

The Public Costs of the Re-structuring of Adult Education: A Case in Point from Sweden

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Citation information

URL: <<http://www.jceps.com/?pageID=article&articleID=25>>

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Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies

Volume 2, Number 1 (March 2004)

ISSN 1740-2743

Abstract

The present paper takes up a concrete example of education restructuring, that of adult education in Gothenburg, Sweden in recent years. This example has been studied through ethnographic data about changes to the supply of basic adult education – an education that is given to adults who have a school education below that provided by the compulsory school – and upper secondary adult education – an education at an approximately ‘A’ level and/or NVQ level. SFI education, Swedish for immigrants, has been focussed in particular. Sfi is important in relation to the restructuring in Gothenburg as this was initiated there first, based on decisions in the Gothenburg Municipal Council in 1999, near to the completion of the National Adult Education Initiative. The restructuring processes followed guidelines from the 1992 Purchasing Act and had consequences for all education suppliers, but in particular one of them, an adult education company called Studium Ltd, which was created in 2001 when the municipal adult education service (Komvux) was converted into a municipal company. Studium was the largest deliverer of adult education in 2001 but lost its contracts during tendering and is now on the brink of bankruptcy. From having had over 3000 sfi students in 2001, for which they were fully reimbursed, Studium now has less than 250 such students on role and a reduced budget for each student. As disclosed in a recent City Audit, the local tax-based economy footed the bill of the conversion processes and salary costs of under employed Studium employees. Public funds paying for the conversion of public services to private seems to be a consistent element of education restructuring according to international research.

Introduction

Three cycles of production; i.e. the interacting activity systems of the *production* of goods, *identity/ies* and *ideology*; have figured consistently in Marxist and neo-Marxist (e.g. Althusserian) analyses of education (see e.g. Althusser, 1972; Allman, 1999; Hill, 2001; Mayo, 2003; Cole, 2003; Guile, 2003; Sharpe, 2003) and are also central in the present paper, which is concerned in particular with the way education restructuring has affected a specific adult education supplier in Gothenburg in recent years, the municipal (i.e. local Government owned and run) education service *Komvux* (an acronym for

Kommunal vuxenutbildning: Trans. Communal Adult Education) and its employees and students. What the main *organisational concepts* within the restructuring process are and what importance has been given to these, how restructuring has influenced the work situation and the organisation of teaching and learning, which visions and prognoses have been articulated with respect to restructuring and in whose interests these have concretely operated are the questions posed and hopefully at least partly answered.

Two things have been seen as particularly significant in the restructuring processes in Gothenburg. These are firstly the conversion of *Komvux* into a municipally owned company (Studium Ltd) on May 16th, 2001, by the Gothenburg Municipal Council (GMC), 'so that it could legally take part in the tendering that was being planned for adult education in the region and could safeguard a public service interest there' (Owner Directives at the launching of the company) and secondly, and also somewhat paradoxically, how under the subsequent 18-month period the company lost most of its adult education delivery on the basis of decisions made by the Adult Education Board, a franchising agency created within the GMC Education Office by the owners of Studium, the GMC itself. Such contradictions and paradoxes as this seem to be very characteristic for the situation in question.

Restructuring adult education as a market in Gothenburg

An idea that is fundamental to education restructuring in the context of the western welfare state, and that has come to mean changing education supply through the introduction of a market model of delivery with roots in the world of business and the expressed intention of making education supply more economically effective, is the extremely ideological claim that markets have been shown to efficiently distribute goods to individuals who need and desire them and that services should therefore be deliberately altered so that *the market* can become the ultimate arbiter of what is included in them and what is not (Ball, 1993, 1997, 1998; Dale, 1997; Whitty et al., 1997, 1998; Whitty & Power, 2003; Gordon et al, 2003). However, this is at one and the same time an intervention to favour marketisation *and* a contradiction of the very basis of the idea of markets, because in it restructuring involves direct political involvements in production and delivery that the introduction of markets is supposed to render superfluous. It is a form of *neo-liberal* intervention in other words. Less of a living exemplification of the fundamental ideas of a liberal market ideology than it is an exploitation of these ideas in an attempt to reconstruct the world in line with certain preconceived interests by legitimising the privatisation of public services and allowing direct corporate involvement in service production and delivery in the name of profit.

This 'description of restructuring' is very different to the topoi presented in the right and right centre political debate and is also a description that is more correct, as it stands up to material analysis rather than only ideological speculation, by connecting restructuring to production and by seeing its very existence in its present form as ensuing from the policies of finance capital and its aims to create new homes for processes of accumulation when rates of profit fall in conventional production and consumption owing to crises of overproduction (see also Theliander, 1999; Thorpe & Brady, 2003; McMurtry, 1998). This is important. Labour processes have become radically reconditioned by automatization and computerisation and have become both more abstract, immaterial and even intellectual, as production swarms out of factories and nestles within the interstices of civil society (Macdonald, 2003, p. 91), such that it no longer makes easy sense to locate profit solely (or even primarily) in relation to mass labour and the confines of the factory (*ibid.*). Accumulation and control has transmuted through restructuring from centralised practices into imminent, dispersed and inter-related networks of power and politics with the consequence that although restructuring is presented from the right and centre *as a natural solution* in the public sector to the capital crisis that has developed recently for services like health and education (GATT, 1990), there are at least two good reasons to question this very ideological position.

