

Bjursell, Cecilia

## When theories become practice - a metaphorical analysis of adult-education school-leaders' talk

*European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 7 (2016) 2, S. 191-205



Empfohlene Zitierung/ Suggested Citation:

Bjursell, Cecilia: When theories become practice - a metaphorical analysis of adult-education school-leaders' talk - In: *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* 7 (2016) 2, S. 191-205 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-125378 - DOI: 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9084  
<http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-125378>  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9084>

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:



<http://www.ep.liu.se>

### Nutzungsbedingungen

Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Die Nutzung stellt keine Übertragung des Eigentumsrechts an diesem Dokument dar und gilt vorbehaltlich der folgenden Einschränkungen: Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen. Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### Terms of use

We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. Use of this document does not include any transfer of property rights and it is conditional to the following limitations: All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

### Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS  
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation  
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung  
E-Mail: [pedocs@dipf.de](mailto:pedocs@dipf.de)  
Internet: [www.pedocs.de](http://www.pedocs.de)

Mitglied der

  
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

## When theories become practice—a metaphorical analysis of adult-education school-leaders' talk

*Cecilia Bjursell*

Jönköping University, Sweden (cecilia.bjursell@ju.se)

### Abstract

*Marketization has changed the education system. If we say that education is a market, this transforms the understanding of education and influences how people act. In this paper, adult-education school-leaders' talk is analysed and seven metaphors for education are found: education as administration, market, matching, democracy, policy work, integration and learning. Exploring empirical metaphors provides a rich illustration of coinciding meanings. In line with studies on policy texts, economic metaphors are found to dominate. This should be understood not only as representing liberal ideology, as is often discussed in analyses of policy papers, but also as representing economic theory. In other words, contemporary adult education can be understood as driven by economic theories. The difference and relation between ideology and theory should be further examined since they have an impact on our society and on our everyday lives.*

**Keywords:** metaphors; adult education; school leaders; marketization; education management

### Images of adult education

'The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe' (Berger, 1972). Though Berger was speaking about art, could the same be said about our everyday perceptions in organizations? In this paper, I will explore metaphors in school-leaders' talk to paint a portrait of contemporary adult education as a collage of co-existing meanings.

Adult education is an integrated part of society, so it changes with the cultural tides. As pointed out by Wildemeersch and Salling Olesen (2012), both policies and market forces have influenced the understanding of adult education and lifelong learning. The consequences have been shifts in meanings and in the ways central concepts are used. Policy transformations initiated by think-tanks of transnational agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, WTO, the OECD, and the European Union were found to influence such change in the direction of increased market orientation (Milana, 2012; Wildemeersch & Salling Olesen, 2012).

In today's policy discourses, the language is dominated by an economic ideology. The knowledge economy and human capital theory are found as the predominant discourses embedded in policy documents in Canada (Gibb, 2008). Several authors have identified how the responsibility for education, in policy writing, is shifting from the state to individuals, and they contend that this represents the demise of the nation state as a guarantor of social justice (Barros, 2012; Milana, 2012). In an analysis of policy language concerning career development as a part of adult education, Bergmo-Prvulovic (2012) also finds the economic perspective to dominate, followed by learning and political science perspectives. These changes at the transnational level are reflected at national and local levels.

In the twentieth century, the Nordic model became a well-known concept in the field of adult education. The Nordic model of education is used to refer to the similarities in reforms and systems in the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden (Lundahl, 2016). Equality, inclusion, enlightenment, and the enabling of 'second chances' for all adult citizens are values connected to the Nordic model, but recent studies have questioned the fit between the model and (adult) education practice in the Nordic countries (Filander, 2012; Lundahl, 2016) and discussed the commodification of education (Antikainen & Kauppila, 2002).

In Sweden, change has been more pronounced than in many other OECD countries: its formal education system has been radically and extensively transformed to imitate a market (eg. Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Holm & Lundström, 2013). In national regulatory documents concepts such as welfare, equality, *bildung*, and citizen have been displaced by concepts such as compliance rates, results, competition, growth, education system, legal security, and efficiency (Bergh, 2010). Discourses on New Public Management are pervasive in organising and governing public institutions and the government can be said to operate through the freedom of the individual (Fejes, 2016). In a study of teachers and students in municipal adult education, it was found that the responsible, motivated, and goal-oriented students were positioned as desirable, and students were seen as responsible for their own success (Sandberg, Fejes, Dahlstedt & Olson, 2016).

