discuss the discourses by presenting the nodal points, myths and master signifiers that restrain and give content to each one. Here we emphasize how social identities are organized in the different discourses, with a special interest in the discursive positioning of the subject *student*. The idea is that each discourse provides the *student* with different guidelines for action, giving rise to different consequences concerning issues of self-reflexivity and responsibility. We use the notion of master signifier to analyse the different guidelines for action provided by each discourse. The second stage of our analysis is a consequential analysis, focused on the kind of self-reflexivity and responsibility that each discourse promotes. Here we discuss the consequences of the different discourses for issues of self-reflexivity and responsibility, in the light of the foreground drawn in section II. The idea here is that each discourse gives the subject different possibilities, within education, to realize their aims in life – or to practise different cultural lifestyles. This stage of our analysis is touched upon in this section, but further developed in section IV.

Let us begin with some initial words about the demarcation of four specific discourses. This demarcation is based upon our reading of the nine policy texts, and on what we, in discourse theoretical terms, perceive to be different discursively established signifying chains (cf. Laclau & Mouffe 1985/2000). Within each such chain we can see how meaning is fixed around privileged words – nodal points. The

nodal point fixes the meaning of other signs in the signifying chain, and sustains the identity of a specific discourse by constructing a knot of definite meaning. The discursive organization of social identities, and the guidelines for action provided by each discourse, necessarily follows in the footsteps of the meaning established by the signifying chains and the nodal points (cf. Laclau & Mouffe 1985/2000). In our reading of the texts it became clear to us that signifying chains were established and the nodal point of each discourse was to be found in the way different articulations restrained and defined the societal role (the aims and purposes) of higher education. For example, within the classical academic discourse, the role of higher education is defined first of all as a responsibility to “search for new knowledge and to distribute this knowledge” (SOU 1992:1, p. 16). This discourse is organized by the nodal point of classical academic ideals, which is given meaning in relation to signs like academic freedom, critical examination and rational argumentation. The discourse offers the student a subject position emphasizing autonomy, a striving for new knowledge and a critical attitude. Within the discourse of economic globalization the societal role of higher education is defined as a responsibility to “promote mobility, employability and Europe’s competitiveness as an educational continent” (Proposition 2004/05, p. 1). This discourse is organized by the nodal point of globalization, which is given meaning in relation to signs like economy, competition and mobility. The discourse offers the student a completely different subject position, emphasizing accommodation, mobility and a flexible attitude.

Before going into our analysis of the four different discourses, we will give the reader a chance to gain an overview of it, by providing an introductory summary of our findings in the table below. The table represents the first step in our analysis – in other words a descriptive analysis of the content of the discourses found in the texts.

Table 1: *Educational policy discourses in Sweden 1992–2007.*

	The classical academic discourse	The discourse of Bildung	The discourse of democracy	The discourse of economic globalization
Nodal point	Classical academic ideals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic freedom - Critical examination - Rational argumentation 	Personal development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Humanism - Bildung - Self-knowledge - Solidarity 	Democratic development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality - Justice - Participation - Civil competence 	Globalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic development - Competition - Mobility - Comparability - Life-long learning
Myth	The academic (thick) community	The international (thick) community	The democratic (thick) community	The European education and labour market
Master signifier	The intellectual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aspiring to knowledge - Critically thinking - Autonomous 	The world citizen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-conscious - Showing solidarity - Autonomous 	The critical citizen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critically thinking - Participant - Autonomous 	The European citizen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible - Employable - Investor - Accommodative

The classical academic discourse

As stated above, the classical academic discourse is organized by the nodal point of classical academic ideals. As a basis for further analysis of this discourse, we will give an introductory example of a typical articulation within it. The italics in the quote are our own:

As the title of our report, we have chosen the words *freedom, responsibility and competence*. These are three guiding stars that we happily embrace as the guidelines for the development of higher education during the 1990s and the coming century.

Of course, they must be understood in the light of what is the external purpose of higher education: *the search for new knowledge and the distribution of that knowledge*. But within this broader framework, these three prestigious words deserve to be given prominence as symbols. They are intended to mark a shift in perspective in relation to what is behind us, but are at the same time also a reconnection to what could be called *the classical academic ideals*.

...

The concept of *freedom*, we would argue, does not imply isolation or a demarcation from the surrounding society. On the contrary, it is a question of *freedom* combined with *responsibility*. The *autonomy* of higher education has, from a historical

point of view, never been interpreted as a wall against the surrounding world. Not even during those epochs when *academic freedom* was marked by a specific legal system, and the student was a “*liber studiosos*”, was there any other notion than that higher education had the purpose of supplying the nation state and the church with *civil servants*. In that sense, universities and other institutions of higher education have always been vocational. The *freedom* intended is on another level: an *inner freedom* which, with partly different applications, applies to both teachers and students. Among other things, it is characterized by *open debate*, where everyone has the right to state their opinion and where *no other authority but the strength of the argument* is valid. The *academic seminar form* or the open disputation, with its *critical examination*, can be seen as a symbol for this attitude (SOU 1992:1, p. 37).