The first reason to question restructuring as a natural solution to capital crises within the welfare state is of course that it is *man-made* not natural and because an examination of developments in public

services in countries where privatisation and corporate involvement have become commonplace through restructuring; such as the USA, Australia and the UK (Ball, 1993, 1997, 2003; Gerwitz, 2002; Whitty et al, 1998; Whitty & Power, 2003; Gabbard, 2003; Hursh & Camille, 2003); show that the more the private sector becomes involved in delivering public services, the worse the level of general service becomes in terms of broad availability and class differences in the use of services by citizens (also McMurtry, 1998; Gustafsson, 2002). This is very evident in basic (social, physical, mental and dental) health, education, water supply, energy supply and transport in particular (ibid). However secondly, as also Thorpe and Brady have suggested (2003), rather than being a solution to the capital crisis in the public sector, privatisation in general and corporate involvement in particular are a (if not the) main cause of this crisis. Public services are maintained through taxation and corporations cost society billions each year in tax avoidance through the exploitation of loopholes in tax laws that in the last ten years have led the tax burden for services to become dramatically displaced from businesses onto workers [1] .

A common way in which corporations and private interests take over the public sector is via the creation of service markets and the appropriation of voucher systems. This model of provision allocates a symbolic sum of public money to individual consumers for use in the purchase of services from certified suppliers and was developed as part of an orchestra of right-wing policies for the processes of restructuring in the 1980ies, a period that saw a massive relocation of public wealth to private revenue, but has since been used for the creation of markets in school and other social services in conjunction with new-right policies of welfare restructuring elsewhere as well (Gustafsson, op cit), including the welfare services in the Nordic countries, where private capital has begun to feed increasingly off welfare provision and pension systems (Gordon et al, 2003). However, there is a risk with voucher systems for politicians as they shift political control to market forces completely and so a second form of privatisation has often been recommended that uses the principle of franchise and involves the (local or national) government in establishing a franchising agency within government administration to negotiate the purchase of welfare for consumers on the basis of tenders from organisations outside of the State bureaucracy. In this *quasi-market* situation markets are still described as rational tools for controlling the provision of services, but rather than direct interactions between suppliers and final consumers determining supply, politicians determine the level of consumer needs and allocate consumers to suppliers, who are then paid for their services by public money. That is, instead of direct bureaucracy or individual consumer pressure controlling public services, (local) governments establish agencies for mediating between the interests of individuals, the State and capital [2] .

A quasi market such as this was the way in which adult education was opened up to market forces by the Gothenburg Municipal Council when it constituted what became known as the Adult Education Board on December 16, 1998, by splitting the existing Board of Education into two separate organisations, one for the upper secondary school (labelled the Board of Education), and one for Adult Education (at first labelled The Commissioner Board of Adult Education and then later the Board of Adult Education). The Commissioner Board was constituted 'in order to tender adult education and to subdue prevailing value conflicts between the market and professionals with regard to the future planning and control of adult education in the Gothenburg region', according to Harold Spanks, the chairperson of the AEB at a public meeting on Sept 18th 2002, the day after the outcomes of the evaluation of tenders by the AEB had become public and this *duty* 'followed over into the duties of the Board of Adult Education as well' (also City Audit; Stadsrevision, 2003).

The model for restructuring adult education in Gothenburg became a specifically recognised approach amongst larger city councils to the capital crisis in the service sector and has been termed 'The Gothenburg Model' (Fig 1 below, also Wass, 1999, 2000). However the model was not unique to Gothenburg but specific to developments within adult education delivery there. It was 'special' in that it allowed politicians to maintain control of education delivery in two steps: (i) by imposing a restriction on the number of actors on the market by offering only a limited number of contracts to education suppliers and (ii) by setting up a student delivery and monitoring system to identify education recipients, allocate them to suppliers and gauge the quality of the education provided by the

use of a standardised model (Balanced Control Card). This is fairly typical for education restructuring in the current global context (Dale, 1997; Whitty et al, 1998) and is resonant with the 1992 Purchasing Act (SFS 1992: 1528; see also SOU, 1991: 104). As an aspect of change between the State, private capital and customers in the delivery of public services its constitution does not correspond to a direct takeover of education by corporate organisations on the basis of direct market relations, but to an updating of the requirements for what has long determined modern formal education according to Hill (2001), McMurtry (1998), Cole (2003), Brosio (1994) and Allman (1999), the interests of politically and economically dominant groups and the value programme of the prevailing economic system. It helps politicians wrest education control from local bureaucracy and relocates this control within a politically controlled education agency and the interests of economic production.

Attempts by politicians to wrest control of adult education from the hands of bureaucrats in Gothenburg has been mentioned by several informants in the present investigation, including a former chief regional adult education officer (Harry Boye). He put things as follows:

This... is something that has been ongoing over a number of years but... reached a head in 1997 with... the Adult Education Initiative (which) was dealt with very differently in Gothenburg than other regions... Since 1996 there's been a successive deconstruction... and a definitive break in 1997, with the AEI, which the local politicians in Gothenburg used in order to tighten control in their struggle with regional bureaucrats like me...

The Adult Education Initiative (AEI: Sw. Kunskapslyft) was a massive economic investment in adult education in Sweden that was set up by the central government as a five-year nationwide project in 1997 for increasing adult involvement in education, for using education as a buffer against unemployment and for, at the same time, also boosting official employment levels and stimulating economic growth (Government Proposition 1995/96: 222; SOU 1996: 27; SOU 1997: 158), by boosting the number of places in adult education and the number of suppliers as well. Above Harry Boye implicates it (as do other politicians and education bureaucrats in the present investigation) as significant for the way adult education was later restructured in Göteborg [3], even in the Gothenburg Model, which is expressed as 'a logical extension of the way the AEI was developed'. Betty, a former Dean of SFI at Studium, and Barbara and Greta, two former teachers there put things as follows:

The model... offers a system for politically controlling education delivery with pre-selected education suppliers with the AEB as the only legal customer... where competition between suppliers and enhanced freedom of choice have been placed 'offside', because both the question of which education supplier is given a contract (and where) students are finally directed, lies in the hands of politicians, bureaucrats and labour market representatives not individuals... This is a radical restriction of the *norm* of individual freedom of choice that was so forthcoming in connection with the current processes in Gothenburg. Despite constant claims to the opposite... Pupils (sic) do not make their own choices of where to study, this is decided by the Student Placement Agency (SPA) and even when they are invited to choose, their choices can't be rational because there is sufficient information back to them about the education available...