Within the Swedish education system, adult education has undergone the largest changes in the wake of marketization. In 2014, 45.7 percent of all students participated in courses delivered by non-public providers (Fejes & Nordvall, 2014). It should be noted that it is a quasi-market, where students can choose their schools and the municipality pays with vouchers to the schools chosen. This design to imitate a free market has brought private sector models for control into education organizations (Carlbaum, Hult, Lindgren, Novak, Rönnberg & Segerholm, 2014). Such marketization challenges institutional norms and values in adult education (Runesdotter, 2011; Fejes, Runesdotter, & Wärvik, 2016), and one effect is that school leaders, as mediators between policy and classroom practice (e.g. Runesdotter, 2011), become occupied with quality systems (Bjursell, Chaib, Falkner & Ludvigsson, 2015). Thus, there is a growing body of knowledge about the effects of marketization, but we still need to know more about school leadership because it is an important factor in improving student achievements.

This paper sets out to explore how school leaders in adult education talk about their practice. Interviews from an empirical study of quality work in adult education provide material for the analysis. In the analysis, metaphors that are at play when an individual describes his or her everyday work are mapped. The purpose is to identify metaphors as frames of reference and to discuss what these mean for adult education. Before

describing the metaphors that are identified in the empirical material, a section describing language as social action and metaphors as social framing is presented.

### Language as social action

To change an organization, a change of language is often needed, and a change of language has consequences for performance in an organization. It has long been recognized that to say something is to *do* something (Austin, 1962). While Austin's, and later on Searle's, structuring of language had a linguistic focus, Cooren (2000) points out that the theory of speech acts connects different disciplines that treat of the social dimension of language. The performative function of language underlines the organizing dimension of communication, and the organization can, accordingly, be regarded as a collaborative discourse (Bjursell, 2007). In that discourse, the focus is on language's constructive effects (Hardy, 2001), and the act of communicating is the way in which we constitute experience (Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995). This means that language moves beyond being mere content to providing a context and simultaneously being a way to recontextualize content (Boje, Oswick & Ford, 2004).

To take a closer look at language as action, the concept of frames and framework can be useful. Goffman (1986) describes framework as schemata of interpretation applicable to a recognized event<sup>1</sup>. These frames function as guides to recognizing a situation, and they call for particular styles of decision or of behavioural response (Perri, 2005). The frameworks, or frames, of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture, but frames vary in their degree of organization. While some are neatly organized as systems with postulates and rules, others are less organized and more of an approach than a system of explicit rules. Goffman's ideas about frames have led to a heated debate as to whether or not Goffman was a structuralist (e.g. Gonos, 1977; Denzin and Keller, 1981; Goffman, 1981; Johnson Williams, 1986). Sociologists wanted to position Goffman's ideas within the structuralist rather than interactionist school. But Czarniawska (2006) points to the revival of Goffman's work in recent studies and argues that, while the dramaturgical metaphor should be used less literally, the strength of Goffman's work is the focus on action. Czarniawska also comments on how concepts such as frame and framing have been adopted and developed in relation to ideas about the construction of meaning. In a literature review by Benford and Snow (2000), the authors say that framing processes have come to be regarded as one of the central dynamics in understanding the character and course of social movements.

To talk about frames and meaning construction in the organization of experience, the verb *framing* is employed (Benford & Snow, 2000). An understanding of language as social action also entails recognition of the co-existence of multiple, competing or complementing frames within a group. Furthermore, an individual can apply several frameworks simultaneously during any one moment of activity (Goffman, 1986). To understand why framing succeeds in some cases but not in others, Snow et al. (1986) described two sets of factors at work. The first concerned the degree of frame resonance with the current life situations and experiences of the potential constituents. The second set of factors involved the configuration of framing hazards, as, for example, when an organization fails to uphold the core values and beliefs it has highlighted. The move between frames can be described either as a process initiated by equally powerful individuals or as a process in which some individuals have more power over the process than others. Palmer and Dunford (1996) have pointed to the first approach as risky due

to its underlying voluntarist and idealist assumptions. To identify social frames in language, metaphors can be a useful tool. They help to bring out underlying assumptions and frames of reference—what we know and what we believe.

### **Metaphors as social frames**

A metaphor provides a way of seeing or representing one thing in terms of another and thus suggests an analogy or likeness between the two (Van Maanen, 2005). To recognize metaphors as social frames means to recognize that they are ways of seeing, thinking, and learning and that they have implications for practice (Hatch & Yanow, 2008). Metaphors are powerful because they allow people to apply familiar knowledge structures to new settings (Walsh, 1995; Cardon et al., 2005) and because they unite reason and imagination (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A metaphor can provide a means of categorization, and if an appropriate metaphor is found it can help the reader see things in a new way, but it also requires the reader to stay critical, as some insights can become distortions. Metaphors can be contradictory: they can be at once enlightening and confusing, highlighting and obscuring, attractive and seductive, and emotional and imprecise (Bjursell, 2015). Additionally, metaphors require that the writer and the reader share meanings connected to the chosen metaphors. If many individuals share powerful metaphors, those metaphors can contribute to shaping the social worlds in which we live (Docherty, 2004).