As can be seen from the quote, the classical academic discourse is built on the idea that higher education has a special character – an academic character, founded on classical academic ideals, which unites all institutions of higher education and separates them from other non-academic forms of education. This view of higher education is further said to be “an expression of an internationally embraced view of the special character of higher education. For example, this view has been expressed in recent years thorough the Magna Charta of the European Universities” (SOU 1992:1, p. 37). It is also said to mirror “somewhat the *continuity from the Middle Ages down to the present day regarding the idea of the university*” (SOU 1992:1, p. 37). Within this discourse, Swedish institutions of higher education are not only constituted as having a special character; they are also constituted as parts of a greater *academic community*. We can call the *academic community* the myth which within the discourse organizes the social space of higher education. The academic community is not demarcated by national borders, but is articulated as an international community. Above we can see how the academic community is organized first of all as a European or Western one. But, within the discourse, the elements of internationalization and globalization (often described as global dependence) add significance to the social space of higher education, extending it beyond Europe and the Western world. Within the discourse, it is articulated as follows: “Concerning an increasing number of questions, country after country is discovering its dependence on developments in the rest of the world” (SOU 1992:1, p. 77). Questions of economics, environmental issues, diseases (like AIDS) and political decisions and events are all given as examples of global dependence. As we shall see below, globalization and interna-

tionalization are important elements in several discourses – in one, globalization even becomes the nodal point that organizes the whole discourse. Within the classical academic discourse, globalization and internationalization are important elements, but, related to the nodal point of classical academic ideals, they are given a different meaning. Here, they are not given the sense of being radically new conditions that the academic community has to adapt to. Instead, it is argued: “Research, carried out at universities and other institutions of higher education, has always functioned in an international context. This is one of its fundamental conditions”, and it is first and foremost the “complexity of the questions” (SOU 1992:1, p. 77) and the quality of research that requires internationalization.

The academic community is, in relation to the surrounding society, articulated as having a special task to fulfil – to search for new knowledge and to distribute that knowledge. This task applies to all members of the academic community – teachers (scholars) as well as students. The idea can be traced way back in history, and has a firm foundation in the Enlightenment idea of science as an instrument of both societal and individual emancipation. But to understand the meaning of the task produced by the classical academic discourse and its significance for issues of self-reflexivity and personal responsibility, we need to take a closer look at how the discourse is constituted. The classical academic discourse is built up around the nodal point of classical academic ideals, which, as the quote above shows, is given its meaning in a signifying chain, when related to signs like academic freedom, critical examination and rational argumentation. The concept of academic freedom articulated within the discourse is, again according to the quote, not to be understood as an argument for the isolation of higher education from the surrounding society, but rather as an argument for an *inner* freedom. This stems from the idea that higher education and the academic community have a *responsibility* towards the surrounding community – through the production and distribution of new knowledge, they are to participate in, and contribute to, both societal and individual emancipation. In that sense, academic freedom does not imply isolation, it implies involvement and responsibility. We would like to discuss the concept of academic freedom a little more, though, since our analysis reveals that a more complex idea of freedom is articulated within the classical academic discourse. Within this discourse, the state apparatus (through legislation and funding) is emphasized as the guarantor for the idea of this freedom. Higher education and the academic community thus become dependent on something outside themselves, and academic freedom can therefore only be upheld in relation to the external. At the same time, questions

about what knowledge to produce, and distribute, are articulated as questions to be answered *within* the academic community. Academic freedom must, in that sense, also be understood as a freedom from what is outside the academic community.

As the quote makes clear, academic freedom is always related to responsibility. Academic freedom and responsibility are first of all articulated as something that applies to research, but they also apply when it comes to questions concerning the content and form of undergraduate education. Within this discourse, a strong connection between research and undergraduate education is emphasized as “a core of ‘the Magna Charta of the European Universities’” (SOU 1992:1, p. 82). But, although the connection between research and undergraduate education is articulated as important both for the changing needs and demands of society and for scientific progress, one can see how issues of academic freedom and responsibility are more complex in relation to undergraduate education. Here the academic community has to accept that there is “an inevitable relationship between education and working life” (SOU 1992:1, p. 14) and higher education has a responsibility for “how its broad spectrum of education is related to, and applied in, the surrounding society” (SOU 1992:1, p. 42). A majority of the educational programmes provided, furthermore, are said to be geared “towards different societal functions” (p. 42). The academic community is given the freedom to decide what knowledge to produce and distribute, but it is also given the responsibility to consider the needs of the surrounding society and provide it with highly educated citizens. A possible conflict between different aims – such as political aims versus academic quality aims – is highlighted within the discourse. But, should it come to a situation where a choice has to be made between them, it is emphasized that, in the relationship with the surrounding society, the academic community and the field of study have the ultimate authority (cf. SOU 1992:1, p. 16). The responsibility to consider, for example, political aims and to educate for different societal functions implies another way of looking at questions of freedom, responsibility and competencies when it comes to undergraduate education and students. In the following we will take a closer look at what responsibilities and competencies the discourse organizes and specifically analyse the guidelines for action provided for the subject position of *student*.