Suggested above is that limitations on individual freedom of choice in Gothenburg occurred at the same time as individual freedom of choice became a new standard of education democracy in the region. However, just about everyone spoken with has mentioned this issue that 'far from free choices being made, the reverse has been the case and students have simply been relocated to suppliers through SPA decisions' (Greta). This was commented on as follows in recent interviews with former teachers and administrators at Komvux and Studium:

One of the things that was said... was that pupils (sic) would have more freedom of choice (but) none of the SFI pupils were able to influence where they were to study... What happened was that the AEB agreed on a volume from different suppliers and tied up the system to contracts that determine where individuals will be placed... There are some different suppliers... but I don't know how the authority

deals with requests from students with regard to this. You can hope that they try to fulfil requests as far as possible but there are limits (because of) contract agreements... (Barbara and Greta)

The initial suggestions were that the individual should have the right to choose... but that's not how things turned out, because the buyer has agreed on a volume from different suppliers and has in that way tied up the system... Contracts determine where individuals are placed... Choice has become very restricted... (Betty)

There's competition and the idea is that things will improve because of it... But of course no one has been able to choose Komvux because it doesn't exist anymore (and) as far as we are concerned the competition has not been on equal terms and has in fact been terribly unfortunate. I can understand that Komvux shouldn't be the only game in town but the inclusion of more suppliers has been badly managed... It's less a question of free competition and more one of political control... Plus, the information out to students about what is available, particularly in SFI, has not really worked.... Nor can it be expected to really... SPA has actually just placed them with a supplier and has then said 'either take it or leave it because there's a queue and if you don't use your place we'll give it to one of the six or eight hundred who are waiting in line...' (Three former Studium teachers, Ken, Greta and Barabara have expressed this in similar terms, as has the former chairperson of the Studium Board of Directors who is quoted above)

Freedom of choice has been ...discussed a lot ...but there has been ...disagreement about what kind of freedom and freedom for whom. Is it the individual who should choose or should someone choose for the individual? Who has the freedom? One of the things that said at the time of the franchising process was that pupils would have freedom of choice to study what they wanted where they wanted. But as far as I can see no SFI pupil influenced where he or she studied... Politicians have taken over... (Greta)

Extended political determination rather than extended individual control characterises the education after restructuring according to the above, and this also fits in with comments by Harald Spanks, the AEB chairperson during the restructuring period. He discussed the advantage of controlling a quasi-market for the local government in terms of the way 'this enabled some education control even during a capital shortage without the risks of ownership' (Stadsrevision 2003). However, processes of conversion such as the ones implied here have effects that go beyond the transfer of costs for education supply alone and impinge upon both professional identity and values as well, because when a public service is transformed into a limited company to compete for the rights to deliver services, these services become privatised and competitive items with a commodity value and their workers, instead of being *public employees* involved in providing guidance, care or education in a client interest according to a defined need and professional guidelines, become alienated workers who take on the characteristics of the value form of labour of capitalist production. This is part of the logic of the capitalist labour process that enables surplus value to be accumulated through the capitalisation of humanity and labour power, as also Cole (2003) and Rikowski (2003) have both stated, in situations where both professional labour and the products of that labour are compromised as forms of objective capital (also Macdonald, 2003). These effects can also be recognised in comments by the majority of education leaders and politicians in Gothenburg when they defend their decisions to restructure education delivery.

Talking about restructuring

Several specific discourses can be identified from interviews concerning the motivations for restructuring in Göteborg. These discourses vary from ones that reproduce the logic of capital, which are often reproduced by people who are defending decisions to restructure, to ones that are openly against it. Most common though is a discourse of bewilderment, as for instance the following comment discussing restructuring as a process concerning the realisation of 'ideas someone has had that it seems must be implemented whatever the cost' (Betty). This bewilderment suggests that there

may be a field of structurally tense relations that researchers have described and analysed previously in terms of idea world versus world of practice (Czarniawska-Joerges 1990), level of reform versus level of reality (Gesser 1986) and arena of formulation versus arena of realisation or arena of implementation (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 1986; Ball, 1994), and that relates to the complexity, contradictions and overlaps that characterise different interpretations and discursive practices in education renewal. These things have been commented on by several informants, as have the issues of poor control, bad management and the lack of forward thinking and evaluation. They were expressed in concrete terms as follows by Former chairperson of the Studium Board of Directors in relation to what he described as a paradox concerning escalating costs and lost contracts:

There was a lot of talk about renewal... new forms of pedagogy... new recruitment of needy individuals who were being ignored previously (and) enhanced effectivity and flexibility... But it's a myth to think that just because you form a company you'll get these things... A company has ...a less complex steering system, because company law says that a company board cannot deal with any issue in any other way than that which is in the best economic interests of the company... The economy of the company (and that means profits for its shareholders) must come first ...no matter what (and) the well being of the education in other respects must suffer if it compromises profits... The new aim was said to be... to find new pathways to create a more effective organisation for the individual and make more use of adult's actual competencies... Fixed structures were to be broken down... Supply was to be expanded and new groups were to be recruited, particularly the unemployed and those with a shorter than average formal education. Education was to help them onto the labour market... But things have gone far too quickly and have perhaps not been adequately reflected over... or evaluated... Prior to the restructuring processes CAE provided over 80% of basic and upper-secondary adult education. This was so also during the first period after the conversion of Komvux to Studium... This figure has fallen to 10%. It means that although the motivations provided by the GMC for turning down its own company was to reduce the costs of adult education generally, as the employees at Studium remain on the GMC payroll, the question of savings is dependent on whether or not new jobs for over 400 surplus employees, mostly teachers, can be secured... They have not...