In addition to using metaphors straightforwardly, root metaphors can be traced through the use of certain vocabulary. A root metaphor reflects implicit beliefs that shape an individual's understanding of a situation. For example, when Van Maanen (1995) finds terms such as replicable, teachable, transferable concept, and method in a text, he sees these as indicating the root metaphor of industrialization. Morgan (2006) suggests that different metaphors expand insights and can contribute to a complementary understanding of an organization, such as the currently well-known metaphors of organization as a machine or organization as a brain (Morgan, 2006). Analysing root metaphors in an organizational context can reveal tacit information hidden in narratives and can thereby provide insight into the philosophies of practices in everyday contexts (Steger, 2007; Wilson, 2011). As described, metaphors can work as research tools, but it should be acknowledged that they come in different shapes. Metaphors can appear in research in four different ways: (1) metaphors that have become a natural part of language and are no longer thought of as metaphors, (2) metaphors that are used for inspiration and creativity during analysis in the research process, (3) metaphors that are encountered in field work, and (4) metaphors that are used as a communicative device when writing up research (Bjursell, 2015). Of particular interest in this paper is the analysis of metaphors in the empirical material. Working from the assumption that language is social action, metaphors provide a way to explore frames of reference in an empirical setting. In this study, the metaphors are understood as representing frames that guide school leaders' orientation in adult education.

### **A field study of adult education in Sweden**

In this section, the field study will be presented. The empirical material was collected in a study of work on quality in adult education (Bjursell, Chaib, Falkner & Ludvigsson,

2015). The empirical material gathered in the field study consists of 9 case studies of municipalities in Sweden and responses from 162 municipal representatives to a survey about quality in adult education. In this paper, only the 19 interviews from the case studies are the subject for analysis since they are richer in content than the other material. The nine municipalities were selected to represent differences: they include the three largest cities in Sweden (seven interviews), one suburb of Stockholm (one interview), three midsize cities (six interviews), and the municipalities of one region (five interviews). We did not interview representatives of small municipalities because they usually outsource their adult education. There was also a spread in terms of geographical location, and we interviewed both men and women. The people interviewed were in leading positions, with different areas of responsibility depending on the size and organizational structure of the municipality. The interviews were performed in a narrative style, as the main purpose was to pursue a natural flow in interviewees' talk about their practice, to avoid interruptions, and to support their narrative through follow-up questions. There was an emphasis on quality and on managing quality, since the issue of quality and evaluation is topical on all levels of education, but the interviews also included a broader discussion about adult education. Since Swedish law states that school leaders must work on quality, the topic represents a link between policy and practice.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews was carried out in two steps. The first step was to get to know the material by reading the interview transcripts several times, and I have written a broad summary, together with colleagues, of how school leaders work on quality. For this particular paper, I wanted to move deeper into the material and see what assumptions and frames could be identified when analysing school leaders' talk about what they do. I knew that the market aspect was in the material, as I had noted it during the interviews when a school leader called the adult learners customers. This was only an impression, however, and I wanted to do a structured analysis of the text. To highlight different understandings of the empirical material as well as to discuss the consequences of perspectives, I chose metaphors as an analytical tool that I have worked with before and have found useful. To find metaphors in the material, I started out with my 'preconceived notions' of the texts. That is, I listed different aspects that came to mind when thinking about the empirical material, which I was quite familiar with at this point. I came up with nine areas/metaphors: administration, market, care, socialization, matching, democracy, policy, integration, and learning. These were possible metaphors that might be found, and I used them as pre-defined categories for a new reading of the interview transcripts. In this reading, I coded the text according to the pre-defined categories. Two of the categories, or metaphors, were left 'empty': education as socialization and education as care. The quotes that could have been coded as socialization were about the reception of students, but in reading them closely I determined that they were more about measuring student satisfaction than about engaging in socialization. Education as care was only mentioned once as something that belonged to another profession:

Sometimes you see teachers that start to act as therapists, all with the ambition to do good, but then we have to clarify that it is not our role. There is care and there is social service, and we are educators.

Because of the lack of content, socialization and care were excluded as metaphors found in the text. The next step in the analysis was to search for patterns and themes that characterized the content of the texts coded to one of the remaining seven categories.

What each metaphor highlights is presented below, including non-attributed quotes from the interviews as they are seen as examples of frames of reference rather than representing individual's views.

When doing this kind of research, reflexivity is key. An awareness of the effect of the researcher, combined with a systematic approach to the material and to the context of knowledge construction, has guided the process. The question is not whether these are the only metaphors that can be found in adult education but whether they bring something to our understanding of school leaders' ideas about their work. These metaphors highlight certain aspects of adult education, while others are kept in the dark. When I refer below, for example, to education as a market, it is merely to allow the reader to consider education as if it were a market. By so doing, metaphor asserts similarity in differences and, less obviously perhaps, differences in similarity (Van Maanen, 2005). Taken together, they allow us to discuss nuances of adult education and consequences of one metaphor or the other.