Within the classical academic discourse the highly educated citizen is equivalent to *the intellectual*. The intellectual is the master signifier who organizes the subject positions of all members of the academic community – here we will focus on the position of the student. *The intellectual* is given its meaning when related to signs like autonomous,

aspiring to knowledge, critical attitude, critical thinking, critical examination and rational argumentation. These signs function as the guidelines for action provided within the discourse. The subject position of student is organized, and given its meaning, in relation to that of the teacher. In relation to the student, the teacher is positioned as someone who already is an intellectual, while the student is positioned as someone who, through education, is to become one. To become an intellectual, the student has to be “trained to develop a *critical attitude*” (SOU 1992:1, p. 88). The element *critical attitude* captures the meaning of the guidelines for action provided for the intellectual. To further understand what a critical attitude implies, we will now take a closer look at how education and teaching aimed at developing this attitude are articulated. First, within the discourse, the most important task of higher education is not to be directed towards well-defined vocational skills, but to strive to provide a general competence within the chosen field of education (cf. SOU 1992:1, p. 41). This implies not only “a *general view* over wide fields but must also contain an *element of deepening* within any part of the teaching” (SOU 1992:1, p. 88). This “element of deepening” is specified as the training of students in critical and academic thinking, which in turn is given its meaning when related to expressions like “*training in scientific method*”, “*readiness for knowledge*”, “*curiosity*” and “*problematization*” (SOU 1992:1, p. 89). From this we can argue that the intellectual is positioned as someone who both has general knowledge and is critically trained within a certain field of knowledge. The guidelines for action provided for the student positioned as an intellectual are primarily directed towards cognitive abilities – that is, abilities to *think* in relation to a certain field of knowledge and in relation to the theories and methods provided by science. These are often expressed as abilities to interpret, understand and survey new information and unknown phenomena (cf. SOU 1992:1, p. 79). However, being an intellectual also means always being willing, and able, to reconsider one’s point of view and to judge between different alternatives – the theories and methods of science do not provide you with any absolute certainty. Intellectual reconsideration and judgement are, though, still rational operations, having to do with one’s abilities to participate in “academic conversation” and “see the reasons for and against opinions which constitute the academic exchange of views” (SOU 1992:1, p. 89).

To draw some consequences concerning issues of self-reflexivity and responsibility, the classical academic discourse offers the student the subject position of the intellectual. The guidelines for action given to this subject are aspiring to knowledge, critical, rational and autonomous. The intellectual has responsibilities both within the academic

community and as a highly educated citizen, responsibilities towards the surrounding community. Both these responsibilities are, within the discourse, to be taken on with the critical attitude, rational reasoning and use of rational judgement learned and practised within higher education and within a specific field of knowledge. Within the discourse, professional responsibility therefore does not have to include personal responsibility and personal aspects of acting and judging.

The discourse of Bildung

The demarcation between the discourse of Bildung and the classical academic discourse is not completely clear. To some extent the signifying chains overlap, and the discourses are both built upon Enlightenment ideas of societal and individual emancipation through academic critique and questioning. Elements such as critical thinking, critical examination and rational argumentation are therefore also building blocks of the discourse of Bildung. The significant difference that justifies the demarcation of two discourses is that within the classical academic discourse the articulations position the student first of all as a member of the academic community. As such, the student has specific professional tasks and responsibilities – and those tasks and responsibilities are to be discharged by the student in similar ways both within the academic community and later, as a highly educated citizen, within the surrounding society. Within the discourse of Bildung the student is positioned as an individual looking to develop, find and free herself, in a complex global society. The student is, first and foremost, positioned as a member of the international community and as someone who has a personal responsibility in relation to that community.

As before, we will begin the analysis with a few introductory examples of typical articulations within the discourse. The italics in the quotations are our own.

Education broaden one's mind, contributes to *personal development* and provides better prerequisites for meeting the great challenges of our time and the rapid changes in the conditions of life (Proposition 2001/02:15, p. 18).

It is also through this [education and research] that our country can strengthen and deepen the *cultural and humanistic values that are part of a good society* (Ds 1992:1, preface).

A striving to give the students opportunities for *self-knowledge* and to develop their *creative abilities*. They should be trained

to ask their own questions, formulate new problems and search for the answers (SOU 1992:1, p. 79).

The education should promote the development by the student of

- her own attitude in relation to the *basic values of the community* (democracy, equality, respect for the equal worth of all etc.),
- awareness about the societal role of knowledge and *human responsibility* for how it is utilized,
- a commitment to participate in the debate about issues concerning theories of life and society,
- willingness to *process her own values concerning moral and ethical questions*, especially in relation to the field of her studies,
- an *understanding of the cultures and conditions of other countries and of the global context*,
- curiosity, willingness to take initiatives, openness to new demands and influences and a readiness to act (SOU 1992:1, p. 81).