The above comment comes from inside the political management of education. Teachers commonly spoke differently about their experiences of restructuring. They related often to 'a destructive process' and as Betty (above), 'a frustration over how things that have been built up... over many years are being torn down in the execution of an idea that seems necessary to push through whatever the... costs may be' (e.g. Ken; Greta). However also spoken on regularly was a 'confusion regarding professional identities and roles' (Greta) and a lack of democracy, in that 'whilst the official rhetoric... expresses democracy, teacher professionalism and autonomy, a new steering block within the local authorities has developed (the AEB) that is in a strong conflict of interests with these ideals as it has to be primarily driven by economic thinking' (Greta). Finally some turbulence has also been talked about, as has an intensified sense of job insecurity [4] . Barbara and Ronny (a teacher in the upper-secondary school sector) put things in the following ways:

Although we still have a guaranteed income, most of the former teachers in Studium have in a strict sense lost their old jobs and are currently involved in a readjustment project... to help them find new workplaces within adult education or outside it, within the local government administration or outside it, or an education of some kind... Many of the teachers were expected to move into the regular comprehensive or upper-secondary school sectors... where there is a degree of teacher shortage. However, many of us... have resisted the move... and there have also been some heated exchanges at meetings between teachers and project leaders... with critical voices heard from teachers and union representatives... Many teachers feel they will be asked to teach in areas that they are not qualified in and they protest against what they see as a view of professionalism in which the idea seems to be that if you can teach one thing you can teach anything... and once a teacher always a teacher... The re-adjustment project was established in order to deal with the problem of surplus staff and staff redeployment and through it some staff have re-entered higher education to be 'retrained as special educators' paid for by the GMC, whilst others have gone back into the secondary or upper-secondary education sector to teach or work as administrators or councillors and some have remained as

administered subjects within the project itself, but it is costing the taxpayer a lot of money everyday. What for? I don't know... (Barbara)

I have absolutely no idea what I'll be doing this coming year and term starts in two weeks... I have previously taught philosophy and history at Alpha upper-secondary school but that was on a temporary contract and there are now 450 surplus adult education teachers to be redeployed and a calculated surplus within the upper-secondary sector already of over 100 teachers... Just now it looks as though I'll be working somewhere between 40 and 60 percent at Alpha and the rest here hopefully... But there's a real shortage of money... and the number of independent schools has increased... They use unqualified and inexperienced teachers often and are able to keep costs down and are taking students from us in ever increasing numbers... Coupled to what happened in adult education over the last few months it is creating great confusion about employment for teachers who lack a permanent contract... (Ronny)

In the official versions of restructuring flexibility and efficiency are mentioned regularly. However, it is not flexibility and efficiency that are expressed above, but disposability and the increasingly unregulated selling and buying of labour power in a new labour market that creates job uncertainty and insecurity. This is perhaps the clearest effect of the material mobilisation of the moral and economic value programmes of market capitalism on the lives and experiences of people in the present study (see also McMurtry, 1998; Gordon et al, 2003; Beach, 2003). It applies even to the teachers and administrators who have 'done well in the new situation', like Marsha and Brenda below, who came from Studium and developed a new niche organisation in adult education, SVEA, specialising in sfi for short educated and illiterate adults. Although they see themselves as winners in the new situation, even they experience a sense of insecurity as they 'don't know what will happen in the next round of negotiations... or in the quality control attached to present delivery' and even they are concerned about the flexibility fetish that has been introduced and is beginning to influence even the curriculum. This can be seen in the development of 'flexi-courses', 'individual study plans' and 'learner workshops' to replace more conventional classrooms and teaching. Teacher informants have discussed these effects in the field in the following ways:

A lot of the criticism that you could hear about Studium and komvux was that it was rigid, that we weren't flexible enough and also that it was for people who were already educationally successful. There was a series of such criticisms without any real evidence... And as I see it there wasn't much interest either in trying to see how things really were... There was mainly an idea that the education would improve once it was exposed to competition because the view was that increased competition gives improved quality... However, also, opening up for competition was a thing of the times and at the bottom line was the belief that things would become cheaper... They didn't. Like the Auditors' report pointed out they got more expensive and we'll be paying for it through the tax budget for the next five years or more... Not to mention the human cost... Furthermore now it's form more than content that counts the most... I'm teaching flex courses in this new fashionable education... I have a mix of different students, some from evening courses, with different needs... The intention is to mentor them... so they can pass the course and study as far as possible when they can and where they can but I don't think it works out well... Most of the time goes to making individual study plans and hardly any goes to teaching the content... We've been made into learning managers and coaches instead of teachers... It's like the personal trainer fad in the middle classes at the moment has struck home everywhere... (Ken)

The claim is that the changes that are taking place are part of a natural progression to market capitalism and democracy that represents everyone's best interests by effectivising services, responding to needs and inducing quality. But this is questionable. The changes are costing not saving money, and at such an extent that it will take years to recoup the losses just from the re-adjustment project alone, not to mention the millions upon millions the new administration will cost us... The decision to restructure looks... to only be political and ideological. Costs have not been reduced, freedoms have not developed and education content is not being significantly renewed. The public

purse will foot the costs of this, in effect thus subsidising the conversion of welfare from public supply to private interest... (Barbara; Greta)