### Education as administration

Adult education as administration brings out the aspect that has to do with management and control of an organization. Since the interviews were about quality management, it is not surprising that this aspect was dominant in the material. It is nevertheless a relevant aspect considering the general debate about increased managerialism in education.

Working on goals, measures, budgets, and quality systems is a must in public administration: *'It is natural to have a budget and work on quality in a politically governed organization, and the national rules form a basis for all formal education.'* Each organizational unit is expected to set goals; for the adult-education organization this means combining goals from the national curriculum, the municipality's goals, and the organization's own goals.

We work with goals such as being an attractive employer, being an attractive workplace, reducing sick leave, and reducing the areas we use in buildings—which doesn't work for us because we are growing. But there are no explicit goals for adult education [on the municipality level]. We try to find them, but it is hard.

In the interviews there are discussions about goals, measurements, and systems for administration. Many school leaders struggle with finding key figures and goals, and the purpose is to satisfy national and municipal requirements and to satisfy 'the system'. Administration can also be about finding tools to improve operations and to gauge performance level in relation to other adult-education organizations. Some organizations work with a broad spectrum of different goals. One school leader mentioned that they had more than 60 goals for the organization. Others have tried a reductionist approach, working with only one measure in a qualitative way to understand and manage the organization. An example of such a focus is to look at reasons for drop-outs. The quantitative approach to data, measurement, and goals is dominant, however. Depending on the size of the municipality, there are different approaches to quality management. In urban areas, which have more adult education organizations, there tends to be more focus on solving problems through the setting up of systems and rules, whereas in rural areas, with fewer inhabitants, the school leaders are closer to the

everyday educational activities and want to involve the personnel in quality improvement.

The school leaders mention some negative aspects of the heavy focus on administrative work and evaluation, such as the problem of finding relevant goals, the weak quality of national statistics concerning adult education, and the low response rates on surveys. The rigid approach from the national inspectorate is also mentioned, and the school leaders get the impression that they are working with a system created for basic education of children rather than a system fitted to adult education organizations. This way of working creates tension; working systematically is often interpreted as having a homogeneous system in place, and this is in contrast to the sometimes chaotic and ever-changing daily reality of adult education. *'This [the system] gives the impression that everything is neatly ordered, but it's partly a chaotic process, and when you look, for example, at drop-outs, you get one picture one day, and the next day it has changed'*. Another problem can be that quality work is perceived as a paper tiger; that is, there are extensive systems and plenty of ambition, but they do not have any effect on daily conditions for students in adult education.

## Education as a market

Adult education as a market brings out aspects that have to do with economics. Economics in general concerns topics such as supply and demand, goods and services, prices and negotiation, and production and distribution.

In the interviews with the school leaders of adult education, words such as customer, customer choice, customer service, customer satisfaction index, supplier, and price comparison hint that concepts and possibly models from economics have penetrated adult education. In one municipality, the politicians have developed an 'act of conduct' (the English words 'act of conduct' are used in the Swedish language), and they want to work according to a quarterly economic cycle with follow-ups and to have customer surveys to get input from the learners.

We have worked a lot with focus groups with our customers, or should I say pupils [pupil is the word used in the regulatory national documents for adult learners], and then asked them what they think is important in education.

The school leader comments that the tempo of the quarterly cycle does not work well because of the continuous starts and flexible character of adult education, where one of the major goals is to meet individuals' needs.

The market orientation is not surprising given that more than 40 percent of adult education offered in Sweden involves external providers of education. In Sweden this means that private companies offer education and are paid by the municipality. There has been a wave of privatization the last 20 years, and one of the school leaders thinks that the government was quite naïve when they thought they could expect small scale organizations, teacher influence, and quality when they permitted private entrepreneurs in education. Instead, the venture capitalists came running: *'In Swedish naiveté, they let loose market forces, and the big companies came and eliminated the small cooperatives'* because the large companies could work with economies of scale. The situation is different from municipality to municipality, however; in some municipalities all adult education is offered through the municipality, and in other municipalities it has



been outsourced to entrepreneurs. But the language of economics is not restricted to the municipalities with large proportions of external providers of education.

A rural municipality might be forced to buy adult education from others in order to provide a complete range of offerings to its citizens. An alternative solution is that rural municipalities collaborate when offering adult education. In urban regions, market forces are used to try to keep costs down.