The discourse of *Bildung* is organized by the nodal point of personal development. This nodal point is given its meaning when related to signs such as cultural and humanistic values, a good society, self-knowledge, creative abilities, and moral and ethical questions. Questions concerning individual emancipation and freedom are at the bottom of the articulations within this discourse. This could be compared to the classical academic discourse, where academic freedom is emphasized, and where the student is positioned as someone who has a task in relation to that institutionalized freedom. Within the discourse of *Bildung*, the emancipation of the individual comes first, and the student is positioned as a person who, through higher education, is striving to free (and develop) herself and meet the challenges of *our time*. In relation to this, the articulated purpose of higher education becomes to make possible what we might call the individual's personal life-project.

This purpose of higher education becomes even clearer when students' different motives for studying are articulated as important values within higher education and educational policy. It is argued that starting points in a future profession, preferences for a certain subject, further education or a wish to educate oneself within areas like art and literature are all to be legitimate motives within higher education, and that a pluralism in educational direction – both vocational and general training – is therefore needed (cf. SOU 1992:1, p. 99). But despite this openness concerning student motives and wishes, a specific personal life-project is organized within the discourse of *Bildung*. This life-project

is a humanistic one, and institutions of higher education are therefore, logically, positioned as having the responsibility to educate persons – no matter what they study – towards humanistic values. These values are not articulated as specifically academic, although, as mentioned before, many of the classic academic ideals are included in what are here articulated as humanistic ideals. Rather, they are values cherished by the (good) international community. The myth of the international community is, within this discourse, what organizes the social space of higher education, and institutions of higher education and students are positioned as members of that international community.

The articulated idea of an international community demands a striving for internationalization of higher education – an internationalization that cannot be confined to the Western world: “An internationalization that remains within the Western world is only a half measure” (SOU 1992:1, p. 78). This is due to the humanistic idea that individual emancipation and the realization of one’s personal life-project are not to be conducted at the expense of others. Instead they must be undertaken with consideration for, understanding of and solidarity with others:

The purpose of internationalization is also to contribute to a greater *solidarity* and *understanding for the conditions of other countries* and thereby avoid provincialism. It also has the purpose of making the student capable of relating knowledge about other countries to knowledge about her own country (SOU 1992:1, p. 78).

Internationalization here is not just articulated as a prerequisite for high-quality academic work, it is also fundamental to realization of the humanistic personal life-project, which will form part of a complex international community which the individual wants, and needs, to know and understand. For this to be possible, foreign languages, communication skills and cultural knowledge are articulated as competencies which it is necessary to educate the student towards. These are competencies which in many cases go beyond what is learned within a specific field of knowledge.

From the above we can argue that the task of higher education is not only one of educating intellectuals, but rather becomes one of educating *world citizens*. The world citizen is equivalent to someone who wishes to explore and understand the world, to communicate with others and to embrace the idea of solidarity. The most significant thing about the world citizen, compared to the intellectual, is that she is expected to be aware of “the societal role of knowledge” and take “human responsibility for how it is utilized” (SOU 1992:1, p. 81). She is also expected to have

knowledge about herself and be willing to process her own values in a way that reaches beyond the theories and methods provided by a given field of knowledge. From the quote at the beginning of this section, we can also see how “readiness to act” is emphasized, which we can compare with the expression “readiness for knowledge” that is common in the classical academic discourse. This, together with the emphasis on ethical questions and understanding of the global context, demonstrates that the articulated personal responsibility of the student positioned as a world citizen is different from the professional responsibility of the intellectual. In the case of the world citizen, the link between professional responsibility and personal responsibility is quite strong – professional responsibility becomes equivalent to personal responsibility within the discourse of *Bildung*. The student, as a world citizen, is to have self-knowledge, as well as an understanding of the global context of which she is a part, and from this she must judge what personal life-project she wants to pursue in the world. This judgement must be made with consideration for, understanding of and solidarity with others – and therefore it must always include an ethical dimension and is an act of personal responsibility.

The discourse of democracy

Within the democratic discourse, the role of higher education is defined as a responsibility to confirm, or develop, democracy and to empower citizens by giving them equal opportunities to participate in society and reach their aims in life:

Education is a decisive prerequisite for *confirming democracy* and *equalizing inequalities in the distribution of welfare, influence and opportunities to actively participate in society*. Education that meets high standards of quality is significant to the future of the individual and her potential to develop. *The right of all to knowledge and development is, against this background, the starting point for the government's policy*. The knowledge society must be open to everyone. This is the great future task of welfare policy. Higher education must be a *force for social change*. Knowledge is not reduced when it is shared by more people – on the contrary. Growth and welfare demand a population that is well educated. *Inequalities in access to education mean inequalities in power, concerning one's own life and in society*. Educational policy becomes central to the policy of redistribution in a knowledge society.

...

An open system of higher education welcomes all equally, regardless of their background, ethnicity, place of residence,

gender or disability. The diversity in our society must to a larger extent be mirrored in higher education, when it comes to students, teachers and researchers alike. The open higher education system is open to the surrounding world. Recruitment to higher education should therefore increase, *equalize* and be widened to include new groups of people (Proposition 2001/02:1, p. 18).

The discourse of democracy is built up around the nodal point of democratic development, which is given its meaning when related to signs like equality, justice, participation and power. Higher education is here given the twin task of developing democracy by empowering people to influence and actively participate in society.

