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### **Foucault and Lifelong Learning: Governing the Subject**

Edited by ANDREAS FEJES AND KATHERINE NICOLL. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. 218 pp. £ 22.99 (pbk). ISBN 978-0-415-42402-8 (hbk) – ISBN 978-0-415-42403-5 (pbk) – ISBN 978-0-203-93341-1 (ebk)

In the past few years the concept of lifelong learning has given rise to a great deal of debate in a number of European countries, leading among other things to several recent books devoted to lifelong learning and discussing the political context in which it has emerged as a policy agenda – including Morgan-Klein and Osborne's (2007) *The Concepts and Practices of Lifelong Learning* which was reviewed in this journal (Truty 2009). This edited book on Foucauldian approaches to lifelong learning complements well Morgan-Klein and Osborne's work in the sense that the Foucauldian understandings it provides prove useful to articulate 'the tension surrounding the perceived–and real–primacy of economic versus social ends of lifelong learning initiatives' (Truty 2009:103). Nearly all chapters explicitly draw on the Foucauldian notion of 'governmentality' which allows the authors to make connections between (neo)liberal government – requiring 'free' people to be active, enterprising and productive – and lifelong learning as an instrument of this government(ality). In order to discuss the contents of the book, it is thus important to first briefly discuss 'governmentality' as a notion introduced by Foucault to conceptualize government in line with his 'non-conventional' understanding of power. I begin this review by doing this, after which I briefly present each chapter. The final chapter, which reflects back on the whole book, then leads me to discuss some relative strengths and weaknesses of the book, based on which I conclude by

suggesting what kind of audience the book is mainly appropriate for in my view.

As opposed to conventional conceptions of power, Foucault understands power as diffused in society, related to the production and distribution of knowledge, and being productive rather than only repressive. His neologism of ‘governmentality’ – merged from both government-mentality and government-rationality – is meant to understand government in line with these characteristics of power. As Nicoll and Fejes point out in their introduction (p. 11), the notion of governmentality has been used in two main, related ways: (1) in order to analyse what Foucault calls ‘bio-power’, which has as its object the management of populations as resources to be used in an optimal way by government; and (2) in order to understand how ‘free subjects’ are governed ‘through their freedom’ in liberal societies. The key to this government of free citizens is governmentality as ‘conduct of conduct’: government attempts to conduct/direct the conduct/behaviour of free subjects through activating and mobilizing their self-organizing potential, and through structuring their ‘possible field of action’ (Foucault 1982:221). Making lifelong learning a desirable objective for free citizens can be understood as one way of structuring their possible field of action, which suggests that examining lifelong learning theory and practice in various settings through a governmentality perspective may be fruitful.

Nearly all chapters take a critical stance on lifelong learning in the context of contemporary (neo)liberal societies and discuss the subject that is governed through the governmentality of lifelong learning, i.e. ‘the lifelong learner’. The chapters display a great deal of consistency in their treatment of their subject matter, which also means that there are many similarities that at times feel repetitive to the reader, especially when it comes to the descriptions of the authors’ Foucauldian approaches to lifelong learning. In addition, a number of chapters focus on the Swedish context, which admittedly is very illustrative as

Sweden seems to have embraced the lifelong learning ethos more avidly than most other societies. A summary of some of the salient issues from each chapter follows.

Chapter 1 is an introduction written by the editors on Foucauldian thought – in particular governmentality – and how it can be mobilized to study lifelong learning. Somewhat surprisingly, it does not include short summaries of the chapters. Chapters 2 to 7 form Section 1, ‘Governing policy subjects’, in which the studies are on a more ‘macro’ societal level. In chapter 2, Edwards shows how the practices of confession entailed by lifelong learning make learning a *moral* obligation: subjects are invited to see themselves as learners ‘whose learning is never complete’ (p. 31). In chapter 3, Olssen discusses how lifelong learning relates to neoliberal governmentality, and emphasizes the dangers of a complete hijacking of lifelong learning for purely competitive and productive purposes through flexibility and ‘workforce versatility’ (p. 39). He concludes with a normative analysis in order to associate learning to more emancipatory discourses. In chapter 4, Simons and Masschelein show that the subject for whom learning is most important as a way to ‘position and reposition oneself in society’ is ‘the entrepreneurial self’ (p. 57), which typically characterizes many contemporary subjects, including ‘the academic’. Their normative injunction, very different from Olssen’s, is for ‘us’ learners to free ourselves from learning conceived as a fundamental constitutive element of our freedom. In chapter 5, Olsson and Petersson analyse how the lifelong learning subject is constructed in the Swedish context, which they find illustrative of broader, global trends. Their conclusion is that with the lifelong learning ethos, subjects are meant to be responsabilized and empowered through both the constant search for knowledge and their own production of knowledge. In chapter 6, Popkewitz relates child learning to the values of cosmopolitanism, in particular its ‘double gestures’ of inclusion and exclusion: while ‘enlightened children’ are celebrated as an envisioned norm in contemporary liberal societies,

those children who cannot fit in this norm are excluded, categorized as 'left behind'. Implications for adult lifelong learners, however implicit, are clear: many run the risk of being 'left behind' in knowledge societies. In chapter 7, Fejes takes us back to the Swedish context to describe how the ways of governing adult subjects in that country have evolved over the last eighty years. A neoliberal governmentality is found to characterize the Swedish way of activating citizens today, and what is particularly interesting is that it is on behalf of the welfare state – and the need to be 'competitive' in order to remain an affluent society – that such a shift has been promoted. The problem with this evolution is that the construction of the 'educable subject' produces exclusion, and it is unclear how lifelong learning could be reshaped in order to avoid exclusionary practices.