In (an urban area) it is not hard to find private suppliers of education, but I can tell you that it looks very different in different parts of Sweden. I am part of a national group for adult education, and we have a representative from Lapland [a province in northern Sweden], and there it is not as easy to find suppliers that are willing to offer education, except for distance education. There is not enough volume.

Many municipalities have had negative experiences when competition was based solely on price, and now they try to include other demands to get higher quality education: *‘When municipalities have used price as a single basis [for buying education from private entrepreneurs], it has created enormous difficulties with low quality’.*

The customer perspective is a way to involve the learners in evaluation to improve education, but viewing the learner as a customer means taking a service and supplier perspective. In the surveys, there are often questions about the target group’s satisfaction with education to find out whether they are pleased with what was offered, not whether they have learned something. If an organization gets good results, the results from a customer satisfaction index can be used in the organization’s marketing (this holds for both public and private actors). One of the school leaders interviewed said that they had used it in marketing towards politicians as well.

## Education as matching

Adult education as matching sets the focus on adult education as a third party that offers intermediation between the learner and an employer. The idea of an intermediary is to offer added value that would be lost by direct trading. In adult education, providing learners with the knowledge that the employers are looking for is often referred to as the matching function. Matching theory is a theory in economics, which means that the matching metaphor connects to the market metaphor.

The Education Act states that one goal of adult education is to find, recruit and support those who are furthest away from the labour market. On the municipal level, adult education has been moved in many cases from the education council to the labour-market council, or new hybrids that might be called ‘competence and labour market councils’ have been formed: ‘Adult education is moving towards the labour market area’. One progressive municipality works from the basis of the municipality’s business needs when it develops its education programmes.

Build relationships to business so you can connect your education to what businesses need. Our schools have started with that business logic. They start by building a relationship with an employer that needs to recruit people, and then they define the competence need in a curriculum for adult education, and then we recruit learners. The employer is active in the recruitment of learners, and if the learner gets in to the course or programme, they get a job.

This municipality is not representative of other Swedish municipalities, but it has a very clear idea of what it wants to achieve with its adult education—to have a matching function. There are also other municipalities that collaborate with the business sector to provide educational programmes that match the competence needs of business and the employment needs of learners. This group includes both politically left- and right-oriented municipalities, so it is not necessarily a question of ideology. Rather, pragmatism might explain the choices.

There is an increased demand from the learners to get study counselling: *‘They ask for contact with study counsellors. This demand is increasing.’* This could be an expression of learners’ seeking specialized study plans to match a future labour market, but it might also be an indicator of an increasingly complex system.

### Education as democracy

Adult education as democracy brings out the task of adult education to support the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and in civic life. This implies strengthening the fulfilment of the human rights of all citizens through education.

Words or views that are connected to this metaphor are scarce in the material, but there are a few who speak about citizens rather than learners, students, pupils, or customers. Words or views about the values of democracy, such as equality and active participation, are still important as they are stated in the national goals for adult education.

We have some targets for a supportive learning environment, like increasing the number of pupils who think that democracy and people’s equal rights are highly valued at the school. Other targets are to increase gender equality and to increase the number of students who feel safe at school. We should increase these rates by five percent.

To achieve these goals and targets, the schools try to arrange forums where the learners can practice citizenship and influence how education is organized and performed. This influence is exercised through councils, surveys, meetings, and through transparency in decision making and internal processes.

One of the school leaders interviewed feels strongly about adult education as a basis for people’s participation in a democratic state. This person sees adult education as a key to ensuring that citizens have the knowledge and skills to participate in a democratic society. Literacy, as a minimum, should be ensured for adults who have the right to vote because otherwise we could see a situation where those who have education might question other citizens’ democratic rights: *‘I would rather speak about democracy because, for me, education is the way to a democratic society. It’s about people, power, tools, and influence’.*

### Education as policy work

Adult education as policy work refers to the activities performed to make sure that the adult-education voice is heard on national, regional, and local levels. The municipalities are responsible for adult education, among many other things, and the interviewees express the need to educate politicians on the role and possibilities of adult education.

The attitude towards adult education differs between the municipalities represented in the interviews. In one, the politicians see education as a basis for developing the local community, while in several others, the school leaders of adult education work actively to inform politicians about what adult education is, what the current needs are, and what they have achieved.

We have to continuously educate and influence our politicians about rules, regulations, and needs. ... If we were to remain silent, we would fade into the periphery.

Several school leaders state that the situation is similar on the local and national levels as well as in urban and rural areas. Despite all the people involved throughout the country, there seems to be a lack of knowledge about what adult education is and what they do. The increased proportion of immigrant learners in adult education is, however, fuelling interest in the role of adult education in integration.

### **Education as integration<sup>2</sup>**

Adult education as integration concerns the process of becoming a citizen after immigrating to the country. It is a dual adjustment as immigrant learners adapt to Swedish society and Swedish society adapts to the new composition of the population.