The above comments stand strongly in the face of the main motivations for restructuring from the GMC and the AEB, who both motivated restructuring in terms of reducing the size of the municipally owned adult education service 'as an economic necessity for securing the quality of adult education in the region after the completion of the AEI programme and in the face of a severely reduced budget' (Harold Spinks) and as part of a movement from large scale government regulation to a decentralised arrangement with a value of flexibility and greater freedom of choice. These kinds of topoi target large-scale centrally regulated comprehensive education as a problem in comparison to smaller niche organisations and ideologically bed for the kinds of changes that have been introduced (Gewirtz, 2002; Ball, 1994, 1997; Blidberg et al., 1999; Jennings ed, 1997; Romhed, 1998; Dellatre et al., 1988; Dale, 1997; Whitty, et al, 1998; Elwood & Leydon 2000; Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000; Daun 1997), but the actual processes of restructuring haven't had (and perhaps shouldn't have been expected to have had) the benefits that are often associated with them in this rhetoric. As the City Audit and also several teacher informants have expressed it, 'things haven't become more flexible, money has not been saved and education processes have not involved more freedom of choice and self-determination' (Greta; Betty; Ken and Harry Boye) and in the end, the turn of events seems only to have visibly been about the proliferation of market interests and the moral justification of the capitalisation of education work through the introduction of a level of competition in the negotiation and allocation of contracts that were formally distributed 'based only on assumptions about the cost effectiveness of different suppliers as reflected in *what these suppliers wrote about their own activities in their submission of tender*' (Betty). In these written accounts, and then afterwards in accordance with formulations, even education content has been changed to emphasise shortterm job related skills and knowledge. Teacher informants have often expressed this as an outcome of 'an increased emphasis on labour market thinking and an increased involvement of labour market representatives in adult education planning... that has taken place since the Adult Education Initiative' (Ken):

The connection with the labour market is very apparent. It started already with the AEI, which was a labour market initiative not primarily an education or welfare one... The dominant idea is that we should educate people so they can get work and that if they can't or don't get a job or qualification for a job then the education isn't worthwhile... This has been imported directly into the new framework agreement for SFI where pupils (*sic*) become individuals who are... are seen as investment objects, worthy of investing in or not, as the case may be. There is an obvious conflict between this and a humanistic perspective... It's also visible in how we make up course and programmes, if you can call them programmes these days... It's all about flex courses, workshops, individual study plans and the like... so people can fit studying into life projects where work dominates, rather than building life projects around a desire for improvement through education... But things like the flex courses and the like don't suit everyone, neither all students, nor all teachers or all situations... Courses become very minimalist... What is important for the moment dominates... Learning becomes fragmented... (Barbara, who is quoted above, and Ken principally, but also, Greta and Betty)

The flexi form dominates now but takes more time than politicians and administrators think and it is very demanding on the students... Flex courses are said to be in the student interests and choices but this is a myth... The idea that these courses can work in the interests of the 'needier groups' as politicians have called them, is a total fallacy. They demand... study skills and students who are able to manage and plan their own learning... Most of our students, particularly in SFI, don't have these routines (so) what happens is that we pilot them through the courses and ignore the content of what they actually understand so they can fit in learning... within finding... employment... It becomes very fragmented... Learning difficulties are passed on all the time to the next level... These outcomes... create the problems proponents claim they treat... (Ken)

Of course, the domination of flex-courses and a new labour market perspective within municipally financed education now doesn't mean that there was no flexibility or employer oriented education for

adult learners in the past in public service education (indeed generally, capitalist education forms in industrialised nations are understood as responding specifically to these interests), it only means that this education is being given openly and as a clear rule now, paid for directly by public money rather than being delivered through a hidden curriculum or as a subsidiary part of education supply. The situation was different previously. Komvux (at least officially) provided a humanist education for adults who wanted to progress within the education system and fulfil the demands of upper-secondary qualification, and companies commissioned and then paid for (admittedly against tax relief) specialist courses for their employees when they felt they needed or could benefit from them (Carlén, 1999):

Before... companies bought education from us... for their employees... We pushed things pretty hard... to fit their requests because our (school) economy... pulled in a lot of money... that we could then use for... conferences and so on... It was a great situation... Now education in 'flex courses' that cater to individual needs and the labour market is what we do almost all the time... On the one hand we give a quick fix to get people into work or we are flexible and bend enough to allow them to combine work and study so that they can at least appear to get an education... There is very little else left... What companies were getting from us but paying for themselves before... they are getting now, paid for by the tax budget... It's clear who gains from this... The suggestions were that what characterised Komvux was that it was rigid and there was an idea that there would be greater flexibility in a system with several actors involved. There would be competition, new pedagogical methods and freedom of choice... What has been ignored is that there was variety in the past and that the new flexi courses... lead to highly fragmented learning and change education work in the process from a professional to a mechanical and managerial activity... (Ken)

Popular discourses about a new society and its new work order suggest that we are living in a new free world where human advancement, self-reliance, flexibility, independence and autonomy are catered for through markets that also save money, by tying service provision to economic calculations. However, the material developments from restructuring stand against this idea and suggest that this world can be more suitably characterised in another way, where instead of the *idealism* of new types of flexibility, variety, choice, freedom and the creation of new spaces for the development of new skills and personalities, there are the living people and *material conditions* of workers (teachers, managers, bureaucrats, administrators, ancillary labourers) and students in the new economy. What people say they want and need more than anything else here is 'stability and security' (Ronny)! However, what they also say is that this need 'is currently being (denied or) preyed on by those who only are interested in promoting one vision of education supply at the expense of others' (Ronny; also Betty) and that, in contrast to ideal images of restructuring, 'there is little freedom of choice for the majority of people' (Barbara; Betty) and no economic savings only the 'costs of conversions of public wealth to private' through the closing down of public arenas for aesthetic, cultural and intellectual expression and absorption, 'and the opening up private *for-profit* ones to replace them' (Ken). In this situation, rather than being free, people are 'becoming increasingly steered by contractual arrangements that have been negotiated and cemented into place by others' (Betty; Barbara) and learning 'has become fetishised as a commodity in schools that have become new sites for the extraction of surplus value' (Greta) within changed relations between the State, civil society and the market in the organisation of education supply that see teachers, students and administrators entering into labour relations in ever increasing numbers as objectivised factors of production in processes that are owned and controlled by people other than themselves. These forms of 'alienation' in the new free market era are a side of restructuring that challenges the validity of dominant discourses. They signal that in order for restructuring to be adequately grasped allowances have to be made for the variations that make up the diversity of human experience. Market and quasi-market solutions are far from of equal (or even wholly positive) value to everyone according to the data and analyses here.