The democratic community is the myth organizing the social space of higher education within the discourse, and is demarcated by reference to the principals of equality, justice and participation. Here, though, the social space of higher education is more place-bound than that found within the discourse of *Bildung* – institutions of higher education, and individuals, are related to and have responsibilities towards specific democratic communities (the Swedish nation state, the municipality etc.), and towards specific social groups within the community. Higher education is therefore constituted as a force for social change, which can contribute to equalizing inequalities and injustice between different social groups within a democratic community. Several arguments for this are given, including the advantages of higher education for the individual in terms of employment, health, longer life and a higher salary (cf. Proposition 2001/02:1, p. 19). But much emphasis is also placed on the importance of representation and diversity in significant societal positions:

Many jobs in significant societal positions, for example within public administration, the school system, the legal system, the media and trade and industry, demand higher education. To strengthen integration and increase the citizens' trust in societal institutions, it is important that the people who work there represent a greater diversity and better mirror the composition of the population (Proposition 2001/02:1, p. 20).

Higher education is believed to bring about social change with regard to the representation of social groups in different social positions, and the citizenry's trust in societal institutions. Social change here, though, is not only a question of representation, or mirroring, of different social groups, or a question of supporting existing societal institutions. As mentioned before, it is also – and perhaps even more

importantly – a question of empowering the individual to achieve increased influence and participation, and thereby also a possible future institutional change. Within the discourse, it is emphasized that a diverse, empowered public has an impact on quality and content, and can contribute to change.

As we shall see later, questions concerning influence, participation and equality are also emphasized within the discourse of economic globalization, but only in relation to opportunities to participate in, and influence, the economy and the labour market. Within the discourse of democracy, empowerment by higher education is a bigger, and more political, question. It is for example stated that the “consequences of education are not limited to the economy and working life. A part of ‘the good’ that can follow from higher education is bound to personal development, perhaps an inner satisfaction or a feeling of coherence” (SOU 1883:85, p. 316). But what is emphasized as more important is “the political dimension, ‘civil competence’” (p. 316), which implies a distribution of “human universal competence” (p. 316). It is further stated, that “previous studies show unambiguously that higher education provides better prerequisites for ‘civil influence’” (p. 316).

The emphasis on higher education contributing to the development of what is here called civil competence is characteristic of the discourse of democracy. Within this discourse, civil competence is defined by ideals stemming from both the classical academic discourse and the discourse of *Bildung*. But through the important elements of equality, justice, influence and participation, the civilly competent student is positioned as a *critical citizen*, rather than an intellectual or a world citizen. Within the discourse, the professional responsibility of a highly educated critical citizen has to do with civil competence and the responsibility to contribute to social change and democratic development. The critical citizen is seen as a member of a specific democratic community and as someone having responsibilities towards that community. The critical citizen has to practise her judgement and consider what best to do in relation to the community and its citizens, guided by the principles of equality, justice and participation. The responsibility of the critical citizen therefore goes beyond that of the intellectual, and always includes personal aspects of acting and judging.

The discourse of economic globalization

Within the discourse of economic globalization, the societal role of higher education is defined as a responsibility to “promote mobility, employability and Europe’s competitiveness as an educational conti-

ment” (Proposition 2004/05, p. 1). This discourse is organized by the nodal point of globalization, which is given its meaning in relation to signs such as growth, competition and mobility. Questions of globalization are, first of all, treated from an economic point of view, and therefore the student is offered a completely different subject position compared with those of the other discourses. Within the discourse of economic globalization, the subject position of the student is organized by the master signifier *the employable*, which emphasizes autonomy, mobility and flexibility.

A modern higher education, in *the era of globalization*, is open to the surrounding world. In a period of closer international cooperation, less significance of borders and increased *competition*, education becomes more and more important. In a knowledge society, where the *supply* of less qualified jobs is decreasing, access to education becomes more important for the individual. *In a society which every day is measured against other societies, the competence of its people becomes maybe the most important factor for future societal development.* Well-functioning, and high-quality, universities and other higher education institutions are therefore crucial if we, in our community, are to be able to *assert ourselves* well in the future.

...
 With this bill, a new chapter is being written in Swedish educational policy. It is important to build upon previous *advances*, but at the same time we must *arm ourselves* to be able to make the most of the opportunities of internationalization. In this bill, the government presents a policy that will strengthen the *competitiveness* of Swedish higher education. *Sweden should be an attractive country for studies, developing in line with the intentions of the Bologna process* (Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 26).

As can be seen from the above quotation, questions concerning Sweden’s competitiveness as a knowledge nation are brought into focus within this discourse. Higher education, and the individual, are given their value in relation to this focus, and are positioned as forces making this possible.