This is an everyday reality for adult education, which has seen these changes for several years now and has realized that different methods and new ways of working are required. The population of adults needing competence development has changed from a homogeneous group of Swedes to a heterogeneous group of people from all over the world.

When you come here, it's the world in one building. We have 30 nationalities, and about 1200 people come here every week. In a single year we have between 4000 and 5000 learners in different courses.

There is also heterogeneity in terms of previous levels of education, from illiterate groups to groups with university degrees. The composition requires new forms of competence on the part of adult educators. A group of immigrants may need new skills and knowledge, but they also need to learn the Swedish language and how Swedish society and culture work. Values that are taken for granted by Swedish citizens, such as the position of women in an equal society, may have to be clarified because people need to know the laws and norms to be able to function in society. The learning culture may also differ. Some people come from countries where they are expected to learn a text by heart, and this can pose a hindrance when they enter the Swedish learning culture, where they are expected to take responsibility, to analyse, and to think critically. In response to the changed situation, there has been some adaptation of the structure of adult education. One example is the development of courses that combine teaching language and a profession at the same time. Sometimes this is even performed at a workplace.

One of the school leaders is very pleased with how they have handled the new situation: *'If the world was a learning centre, we wouldn't have wars. We have so many religions and nationalities together, and we connect through lifelong learning. And it works.'*

## Education as learning

Adult education as learning emphasizes the process of acquiring or modifying knowledge, skills, and values. The learners that participate in adult education are the core of education.

The most important thing is the pupils' learning and well-being. They should be uplifted. That's a basic quality criterion. And of course that's an individual's experience and not something I can put on paper.

This school leader wants to highlight that quality is something that is hard to measure or register in a document. It might rather be understood as a craft: a skilled craftsperson knows when things are working well. To achieve learning and well-being in adult education, many of the school leaders interviewed come back to two areas that they actively work on: flexible ways to offer education and the level of competence among teachers.

Flexibility in the ways education is offered is a requirement in the national regulatory documents and curriculum for adult education. The national goals are very clear about the goal to individualize and make education flexible to help individuals grow and move towards further education or work.

I think of flexibility in terms of space and time. We're not a school—we don't use that vocabulary at all. This is an all-year-round operation, and people have the right to study. And that can be during the day, at night, here, or by distance, and we have learning labs to support them.

Distance education has a long tradition in adult education and is sometimes used to provide flexibility in terms of courses available to the learner and in terms of what time works best for the learner during the day. The experience among the adult education providers, however, is that 'pure' distance education might not be as effective in terms of learning and achieving grades, so many of them work with hybrid courses that include both distance and on-site education.

Rather than distance education, we choose to procure flexible education that has teacher support on-site because it is needed among the learners. They need to meet the teachers.

The level of competence among teachers is the other major area that emerges in the interviews in relation to learning. New, growing, and changing groups of learners mean changed requirements regarding teacher competence. Teachers in adult education know how to work with motivated and skilled students, but they may need more skill and competence to work with groups that might consist of illiterate adults or adults with mental disabilities. Special education is a new but welcomed perspective in adult education.

We need the perspective of special educators on all levels: organization, group, and individual. We must understand why people don't pass the courses. Why do they quit? Why do they get an F? How can we support them in the classroom? And so on.

Another area where there are competence needs in relation to ongoing changes is the use of IT in education to work in flexible ways with online and distance education. Other areas that are mentioned in the competence development of teachers are working

with formative evaluation and teacher authorization as well as competence networks and communities of practice to share ideas on leadership, culture, and values as a way to improve the adult learner's experience.

Adult education as learning is thus about the learners in adult education as well as about the education of teachers to acquire skills and knowledge for a changing situation.

## **Discussion: Frames of reference in adult education**

Our frames of reference, what we know and what we believe, affect the way we understand a phenomenon, and the words we use interact with our understanding. The metaphors identified in this paper can be said to represent different social frames that were expressed in the interviews. The discussion around metaphors in an empirical analysis of school leaders' talk provides methodological and empirical contributions to the existing literature on adult education. When school leaders talk about education in market terms, for example, this represents (part of their) understanding of education, and it influences how they act. The metaphors identified in this paper provide a rich illustration of coinciding meanings.