Discussion

The present paper describes some of the experiences of living education subjects in the introduction of a quasi-market that extended the capitalisation of the public sector within a key public service. In this

situation ‘customer needs’, employability and flexibility have been central concepts for motivating changes, as has individual freedom of choice and reduced costs; but these things have not been lived out and experienced in the senses one might assume. For instance, although individual education needs, freedom of choice and the need to press costs down have been continually flagged as central issues in the formal (ideological) texts and talk from the political leadership of education in Göteborg (at least until very recently when some sense of an about turn can be noticed), individual education needs have actually continually been determined and choices restricted by local government agencies (the AEB and SPA) on the basis of their ‘private’ negotiations with other interest groups, and instead of savings being made as anticipated or promised, they have escalated. These are the real/material/actual effects of restructuring on education. They are what *neo-liberal restructuring* has really meant for those affected by the marketisation of public service adult education in Gothenburg when responsibility for that education was shifted from a bureaucratic, costly, State-owned public-care-sector to a managerialist agency for the privatisation of service provision. They are summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1: Outcomes of restructuring in adult education in Gothenburg

-	Company formation: e.g. Lernia, ABF AB, Studium AB.
-	Conversion of public services to private
-	Business takeover of education supply
-	The creation of a quasi market for consolidating the processes of privatisation
-	Local authorities forming agencies for contracting out education to ‘new’ suppliers
-	Public payment for the public supply of education in the interests of businesses replacing business payment for the supply of this education
-	Costs of administration shifted from costs of public ownership and control to costs of managing and monitoring outsourced delivery
-	Increased costs from franchise effects (un/under-employment) on public employees
-	Increased privatisation of the means of education production
-	The increased objectification of labour and increases in the value form of labour
-	A dissemination of a view of learners as economically rational, self-interested individuals and the reconstruction of the curriculum in line with this vision
-	A redefinition of democracy in terms of consumer choice
-	An increased objectification of teachers, learners and curricula as factors of production
-	The creation of a labour buffer (surplus army of labour) in a re-adjustment project

The features of restructuring in adult education in Gothenburg above suggest several important things, but include primarily the further commodification of education, a decline in public financing of welfare services, an increase in public financing of private interests, an increase in the surveillance of professionals, a transformation of governance through the furtherance of corporate management regimes, the need of a new accountability agenda and the production of significant changes in the

labour process for public service professionals. These are similar changes to those noted by Rachael Sharpe (2003) in higher education in her charge that in each capitalist country where restructuring has occurred, the revolution in education policy that has been brought about has constantly produced such effects (also Whitty et al, 1998, Dale, 1997). However, what is perhaps most interesting in this is that Sweden's welfare state (which has developed over a long period of political control by the social democratic labour party) has undergone restructuring with effects not dissimilar from those apparent in countries like Britain, which have had long periods of conservative office, to suggest that regardless of whether social democrats or conservatives have been in charge, education restructuring shares fundamental elements in common and may possess a global characteristic. The Gothenburg case may be able to suggest what at least some part of this global characteristic is like.

Adult education in Gothenburg since restructuring is increasingly provided subject to cost (and therefore also its profitability potential) as opposed to professional judgements about good value practices and is in this sense therefore also becoming increasingly objectified in the terms of it developing through social relations that transform people into objects rather than subjects, and alienated, in the sense that work becomes successively and increasingly accommodated toward the value form of labour that is characteristic for competitive, privatised production. This has affected conditions of labour for teachers remaining in adult education (through reductions in paid trust time with new employers and the enforcement of individual salary setting to replace collective bargaining), teacher-union influence on education content and delivery and levels of professional involvement in education administration. Less than half of those involved in education management are educated in education leadership according to recent figures. However, also important was that in the Gothenburg case the local government (as a local implementer of State policy) was complicit in the processes of conversion and in this sense helped to stabilise a human conformity to the dehumanising (transhuman) labour process described (Rikowski, 2003) through the reculturalisation of teaching and teachers according to a neoliberal value base, which took place regardless of the human preferences of the people involved. Teachers have been forced to conform to a neo-liberal self-image by the threat of losing the economic means of life support in a commodity society. This has nothing to do with increased degrees of individual determination and freedom or the enablement of forms of self-determination, as is often claimed. It is not about freedom! It is about control and repression! But it is also fully in line with recommendations for the conversion of public services in Sweden to private and the auspices of the 1992 Purchasing Act and is therefore both legal and ideologically legitimated, so perhaps we should also question the values of our legal and legislative apparatuses and wonder about whose interests they actually operate in.

The above points suggest something of the actual, material characteristics of restructuring and are fairly clear regarding why it should be thoroughly opposed, at least from below. However, another interesting point in the present situation that has been related many times by informants from all levels of adult education in Gothenburg, and that is also apparent from the minutes of meetings of the GMC and AEB and from field notes relating to rallies, meetings and audiences with politicians and administrators, is that there has been political unity between right and left in relation to decisions to restructure, even though there are slightly different emphases and accents placed on and within their respective discourses of renewal. On the one hand some individuals emphasise that an attack on the former system was needed for the benefit of 'one shared and common economy and to ensure that people can perform an assigned role in production'. On the other the same changes and attacks were motivated in terms of 'the best interests of the needy groups in society who have previously been under-recruited and badly served in adult education'. The first type of argument comes usually from the political right and employer associations. The second have come consistently from the Left Party and social democrat political majority. In both cases however, any desires for an education beyond the market model and in the interests of the economy have been described as 'essential to break down' and in both cases the transformation of education is motivated in terms of the advantages of 'flexibility features, such as shortened response times with respect to consumer needs and interests, through the effects of customer choice on supply in a competitive situation' (Harold Spinks). But these things are elements of a market idealism that the present concrete investigation has clearly suggested to be more myth than reality. They are things that need to be constantly mediated in today's society and there is

therefore a need of a counter discourse. There were examples of reflexive, flexible innovations within the former Komvux and Studium regimes that were responsive to student needs according to informants. Furthermore, rather than the promised flexibility, freedom and economic savings, the restructuring of Gothenburg's adult education has primarily contributed to the development of a complex, multi-level steering process involving actors from different interest groups with different interpretations of what education actually is and really should be for and this has created confusion and a far from flexible working arrangement, where the often spoken on flexibility and freedom has degenerated into fragmentary and restrictive decision making processes and constantly escalating costs. It may well be so that the *humanist* education provided by Komvux (and later Studium) didn't have the benefits for the majority of the population hoped for and they certainly did very little to materially or ideologically contribute to the transformation of class relations. But linking education to neo-liberalist conceptions of a market is not a solution to this problem according to this investigation.