The myth organizing the social space of higher education is not, as one might think, Sweden. Within the discourse it is made clear that Sweden, its institutions and people, cannot compete by themselves in a globalized world. Here we will just note the use of a war rhetoric – the talk about advances and arming ourselves – to emphasize the way in which the articulations within this discourse try to argue for the need for allies in a competitive situation. Rather than Sweden, the

European community is the myth of the discourse. This community is made up of a common European education and labour market, and it is in relation to this market that higher education must orient itself. Internationalization of higher education is therefore also a crucial element within the discourse of economic globalization. Here, though, internationalization is not a matter of solving epistemological questions or increasing solidarity: “The internationalization of higher education has, in recent years, first of all been connected to the *globalization of the economy, the labour market, increased international mobility among people and increased international ingredients in many professions*” (Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 32). Globalization of the economy is further described as creating new (economic) opportunities, but also sharper competition, which puts Sweden in a situation where “it has to strengthen its position by competing with knowledge, competence, creativity and quality” (Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 32). It is for these purposes, according to the discourse, that we need higher education.

When the internationalization of higher education is linked to mobility and competition, the focus falls, rather, on questions concerning the attractiveness, clarity and comparability of Swedish higher education (cf. Proposition 2004/05, p. 1), which becomes a matter of creating, and participating in, a European educational continent (also referred to as the EHEA, or European Higher Education Area). The creation of a European educational continent has as its purpose “to promote mobility, employability and Europe’s competitiveness as an educational continent” (Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 1). It is to provide education, based upon three cycles, that will accommodate the educational needs of the individual, the needs of the academic community and the needs of the labour market (cf. Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 85). Within the discourse, the articulations try to make it plausible to the academic community that the basis for higher education is still academic subjects and disciplines, and that the new policy does not threaten their academic freedom. The following is a typical example of how this is done. First comes an expression of confidence in the established academic disciplines as the basis for higher education:

The intention of the government is not to question the role of established academic subjects and disciplines. However, there is reason to avoid regulations that are based on distinguished Swedish tradition, or that can hinder attempts to cut across disciplines and develop new subjects or subject areas. The regulations that will apply to all higher education will, as far as possible, be neutral in relation to the definitions and development of the academic community (Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 103).

Later on in the text, however, the government's opinion concerning the content of education is made clear, and it is stated that, no matter what, "it is important to have second-cycle education that directs itself towards those who are already professional or is evidently directed to the labour market, and not only designed to fit continued academic studies and research within the discipline" (Proposition 2004/05:162, p. 104). The orientation towards the labour market is here emphasized with regard to second-cycle (master's degree) education, but we can find similar examples referring to all levels of education – including doctoral studies.¹³ Within the discourse there is also another restriction concerning the academic freedom and content of higher education. Institutions of higher education are to prioritize education and research that are internationally successful – excellence, specialization and differentiation are here important elements in understanding the striving for development articulated within the discourse (cf. SOU 2007:81, pp. 16 f., 20 f.).

What consequences does the above have for the student – what kind of position is she offered within the discourse of economic globalization? Well, first of all, the student is positioned as a European citizen. This is made clear in an articulation from the European ministers of education, stressing the role of an internationalization of higher education and

the necessity of ensuring a substantial period of study abroad in joint degree programmes as well as proper provision for linguistic diversity and language learning, so that students may achieve their full potential for European identity, citizenship and employability (Berlin communiqué 2003, p. 6).

The student as a European citizen is positioned as someone having a specific European identity and belonging. The citizenship of the European citizen is, within the discourse, restricted to a relationship between the individual and the European education and labour market. This means that questions of empowerment, participation and equality in this discourse become equivalent to the creation of similar opportunities to participate, move and compete on the European market. Employability and flexibility therefore become important guidelines for action for the European citizen.

For the individual, education is emphasized as needed first and foremost to improve one's competitiveness within Europe. Improving one's skills, and competitiveness, is the responsibility of the individual – first an individual responsibility for the student to become employ-

able, and later a professional responsibility for the highly educated European citizen to maintain and raise his or her value in relation to the development and new needs of the labour market. Higher education here becomes an investment in a future career on the European labour market, and it is emphasized as crucial that “the education is perceived as an important and profitable investment for the individual” (Proposition 1992/93:1, p. 17). In relation to this, the responsibility of institutions of higher education is to make sure that the investment is indeed a profitable one – that is, to ensure that the educational skills of the student are marketable and lead to employability. In relation to certain professions, marketability and employability might come to mean an endeavour to educate towards a critical attitude, but they could also mean something else. Therefore, at a general level we cannot say anything about the link between professional and personal responsibility. What is made clear, though, is that within the discourse of economic globalization there is a strong emphasis on a *flexible attitude*, on the part of both the individual and institutions of higher education. This flexible attitude entails an ability to *accommodate* oneself to the conditions of a rapidly changing labour market. This is in clear contrast to the other discourses, where higher education is supposed, in one way or another, to empower the individual to take responsibility, to lead her own life, to participate in, and have an impact on, societal development and change.

In the next section we will try to sum up and characterize the four discourses in relation to the concepts presented in the second section. We will mainly use Dewey’s concepts and try to make plausible their meaning as a way of understanding the discourse’s impact on potential cultural lifestyles, answering the question of how to understand the way people live their lives in institutions of higher education – or “being at university”.

IV. Potential cultural lifestyles within higher education

Before going into the details of our analysis of potential cultural lifestyles within higher education, we will once again provide an overview, giving a summary of our analysis in the table below. The table represents the second step in our analysis – in other words the consequential analysis of what kind of self-reflexivity and responsibility each discourse promotes.