The seven metaphors identified are: education as administration, as market, as matching, as democracy, as policy work, as integration, and as learning. Of these metaphors, education as administration, as market, and as learning were dominant in the empirical material, while the others had fewer examples. This corresponds to previous research on tensions between co-existing institutional logics in adult education in the Swedish context (Runesdotter, 2011; Fejes, Runesdotter, & Wärvik, 2016). It should also be noted that both the metaphors market and matching represent economic theories. The downplay of democratic concepts and domination of economic concepts is in line with changes in the language of policy documents (Milana, 2012; Wildemeersch & Salling Olesen, 2012). The metaphors hint at what has already been discussed in research: democracy and social rights are not the centre of attention these days, and policy language expresses market-force ideals (i.e. Barros, 2012; Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2012). But one could also ask what democracy does mean in contemporary adult education. Society changes, and adult education practice has to adapt to those changes, but critiques of the current situation often implicitly suggest returning to what used to be, rather than proposing new ways of understanding a phenomenon. Maybe being employed and able to support oneself might be one way to feel like an independent and active citizen in today's society. In other words, perhaps using a customer voice is the way to influence contemporary society. This brings us back to the dominance of economic language. Economic language is sometimes interpreted as representing liberal ideology, but the market and matching metaphors bring out that this language also represents economic theory. Economic theory thus provides an important frame of reference for understanding contemporary adult education.

The metaphors in this paper represent current topics in adult education, but these topics need to be further explored in future studies. The study is furthermore performed in a Nordic context with its specific character (eg. Lundahl, 2016; Fejes & Nordvall, 2014; Filander, 2012; Antikainen & Kauppila, 2002) but we need additional knowledge about how school leaders act in other countries. One emerging image of adult education is that there is much concern about how to work in relation to the labour market. Supporting participation in society could thus be interpreted as supporting individuals on their way to future employment. This is in the interest of the adult learner as well as

of future employers and society, but we need to know more about how this can be done in a way that supports individuals, employers, and society on a long-term basis. The changing competence of adult educators is another interesting venue to explore, as there are fundamental changes in the composition of the groups in adult education today. The two metaphors that directly concern governance—administration and market—are not unexpected, but they are interesting because they are contradictory. The two metaphors actually indicate two contradictory governance models. The market metaphor represents free market ideas and relationships based on negotiation. The administration metaphor represents a planned economy in which activities are embodied in a systematic and long-term action plan. The combination or competition between the two should be further explored. An additional aspect that needs to be explored is the division of work between the state and the private sector. The original idea was that the free market should be disciplined through governmental regulation, but what happens when the government offers the free market as an alternative solution to regulation? What then will be the institution guiding the market economy and addressing inequalities? Are we seeing an increased market for private evaluators as a consequence of governments introducing market solutions in the public sector? Might it even be that the lack of regulatory responsibility among governments is an opening for private actors to capitalize on creating regulations for organizations? Finally, since two of the metaphors directly represent economic theory, the difference and relation between ideology and theory should be further examined since they have an impact on our society and on our everyday lives.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Goffman makes a distinction between two broad classes of primary frameworks, natural and social, but here I talk only about social frameworks.

<sup>2</sup> The interviews were conducted before the 2015 wave of *refugees in Europe*, which has made this aspect even more relevant.

## References

- Antikainen, A., & Kauppila, J. (2002). Educational generations and the futures of adult education: a Nordic experience. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(3), 209-219.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words, the William James lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Barrett, F. J., Thomas, G. F. and Hocevar, S. P. (1995). The Central Role of Discourse in Large-Scale Change: A Social Construction Perspective. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 31(3), 352-372.
- Barros, R. (2012). From lifelong education to lifelong learning: Discussion of some effects of today's neoliberal policies. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 3(2), 119-134.
- Benford, R. D. and Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin books.
- Bergh, A. (2010). *Vad gör kvalitet med utbildning? Om kvalitetsbegreppets skilda innebörder och dess konsekvenser för utbildning*. (Doctoral dissertation). Örebro Studies in Education 29: Örebro Universitet.