Three dimensions of restructuring in education emerge in the paper. These concern firstly the principles of formation of interests in education restructuring. Here political forces have been suggested to channel global ideas, principles and ideologies in ways that challenge existing education relationships and influence the formation of education policy and affect the lives of people inside schools and other institutions (Dale, 1997; Brown & Lauder, 1997). The second concerns forms of opposition. There is resistance toward restructuring within schools and other institutions from the individuals and groups within them and also some autonomy. The circuits of capital are over-determined at individual levels and there is always some room for creativity, even though the disarticulation of the interests of capital in schools and other institutions is often exaggerated and the spaces for oppositional activity are often very squeezed very tightly shut (Hill, 2001) [5]. So the third dimension of interest in the study, and the dimension on which much data production has rested, concerns experiences of restructuring. Several questions have been important here. One of them was who has expressed an experience of agency and in what ways has this experience of agency been expressed. What became clear here was that there were winners and losers in the new situation. Two groups have suffered the most, or at least most directly, are the people who need an education but have been left without one and on the other the uprooted teachers from the service sector of adult education who have lost the possibility of working with the jobs they desire, the right to seek public service employment as opposed to private and the possibility to exercise professional control over the curriculum. Most of the teachers have suffered a deflation of their professional freedom and capacity and have been forced to accept and adapt to the requirements of a new-market identity or leave (or be excluded from) the adult education sector.

The forced adaptation of teachers to market requirements can be described as the motor of re-culturalisation in adult education. It suggests that whilst the current idealism of restructuring expresses that there is no gaping hole between market logic and good education and that the two can be 'run together' for the benefit of all, inside 'market programmes' the value-practices of good education are stifled through processes of the *liquidation* in the conversion of public wealth to private capital. In this scenario education is no longer even formally democratic and comprehensive, but concerns instead the application of a market discourse to a local situation no matter what the consequences might be, even when these consequences openly cut against democratic principles such as the public availability of knowledge rather than its increased privatisation and the creation of the best possible conditions of labour for professional groups to do professional jobs.

The creation of market solutions in public services is a symptom of the decline of capitalism not the victory of capitalism according to Thorpe & Brady (2003) and of the domination of capitalism by the material interests of finance capital; an abstract and parasitic form of capital that destroys its host (also McMurtry, 1998). As Thorpe and Brady have written (op cit.) the sphere of finance capital is circulation and global markets (also McMurtry, 1998) and they emphasise that if or when these are in crisis, finance capital becomes forced to feed off things like pensions and the public sector, which is also the case just now. In their view the dominance of finance capital today explains seemingly contradictory government policy and educational change. Finance capital requires a flexible workforce not an educated workforce and will not pay for a general, worthwhile education for the majority of

individuals. This corresponds with what informants have described. Increasing numbers of people in adult and higher education now attend modular programmes and short courses – often termed flex-courses - that are focused increasingly narrowly on short-term needs. These courses are being provided (and paid for) publicly to the cost of the provision of a humanist and comprehensive adult education or an education for social transformation [6] .

Conclusions

The main previous values of municipal adult education (Komvux) in Sweden have been described as democratic and egalitarian, and although the question as to whether or not these aims were fulfilled is moot, it is clear that such ambitions are now being undermined when the actions of market designers dislocate students and workers from the public sector to the quasi-private through the objectification of education work as the labour processes of education thereafter become increasingly conditioned toward the value form of labour rather than the provision of education in a common, collective, solidaric and democratic interest. In Gothenburg this process began in the five-year nationwide project that started in 1997 and formed a part of a labour market effort for increasing employment levels and economic growth (termed the Swedish Adult Educational Initiative; AEI – Sw Kunskapslyft) and was followed by the creation of a local company from the former Community Adult Education body, the establishment of a local market and the impending bankruptcy of the municipally owned company. In the long term what has changed are the value bases and philosophy of institutional practices and the nature of (professional) work. These things may have changed primarily as a result of emphases on an operating core value – the need to calculate and cut costs to save resources in a capital availability crisis - as has been asserted by the former chairperson of the Adult Education Board. However, within the new market context this operating value core easily turns from savings to profit and it is clear then in whose interests adult education will have begun to operate.

The suggestions of the paper described above thus fit quite well with Marcuse's (1964) ideas about cultural change being related to the totality of social life and of culture as a historically distinguishable unity with two dimensions: the common sense constructs and cultural categories that articulate experiences within complicated social processes and the existing modes of economic and cultural production. Marcuse used the term *affirmative culture* with respect to this duality. Within it education restructuring would not be expected to primarily consist of transformation through a direct takeover of the education service by corporate enterprise, as in common 'linear' understandings of this phenomenon, as the control implied is already prevalent (Brosio, 1994; McMurtry, 1998; Hill, 2001), but would instead be an element of neo-liberalism that, as Tabb (2002, p. 7; cited in Hursh, 2003) writes, would emphasise and mobilise resources for the privatisation of the public provision of goods and services by working to move their provision from the public sector to the private, by deregulating how private producers behave, by giving greater scope to the single-minded pursuit of profit, by paying less regard to the need to limit social costs for redistribution based on nonmarket criteria and by putting into question all collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the market, which is exactly what is suggested to have occurred in the paper. Perhaps educational reculturing is as good (or even better) as a descriptor of these processes than is education restructuring, as what neo-liberal reconstitution thus consists of is an updating of aspects of moral determination by the prevailing economic standards of market capitalism and an abdication (sometimes economically enforced) of responsibility for the plight of individuals who, nevertheless, in some intriguing way still usually come to support the system of transformation in question.