Table 2: Consequences of different discourses concerning issues of self-reflexivity and responsibility.

	The classical academic discourse	The discourse of Bildung	The discourse of democracy	The discourse of economic globalization
Self-reflexivity	Critical attitude - Cognitive abilities (know-how) - Rational judgement	Contingent attitude - Ethical and moral judgement (being in the world)	Democratic attitude - Cognitive abilities - Moral judgement - Political willingness	Flexible attitude - Vocational skills (cognitive or experienced based) - Instrumental choice
Responsibility (individual)	Professional responsibility - contributing to the development of society	Personal responsibility - experiencing one's own interest and partaking of the consequences of action	Personal responsibility - actively involved in the community and common interests	Professional responsibility - adjustable to conditions in the labour market
Responsibility (institutional)	New knowledge	Life-project	Democratic empowerment	European competitiveness

According to our analysis, *the classical academic discourse* institutionalizes new knowledge as the main principle of higher education. This discourse is characterized by the fact that it organizes a *thick community*, in other words the relation between the individual and the institution is organized in a way that supports a specific cultural lifestyle and hinders *indefinite actions*. In the light of professional and personal responsibility, this means that higher education is a specific cultural community in which participants are involved with each other, as well as with ideas (knowledge). In this involvement, emotions and affections tied up with the community are governed by the institutional definition of the profession. This means that the students should be able to use their *reason* rather than their intelligence. In Dewey's sense, that means being able to grasp first and indemonstrable truths about fixed principles, in order to reason deductively from them to the particulars which they govern.

The discourse of Bildung institutionalizes humanistic life-projects as the main principle of higher education. It organizes a *thin community* in the sense of allowing the student's self-reflexivity to be *contingent*, in other words allowing her to experience her *interest* in a relationship where the general moral principles of a certain profession are integrated as well as challenged by the particularity of the situation. This is in line with what we have stated about the contrast between, on the one hand, general principles and professional judgements in terms of reason and, on the other, particular interests and personal preferences in terms of what Dewey refers to as *intelligence*.

Intelligence is about knowing and being in a world without certainty, where personal responsibility is a matter of partaking of the consequences of action. In such a situation the individual is responsible for herself and for her relation to the world and the people in it.

The discourse of democracy institutionalizes individual and societal empowerment as the main principle of higher education. This discourse is characterized by the fact that it organizes a *thick community* of a kind where the “thickness” is built on *reflexivity* that is open not only to solving epistemological problems, but also to overcoming unavoidable conflicts in general (inequality and unequal participation). Our thesis here is that no critical citizenship can be reached or upheld without a personal willingness and acceptance of responsibility, and that such willingness and acceptance are aspects of personal interests, concerns and deep involvement in the community and common interests. In line with our discussion on the political character of education and with references to conflict, educating towards critical citizenship implies a space of disagreement and dissensus that calls for knowledge and judgements on the part of an individual who assumes her or his personal responsibility. In the words of Mouffe and Dewey, relations are political in the sense of being a problem to be solved, where one person has to do something by challenging another. What will come out of such challenges no one knows in advance, not even what the effect will be on one’s own identity. Thus this discourse partly opens the way for a self-reflexive contingency of the individual as well as of the community.

The discourse of economic globalization institutionalizes competitiveness, defined by a European citizenship, as the main principle of higher education. This discourse organizes a *thin and thick community*. It is thin in the sense that it incorporates individuals who should primarily be aware of and alert to what is on the market agenda. The discourse is at the same time based on “community thickness”, through the way that individuals and institutions are positioned as European heirs. This is a situation where one aspect of community implies that the individuals involved share a common symbolic space (Europe), but where the other aspect implies a heavy individualization, in which friends and foes are mixed up. This confused situation takes away the thickness and creates a thin abstract community held together by everybody striving to position themselves in relation to one another as legitimate employees.

To sum up, from the perspective of responsibility, the question of central interest is not only the connection between personal and professional judgements, but also that between private and public conditions and consequences. The problems involved in following a

professional system of rules for acting and for one's personal judgement of situations, and the potential conflicts in such situations, are we think legion in many professions. Our normative standpoint, therefore, is that higher education should care about opportunities to challenge such conflicts, in other words it should confront the private and public aspects of the student's experiences of moral dilemmas in order to make education an undertaking that counts in the vocations of life, rather than prepare students by providing them with professional, technical knowledge (cf. Dewey 1916/1966, p. 136). No matter how valuable preparation of this kind might be, when confronted with an unlimited self-reflexivity and indefinite action, the principle of endorsing responsibility by intelligence rather than by reason is decisive for the character of education and the kind of cultural lifestyle it promotes or interferes with.