- Bergmo-Prvulovic, I. (2012). Subordinating careers to market forces? A critical analysis of European career guidance policy. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 3(2), 155-170.
- Bjursell, C. (2015). Metaphors in Communication of Scholarly Work. In Helle Neergaard & Claire Leitch (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Techniques and Analysis in Entrepreneurship* (pp. 170-184). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bjursell, C., Chaib, C., Falkner, C., & Ludvigsson, A. (2015). *Kvalitetsarbete i vuxenutbildning* [Quality work in adult education]. Encell rapport 1:2015. Visby: Nomen förlag.
- Bjursell, C. (2007). *Integration through framing: A study of the Cloetta Fazer merger*. (Doctoral dissertation). Sweden: Linköping University Electronic Press.
- Boje, D. M., Oswick, C., and Ford, J. D. (2004). Language and organization: the doing of discourse. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(4), 571-577.
- Cardon, M.S., Zietsma, C., Saparito, P., Matherne, B.P., & Davis, C. (2005). A tale of passion: new insights into entrepreneurship from a parenthood metaphor, *Journal of Business Venturing*, 20(1), 23-45.
- Carlbam, S., Hult, A., Lindgren, J., Novak, J., Rönnerberg, L., & Segerholm, C. (2014). Skolinspektion som styrning. *Utbildning & Demokrati – tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik*, 23(1), 5-20.
- Cooren, F. (2000). *The Organizing Property of Communication*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Czarniawska, B. (2006). A Golden Braid: Allport, Goffman, Weick. *Organization Studies*, 27(11), 1661-1674.
- Denzin, N. K., & Keller, C. M. (1981). Frame Analysis Reconsidered. *Contemporary Sociology*, 10(1), 52-60.
- Docherty, J.S. (2004). Narratives, metaphors, and negotiation, *Marquette Law Review*, 87(4), 847-51.
- Fejes, A., Runesdotter, C., & Wärvik, G-B. (2016) Marketization of adult education: principals as business leaders, standardized teachers and responsabilised students. *International Journal of lifelong education*. Published ahead of print. Doi: 10.1080/02601370.2016.1204366
- Fejes, A. (2016). The confessing academic and living the present otherwise: Appraisal interviews and logbooks in academia. *European Educational Research Journal*, 15(4), 345-409.
- Fejes, A., & Nordvall, H. (2014). Folkbildning och vuxenutbildning i skuggan av skolkrisen. In L. Stenberg (Ed.), *Skolan ut ur krisen: En forskarantologi om framtidens utbildningspolitik* (pp. 93-105) [Popular education and adult education in the outskirts of the school crisis]. Stockholm: Tankesmedjan Tiden.
- Filander, K. (2012). Discursive turns from 'Bildung' to managerialism: Memory-work of the Finnish adult education generations. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 3(2), 135-153.
- Gibb, T. L. (2008). Bridging Canadian Adult Second Language Education and Essential Skills Policies: Approach With Caution. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 58(4), 318-334.
- Goffman, E. (1986, originally 1974). *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981). A reply to Denzin and Keller. *Contemporary Sociology*, 10(1), 60-68.
- Gonos, G. (1977). "Situation" versus "Frame": The "Interactionist" and the "Structuralist" Analyses of Everyday Life. *American Sociological Review*, 42(6), 854-867.
- Hardy, C. (2001). Researching Organizational Discourse. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 31(3), 25-47.
- Hatch, M.J., & D. Yanow. (2008), Methodology by metaphor: ways of seeing in painting and research, *Organization Studies*, 29(1), 23-44.
- Johnson Williams, S. (1986). Appraising Goffman. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 37(3), 348-369.
- Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson (1980), *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lundahl, L. (2016). Equality, inclusion and marketization of Nordic education: Introductory notes. *Research in Comparative and International Education* 1745499916631059, first published on February 14, 2016 doi:10.1177/1745499916631059
- Lundahl, L., Erixon Arreman, I., Holm, A-S., & Lundström, U. (2013). Educational marketization the Swedish way. *Education Inquiry*, 4(3), 497-517.
- Milana, M. (2012). Political globalization and the shift from adult education to lifelong learning. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 3(2), 103-117.
- Morgan, G. (2006), *Images of Organization*, 2nd ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Palmer, I. and Dunford, R. (1996). Reframing and organizational action: the unexplored link. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 9(6), 12-25.
- Perri (2005). What's in a frame? Social organization, risk perception and the sociology of knowledge. *Journal of Risk Research*, 8(2), 91-118.
- Runesdotter, C. (2011). Tensions in the meeting between institutional logics and identities in Swedish folk high schools. *Education Inquiry*, 2(4), 659-670.
- Sandberg, F., Fejes, A., Dahlstedt, M., & Olson, M. (2016). Adult Education as a Heterotopia of Deviation: A Dwelling for the Abnormal Citizen. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 66(2), 103-119.
- Snow, D. A., Rochford, B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review*, 51(4), 464-481.
- Steger, T. (2007). The stories metaphors tell: metaphors as a tool to decipher tacit aspects in narratives, *Field Methods*, 19(1), 3-23.
- Van Maanen, J. (1995), Fear and loathing in organization studies, *Organization Science*, 6(6), 687-92.
- Van Maanen, J. (2005), Metaphor', in N. Nicholson, P.G. Audia and M.M. Pillutla (eds), *Blackwell Encyclopedic Dictionary of Organizational Behavior* (pp. 231-2). 2nd ed, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walsh, J.P. (1995), Managerial and organizational cognition: notes from a trip down memory lane, *Organization Science*, 6(3), 280-321.
- Wildemeersch, D., & Salling Olesen, H. (2012). Editorial: The effects of policies for the education and learning of adults - from 'adult education' to 'lifelong learning', from 'emancipation' to 'empowerment'. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 3(2), 97-101.
- Wilson, K.B. (2011), Opening Pandora's box: an autoethnographic study of teaching, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(5), 452-8.