

Paper presented at
The CSP Conference
Oslo, June 17-19, 2004.
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Citizenship and Professional Identity

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Towards a professional identity

School has a special issue in society by educating young citizens developing knowledge and different skills and competences. To a great extent school is to be seen as a test arena for young people's personal life projects. *Individual* ideas and dreams about the future not seldom arise there. These dreams and ideas may have to do with interests, forthcoming studies or choice of profession. At the same time education may be seen as the very special issue of *society* to meet and take care of these interests, ideas and dreams and help develop them. Every time answers, in its own way, the questions of what goals and content education might have in relation to society and the changes going on there. How, and with what, can education contribute when it comes to the question of how people may learn to handle their individual and professional lives within the mosaic of political and cultural contexts they live in? This paper will concern about some implications *pedagogy* may have in relation to this question as to a vocational programme (Business- and Administration Programme) in the upper secondary school in Sweden. One point of departure for the project has to do with my experience of teaching young people in vocational programmes for a long time.

The first steps towards a professional identity are often taken by young people educated within vocational programmes in upper secondary schools. An assumption is that professional identity, whatever it may turn out to be, probably has its deepest basis in the concept of 'citizenship' by words like *autonomy*, *self-reliance* and *reflection*. The implication of 'citizenship' is problematic in the sense that it has changed during the last decades from being more or less a static concept telling something about the relation between the individual and the state - having a Swedish passport for example - to a culturally based, dynamic and discursively constructed concept.

The aim of the project was to focus the professional constructions of young people as 'citizens' within vocational programmes in upper secondary schools in Sweden. These constructions are presupposed to play an important role for the development of professional identities later on. What teachers *ascribe to* their pupils and what they *place credit in* as to their personal and professional future are seen as quite fundamental elements in the construction process.

Citizenship as a static and dynamic concept

Traditionally the notion of 'citizenship' has been described in static and institutionally dominated terms. But step by step it has got an extended implication that deals with the autonomy of the individual in a social community within a civil society where the practice of the citizens is focused (Habermas, 1995).

One of those who inspired Habermas was the French sociologist Durkheim. He meant that the concept of 'citizenship' had its presumptions in the notions of rationality and solidarity and he understood 'democracy' as a system based on reflection. The role of 'citizenship' in society was characterized in terms of that "there is a flow of communication between citizens and the state." (Durkheim, 1957, p.91) He paid much attention to the questions of morality and he also meant that education in itself contains a moral and social issue, besides the issue of knowledge. "We are moral beings only to the extent that we are social beings." (Durkheim, 1925/1961, p.64).

Another source of inspiration was Dewey. He considered the role of the 'citizen' in society in terms of communication. "Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession." (Dewey, 1916/1999, p. 87). The shared experiences communicated between people makes democracy a sort of living more than a form of government. Dewey focuses on the importance of education to the possibilities of the 'citizens' to consider different phenomena in society and in the world. Habermas vitalizes Dewey's thoughts about education, democracy and 'citizenship'. The democratic 'citizenship' is understood as a possibility to form independent ideas and to take the chances to an intellectual autonomy.

The conception of 'citizenship' of today has a wider and more dynamic implication. It's strongly related to the question of knowledge and education by the fact that we all, as 'citizens', are taking part in the shaping of the society we live in. A central question may be what sort of knowledge that is relevant as to the present and the future. One aspect of relevant knowledge in relation to important changes in late modernity are described as the individual's ability to critical reflection and the ability to communicate and negotiate about meaning and action (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). An education that aims at such an active 'citizenship' with a wide and dynamic implication cannot be described in terms of an additional agenda. All teaching and learning with this aim takes its point of departure in the concept of active 'citizenship', not now and then - but all the time.

At this background, very shortly described here, it seems relevant and interesting to study the discursive constructions as to pupils in vocational programmes as 'citizens'. These constructions were supposed to have something to do with the most fundamental part of their first steps towards a professional identity.

Understanding the social room

The research interest in how, and in what words and concepts, young people are constructed – and constituted – as 'citizens' in the professional talk within vocational programmes also turn the thoughts towards young people's professional interest and choice. For all of them it may be a question of what their teachers ascribe to them and what they place credit in. This is looked at by critical eyes, for example by the help of critical theory.

The theoretical framework has its most important parts in Habermas (1996) theory of communicative action. He makes analyses of language in terms of action. Modern society and its problems are described in terms of system and life world. The concept of system relates to power and economic circumstances, while life world relates to people's more private arenas in terms of norms, values and language. To understand society "correctly" *both* concepts are needed; it's not a question of one of them or the other. But there is an evident risk in modern society, Habermas says, that system starts colonizing life world by dictating conditions and choices there.

Foucault's (1972/1992) understanding of the notion of 'discourse' is seen as something very relevant. Discourse, he says, contributes to create the subjects we are and the objects we can know something about. Moreover, his critical questions about what we take for granted about power, about knowledge and about how subjects are constructed/constituted or marginalized seem to be central. Bourdieu (1984) takes an interest in the hidden processes of differentiation in education institutions pointing at the reproduction of "the social room". The most secret and hidden effects of education have to do with what Bourdieu calls "the effect of ascribing status." Institutions of education generally have the authority and power to differentiate between young people (pupils) by ascribing certain good or bad qualities to them. By doing this a certain behaviour is expected. In this way, Bourdieu says, institutions of education contribute to make the differences between people more permanent.