Finally, in the opening scene we asked which specific cultural lifestyles for students and institutions of higher education emerge from the arguments advanced in educational policy in Sweden. So we have attempted an answer. All in all, we can argue that entering a university involves individuals taking part in a collective cultural lifestyle and manifesting a cultural competence in which conflicts of responsibility are present, shaping individuality. From our summary of the character of the educational discourses, we have suggested that there are differences at hand. Our analysis indicates a complex net of interwoven and ambiguous aims for higher education and professional responsibility. However, there is a clear tendency for the discourse of economic globalization now to hegemonize language use within the domain of Swedish educational policy, and the attentive reader may have noticed a chronology in the texts referred to from that domain. This chronology is no coincidence – at the beginning of the 1990s and the 2000s we can observe a discursive domain filled with variations in the use of language, creating both conflicts and openness in the meaning of higher education and professional responsibility. But the closer we get to 2007, the more this variation in language use is reduced, and the narrower the definition we find – largely owing to the fact that Swedish educational policy is adopting the language use of the Bologna process. There is therefore a clear tendency for the discourse of economic globalization to hegemonize language use within the domain. Educational policy, though, is not the only source providing a basis for higher education and student life. In section III we have used two interrelated concepts – field of discursivity and discursive domain. The first represents everything that is, or can be, said about higher education and extends over specific domains of language use. The second represents what is said about higher education within a

particular domain, in our case educational policy. As we see it, there is still openness in the field of discursivity – discourses from other domains counter those of the educational policy domain. The present article can be seen as one example of this.

Notes

1. With pragmatism – the contingency of the individual; with discourse theory – not from class theory, but from a theory of action.
2. With pragmatism – contingency in society and the we-intention in action; with discourse theory – the striving for hegemony and the production of antagonisms.
3. “Indefinite action” is a concept used by us to sum up the meaning of a central pragmatic/Deweyan attitude.
4. The wording of these sentences on democracy is inspired by a formulation used by Dewey, to which we will refer later (cf. Ljunggren 2003).
5. The word “evidence” may seem a bit odd, but understood from pragmatism’s viewpoint of fallibility it becomes indefinite.
6. This is one point, we think, on the basis of which Rorty positions *irony* in the sense of everything in thought and action being contingent. His characterization of Dewey’s experimentalism in science is, as he says, not scientific – “on the contrary . . . no more or less ‘in touch with reality’ than politics or poetry” (Rorty in the introduction to a new edition of Sidney Hook, *John Dewey. An Intellectual Portrait*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1995, pp. xiv–xv). Hook, though, characterizes Dewey’s philosophy in line with his own trust in the scientific *method*, saying about Dewey’s educational theory that its immediate bearings are the same as those of his moral and social theory: “they call for a dedication to the practical struggle for *extending* democracy by methods of intelligence in order that the methods of scientific inquiry win the authority to resolve human problems now exercised by dogma, holy or unholy, economic power, and physical force” (ibid., pp. 190–191). This is what we refer to later in this article in a closer definition of what is meant by “intelligence” (see “Central concepts”).
7. Note that when we use the concepts of “thin” and “thick communities” in the text it is the general aspects we have in mind, i.e. the way action is prescribed – not the particular aspects of political totalitarianism.
8. It should also be noted that the meanings of “student” (Lat. *stud’ens*) and “to study” (Lat. *stud’ere*) refer to a person being in a position, having a specific interest and acting from a certain kind of eagerness and ambition. The meaning of being a student is therefore, from an etymological viewpoint, closely connected to issues of autonomy and responsibility.
9. Cf. Westbrook’s discussion on the character of Dewey’s “socialist democracy”, ibid., p. 434.
10. We have only hinted at the concept of agonism in this article, even though it is one of the key words in Mouffe’s radical democracy, in which she refers to Arendt. We find Deweyan pragmatism close to Mouffe and Arendt primarily in the idea presented here – i.e. the way they argue in favour of the twofold

consequences of action. Formulated in Arendtian terms, it is a matter of situations where the “distinct who meets the shared what”. This is a formulation borrowed from Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 152.

11. The texts include extracts from the following (the English translations of the titles are our own): SOU 1992:1: *Frihet, Ansvar, Kompetens. Grundutbildningens villkor i högskolan. Betänkande av högskoleutredningen* [Freedom, responsibility, competence. The conditions of undergraduate education in higher education. Report of the Higher Education Inquiry], Ds 1992:1: *Fria universitet och högskolor* [Free universities and colleges], Proposition 1992/93:1: *Universitet och högskolor – frihet för kvalitet* [Universities and colleges – freedom for quality], SOU 1993:85: *Origin and education. Socially unrepresentative recruitment to higher education*, Proposition 2001/02:15: *Den öppna högskolan* [Open higher education], Ds 2004:2 *Högre utbildning i utveckling. Bolognaprocessen i svensk belysning* [Higher education in development. The Bologna process in a Swedish light], Proposition 2004/05: *Ny värld – ny högskola* [New world – new higher education], 2006/07:107: *Vägar till högskolan för kunskap och kvalitet* [Ways to higher education for knowledge and quality], SOU 2007:81: *Resurser för kvalitet* [Resources for quality].
12. For example, stages where we posed questions to each text about what meaning it established by putting elements in specific relations to each other, or where we posed questions about which elements, master signifiers and myths organized the texts.
13. Concerning doctoral studies, this emphasis becomes most obvious in SOU 2004:47: *En Ny Doktorsutbildning – kraftansamling för excellens och tillväxt* [A new doctoral education – mobilization for excellence and growth].

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