Gramsci's and Freire's ideas about the power of ideology may be relevant to this discussion, as in these ideas the inter-relations of the power of ideology and the ideology of power can shift attentiveness in ways that are indicated to prevail. Gramsci's and Freire's respective works are embedded in a Marxian conception of ideology based on the assumption that ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships once they have been grasped as structuring ideas that can constitute the relationships that will help to make one class of ideas (or the ideas of one class) the ruling one at a given moment in history. However, not only does the ruling

class produce the ruling ideas because of its control over the means of intellectual production, it also controls the means of material production and because of this the dominated classes are immersed in production relations that they do not control and tend to reproduce ideas that support the dominant material relationships. In this sense we can see human beings as participating in their own oppression by internalising the images of society of their oppressor. People suffer a contradictory consciousness and are therefore also capable of being oppressors within one social hegemonic arrangement and oppressed within another. Looking at the way education has treated its subjects, the fate of many former SFI adult educators at present may reflect that of their students previously.

Acknowledgements

The present article has been produced from within two research projects. A Swedish Research Council sponsored project run jointly by Dennis Beach and Marie Carlson (both of Goteborg University, Sweden) concerned with the complexities of steering and control within education restructuring in adult SFI education within a specific Municipal Region and the Creative Learning and Students' Perspectives project (CLASP) sponsored within the EU SOCRATES programme and coordinated by Bob Jeffrey of the Open University, England.

Notes

[1] Although these tendencies are becoming ever more prevalent elsewhere as well (Gordon et al, 2003), a good example is still the UK, where the total tax contribution from companies has fallen from 36.9% to 27.4% in the last five years and risen from individuals from 63.1% to 72.6% (Thorpe & Brady, op cit.).

[2] This process is described in the 1992 Purchasing Act in Sweden (SFS 1992: 1528; see also SOU, 1991: 104) and has been referenced in Gothenburg in documents such as 'Corporatisation' (Sw. *Bolagisering* Dnr 320/99, Gothenburg City Office) and 'Suggestions for changes in the organisation of adult education' (Sw. *Förslag till förändrad organisation för utbildningsnämndens vuxenutbildningsverksamhet*, Rnr 54/01, Dnr 0879, Gothenburg City Office). Within it market competition is a metaphor for public supply not a working model for it.

[3] The AEI is the largest per capita State enlargement project (anywhere and ever) in adult education. It was sponsored by national revenue based on a human capital theory that claims that education is indispensable for economic growth and was enacted regionally with the aim to expand the supply of adult education and to create an expanded number of suppliers as well. The National Educational Board, Swedish Labour Market Board and Central Study Grant Board were the responsible authorities. The way the AEI developed in Gothenburg was worrying to some of our informants even at the time – at least according to what they have said in our interviews - with respect to 'what would happen after the completion of the AEI, when the money had gone and student numbers decreased'.

[4] Of course this doesn't apply to all teachers. Some, such as the 'owner teachers' at SVEA, who sometimes felt frustrated in the previous organisation, 'have found new possibilities and enhanced senses of fulfilment in the changed situation' (Mary and Brenda, former Studium teachers and 'co-owners' of SVEA). They 'were able to exploit' restructuring in what they feel were both their own professional interests and, partly because of this, the interests of their students as well. They have avoided 'the turbulence and uncertainty short term', but still face external evaluations, which are a trial, the short-term character of the franchising process (contracts were only given for three years) and 'the short-notice changes in framing due to changes in local government regulations and payments'.

[5] Political manipulation in ideological interests, the appropriation of media pressure, the deconstruction of bureaucracy to enable a faster and more direct form of political control and the replacement of the ideas of direct democracy in adult education (see e.g. Larsson, 1993) by a notion of a democracy served by an ideology of freedom of choice offer a examples of how spaces for agency can be restricted, whilst the identification of sites of opposition and the examples of bottom up initiatives in the interests of educationally needy groups by work-a-day teacher professionals show that all is not lost.

[6] The degree of contradiction is thus expansive. Three principle areas are affected the most. First, discourses of restructuring have been used to motivate the transformation of adult education that have constantly advanced the capacities of individuals as agents who can (and should) choose for themselves and take responsibility for their own affairs, but the material reorganisation of education denies these very possibilities, except at a price, as free and informed citizen choices are not made in the new situation and there are insufficient freely available and functional informational modalities accessible to 'education consumers' (especially in sfi) to facilitate rational citizen choice. The second key discursive feature has been the expression of a new flexible education arrangement replacing an old, turgid and inflexible one and the third is that public savings will be. However, there is simply no evidence of enhanced flexibility or economic gain. Indeed the suggestions are that the disposibility of labour not the flexibility of labour has characterised the situation and that public costs not savings have been made, as the local State subsidises the conversion of public wealth to private revenue in the interests of finance capital. Community Adult Education is still paid for by the local municipal council. Within it management costs have increased dramatically as under-employed (former) municipal adult educators are still on the pay-role. The rhetoric of free choice, flexibility, efficiency and public savings seems to be a smoke screen for some other purpose. The question is then, what is this purpose?

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Förslag till förändrad organisation för utbildningsnämndens vuxenutbildningsverksamhet.
Tjänsteutlåtande Rnr 54/01, dnr 0879, Gothenburgs Stadskansli.

Uppdragshandling (Ny organisation för vuxenutbildning), Dnr 320/99, Gothenburgs Stadskansli.

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