Ascribing status

To define groups in a special way, with special words, is also to describe reality in a special way. What words, concepts and values were there about pupils in the professional pedagogic discourse within this vocational programme? Much time was spent in three different teacher teams in upper secondary schools. All people involved were informed of the aim of the research, the conversation of the meetings was recorded and transcribed into text.

Fairclough's (1992; 1995; 2002) analytical framework inspired the process and the understanding. This theoretical and methodological model aims at problemizing and to empirically investigate the relation between discursive practices and wider social and cultural structures. Without getting into the details of the analysis work it could be said that the texts within the professional discursive practice was analysed by key words appearing from the many readings of the text and the transcription process: *ascribe to*, *assign to* and *place credit in*. These words were, in the next step, supposed to ask questions to the text about the professional's view on the young people's ability and status and the words and the communication in general were to be understood in relation to the social and cultural implications of the language. This relation implies a number of open possibilities.

Without being completely finished yet the analysis shows at least three different conceptions and representations – or should we say discourses - as to young people as 'citizens' in the empirical data. As concepts of 'citizenship' they are understood as very important for the professional identity. The implication of 'citizenship' may contain something of your deepest personal qualities necessary for individual and professional development. The following descriptions of the different conceptions or discourses found in the empirical texts are made in general terms and without any detailed distinctions. In spite of this it might, however, be possible to get an idea of the different implications of 'citizenship.'

The traditional conception ascribes to pupils in general a low capacity as to school work. In this conception there's a classifying going on. Pupils are spoken about in different categories like "slow learners", "noisy pupils", "forgetful pupils" etc. Many of them are seen as unmotivated; others are, however, described as doing their best but without any real success in school. Very often comparisons are made to pupils in more theory orientated programmes. The traditional discourse looks backwards and old times are positively described. In the "old times" pupils like these (slow, noisy, forgetful) didn't attend upper secondary schools but had already found a job. Teachers don't place very much credit in the ability of many pupils in this vocational programme. Often they assign subordinated tasks and roles to them, for example in group projects or information activities. The picture of 'citizenship' brings into relief a group of young people unqualified for theoretical studies and not very successful in school work in general. They are seen as effective workers in the future but without any real influence and possibilities to play an active part in the shaping of society.

The market orientated conception listens to the market and wishes it welcome into the classrooms by for example placing great credit in cooperation with people from business life. Some professionals ascribe good chances for a quick career to some of the pupils, talking about university education and a skilful leadership, but the conditions of economic and business life are present everywhere in terms of: "Let's listen to the branches." Another category of pupils are those who are described as future shop-assistants with a subordinated position in working life. The picture of 'citizenship' brings into relief on one side a highly qualified and active 'citizen', probably in a leading position, and on the other side a subordinated worker in a shop or something of that kind.

The pedagogic care conception ascribe and assign to pupils to a very small degree. A few voices in this conception talk about democratic issues but mostly the professionals talk about their own job, what they think and what they do. The central point in this conception is that the pupils need a lot of human care from the professionals but very little is said about the pupils themselves. In one meaning the professionals try to build up walls around the pedagogic practice. The conception implies that that pupils should be protected from the critical eyes of the research. The young pupils remain unknown. The vague picture of 'citizenship' in this conception brings into somewhat indistinct relief a group of young people, helpless and in need of care.

Citizenship and professional identity

As was said before 'citizenship' implies a lot of possibilities. The key words from disciplines like sociology and social philosophy were for example: autonomy, self-reliance, reflection, communication. Important implications also had to do with being able to consider different phenomena in the world around us and to take part in the shaping of society. Even if these key expressions may contain some quite idealistic features they tell something of what the dynamic 'citizenship' of today deals with. The importance of education as to 'citizenship' (and therefore to professional identity) brings a special responsibility to institutions of education and to the pedagogic practice in school. The processes of ascribing special qualities to a person or placing a special credit in what he or she does contains a dimension of *value*. The picture of myself may be influenced by other people's ways of looking at me or acting in relation to me. This is one of the most fundamental thoughts in Mead's (1934/1972) interest in the development of the human identity. In relation to the treatment and response we get from others we create a picture of ourselves.

In a wider social and cultural democratic structure and in relation to the key words *the traditional conception* seems somewhat irrelevant. The effect of its construction appears to be subordinating and marginalizing instead of integrating. What about the fundamental self-reliance? *The market orientated conception* contains two categories of 'citizens'. One of them turns to an active and hardworking 'citizenship' in leading positions; the other to a hardworking subordinated life by giving service to the first category. Both of them will have to fulfil the demands from the branches. What about the ability of independent reflection? *The pedagogic care conception* also contains two sides. One of them turns to a democratic 'citizenship' with communication and care. So far, so good. The other one is a lot more problematic and uncertain. It's a picture of helpless and dependent young 'citizens' desperately needing the care of the professionals. Is this really "true"? If so, what about autonomy?

To sum up, it may be said that it's a great issue for institutions of education, in this case especially the vocational programmes in upper secondary schools, to be aware of and highlight the personal and social consequences of treatment and relevant response in relation to the first steps in a young person's life towards a professional identity. Every time answers, in its own way, the questions of what goals and content education might have in relation to society and the changes going on there. At the background of *this* project I'd say that there are a lot more questions than answers.

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