Chapters 8 to 14 form Section 2, 'Governing pedagogical subjects'. The studies reported upon here relate to more specific sites of lifelong learning. Chapters 8 to 12 all focus at least partly on the Swedish context. In chapter 8, Fogde discusses organized services of advice and guidance in job-search practices, and shows how these processes rely on governing a 'self-steering...learning subject' (p. 111). In chapter 9, Zackrisson and Assarsson analyse the Swedish 'Adult Learning Initiative' project and demonstrate that the policy ideal of a lifelong learning society cannot be met: while the individuals' identities are affected by the subject positions provided to them by the dominant discourse, these same individuals also play with discourse for their own ends which often go contrary to the envisioned norm. In chapter 10, Andersson examines the concept of 'validation' as a technique of governing that works by giving recognition to the individual's prior learning, thereby imposing the subject position of 'learner' on her/him. In chapter 11, Berglund deconstructs lifelong learning 'as and through a pathologized and medicalized discourse' (p. 147) with the aim of challenging normalized truths connecting lifelong learning to a healthy society: this approach exposes the way in

which lifelong learning policy discourse presents those who cannot fulfil themselves through learning as pathological cases, which calls into question how ‘free’ the subjects of this policy discourse are. In chapter 12, Ahl similarly shows how the discourse of lifelong learning, relying on motivation theories, constructs not only ‘lifelong learners’ but also ‘unmotivated lifelong learners’, and how the latter are those who are understood as having a problem. This leads to the question ‘Who says that this is a problem, why, and on what grounds?’ (p. 160) and to an understanding of ‘unmotivation’ as a form of resistance drawing on alternative discourses. In chapter 13, Nicoll studies the rising influence of e-learning within universities, in particular how disciplinary practices that have always been present in higher education are reinforced through e-learning and the ‘panoptical’ possibilities it provides, both within academic institutions and across ‘a network of disciplinary practices [that] is extended throughout the social formation’ (p. 176). In chapter 14, Solomon makes a distinction within academic writing between ‘instructional texts’, ‘hybrid texts’ and ‘disciplined texts’, and argues that in each of these genres the textual practices are connected to a form of governmentality meant to construct and mobilize ‘productive subjects’.

The final chapter, written by Biesta, is an interesting discussion of the book as a whole, and more particularly of the different Foucauldian approaches encountered in the different chapters. Biesta makes a distinction between three main ways in which the different authors conduct Foucauldian analysis: (1) descriptive analyses of the governmentality of lifelong learning without implications; (2) more explicit critiques of the neoliberal nature of this governmentality followed by normative suggestions of how to emancipate oneself/society from it; and (3) analyses of lifelong learning discourse that attempt to ‘breach the self-evidence of particular practices and policies...without claiming to generate a deeper truth’ (p. 202). I agree with Biesta that the first two approaches tend to lack the reflexivity that a

Foucauldian analysis should have, and that the point of such an analysis should not be to construct a new, alternative self-evidence, but to '[transgress] existing self-evidence in order to show that other subject-positions are possible' (p. 203). However, these three different approaches – sometimes combined in the same chapters – bring some diversity to the book, which is welcome since it allows the authors to deliver different types of critiques, including recommendations for change that would admittedly be more in line with a Critical Theory approach than with Foucauldian lenses. To sum up, the focus of the book on Foucauldian thought in general and governmentality in particular can be argued to constitute both the main strength and the main limitation of the book. The main strength, because the book can be seen as an excellent illustration of what Foucauldian analysis can provide us: an understanding of the subject positions that are made available to us by discourse and a number of suggested ways of going beyond these subject positions. And the main limitation, because in keeping with their collective aim to show how lifelong learning is mobilized by neoliberal governmentality, the authors may be missing other possibilities of articulating relevant critique towards – and possibly praise for – lifelong learning.

Dense and theoretical as it is, the book is certainly aimed at an academic audience. Researchers in Education with an interest in lifelong learning obviously are the prime 'target group', but scholars from the broad 'Economy and Society' field and more specifically the lively Foucauldian stream within Critical Management Studies will also be interested in these analyses. This book can no doubt provide much inspiration for governmentality studies of management discourses and their impacts on self-managing individuals – whether managers, employees, or simply citizens – and society.

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