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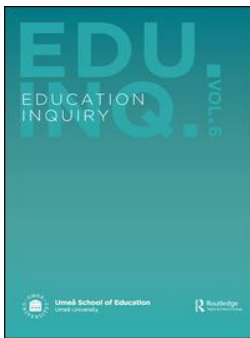
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The Rise of the Survival Discourse in an Era of Therapisation and Neoliberalism

*Kristiina Brunila**

Abstract

The article focuses on how neoliberalism and therapisation are shaping perceptions of the problems faced by young people, particularly those considered 'at risk', and how young people as a consequence are identified. It argues that the alliance of neoliberalism and therapisation offers young people the position of a 'survivalist', especially those deemed to be at risk. How this survival discourse, derived from government policy and educational programmes, shapes the way young people are expected to present themselves in order to be heard will be considered.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Therapisation, Survival discourse, Education, Young people

Introduction

A number of sociologists and educationalists across the world argue that we are experiencing a crisis in education, one that is taking place within the larger crisis of capitalism (e.g. Furedi 2009; Peters, 2011; Davies 2005). This larger crisis is characterised for example by neoliberalism, marketisation, global economic stagnation, and the growing centralisation of capital. Bronwyn Davies has argued that the neoliberal discourse has shifted governments and their subjects towards survival being seen as an individual responsibility. This is a crucial element of the neoliberal order – the removal of dependence on the social combined with the dream of wealth and possessions for each individual who gets it right. According to Davies, vulnerability is closely tied to individual responsibility, and is central to neoliberal subjectivity – workers are disposable and there is no obligation on the part of the 'social fabric' to take care of the disposed. Therefore, the neoliberal subject becomes both vulnerable and necessarily competitive. The notion of responsibility is shifted over to responsibility for individual survival. This survival is constructed not as moral survival but as economic (Davies 2005, 9).

Simultaneously, we seem to be experiencing another crisis, one of mental health and well-being (Ecclestone & Hayes 2008; Ecclestone 2010; Furedi 2004). For example, according to the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology headed by Hans Ulrich Wittchen, Director of the Institute of Clinical Psychology and

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Psychotherapy in Dresden, Germany, over 165 million people in Europe (38% of the continent's population) suffer from mental health problems each year, but in Wittchen's view only one person in three receives proper therapy or medical treatment (Wittchen, press release 2011). This kind of news is becoming more and more familiar and not least because transnational bodies such as the EU, OECD and UNICEF actively produce indicators for well-being (e.g. European Commission 2009; Bradshaw, Hoelscher & Richardson 2007).

In numerous countries, government-sponsored and market-oriented short-term behaviour change interventions are particularly offered to young people who find themselves outside of both education and working life. These individual-based interventions operate increasingly through projects as well as voluntary, third sector and commercial organisations (e.g. Ecclestone and Hayes 2009, Ecclestone et al. 2010; Wright 2008, 2011; Linnakangas, R. & Suikkanen, A. 2004; Brunila 2012a/b). This article focuses on such publicly-funded programmes in Finland. I am especially interested in finding out more closely how young people who are considered at risk by these programmes as well as by government reports are identified in these programmes. Keeping in mind the above-mentioned 'crisis of education' and 'crisis of mental health and well-being', I will ask which kinds of discourses are represented by the educational policies and programmes through which young people are to become heard.

A crisis in the mental health and well-being of young people

According to several reports on the subject of youth, life is seemingly good for young people in Finland¹. The majority of young people report they are happy with their lives (Child and Youth Policy Programme, 2012–2015). More than 80% feel that they are in good health (also see Linnakangas et al. 2004). In spite of these results, there is quite a strong consensus that young people face a growing social crisis in the area of mental health and well-being (Brunila 2011, 2012a/b). For example, in his election campaign the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, brought forward concerns about the social exclusion of young people and, when elected, he immediately launched a campaign to promote the well-being and prevent the social exclusion of young people. The President is not alone in his concern: various cross-sectoral cooperation groups such as those led by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Prime Minister have also considered the issue. Further, governmental policies and reports have called for early intervention to prevent young people's exclusion (e.g. MinEd. 2002, 2003; Linnakangas et al. 2004). However, in these policies and reports social exclusion is not understood as the multifaceted economic, cultural and social phenomenon it is. Definitions of social exclusion are missing so that policies and programmes lose the opportunity to understand it, for example, as a dynamic, multidimensional process that incorporates social and economic aspects of living and experiences of young adults (Atkinson 2000; Kelly 2000; Ecclestone 2010).

The most common development programmes are publicly-funded (e.g. by the EU or Finnish government) short-term efforts that educate, guide and rehabilitate young people. These projects usually operate within or outside the formal education system, have pre-set goals, and young people who are considered to be socially excluded are obliged to participate in them. The present article concentrates particularly on these programmes, which have become increasingly therapeutic in orientation whereby life problems are viewed through a psychological prism.

The article was inspired by Kenneth McLaughlin's book *Surviving Identity*, where the author reviews recent societal developments especially in Britain and how they have shaped our perceptions of both individual and social problems and how members of particular groups have identified themselves as survivors. Consequently, McLaughlin argues that political claims are today being increasingly made on the basis of experienced trauma and inherent vulnerability, while the previous political demand for recognition has resulted in therapeutic solutions. As such, in the current period the demand for recognition not only takes on a specific psychological form but it is also framed within a therapeutic discourse of assumed vulnerability (McLaughlin 2012). In education, the therapeutic discourse refers to much broader perspectives than only the professional therapy provided by psychoanalysts, psychologists and counselling specialists. It means the ways in which ideas, discourses and practices from counselling, therapy and psychiatry as well as educational and clinical psychology become internalised and normalised in education. Therapeutic discourse means the language of disorder, addiction, vulnerability and dysfunction along with associated practices from different branches of therapy (c.f. Ecclestone, Hayes & Furedi 2005; Brunila 2012a/b/c). In practice, the government responses in several European countries already focus on building individualistic competence related to emotional well-being and mental health. In various educational settings, typical initiatives include therapeutic activities such as interventions, activities for raising self-esteem and exploring emotions, and behavioural training.

The tendency to psychologise social problems and require educational and other social policy settings to address them is hardly new (e.g. Rose 1999; Foucault 1967). However, it can be argued that the therapeutic discourse is more influential and much more pervasive than earlier manifestations of psychologisation (Ecclestone & Brunila, in review). Political concerns over the mental and emotional condition of citizens have been manifested in various countries, and a growing body of sociological analysis argues that they are emanating from, and also fuelling, a powerful cultural therapeutic ethos (Nolan 1998; Furedi 2004; Ecclestone & Hayes 2008; McLaughlin 2012). What sociologists define as a "therapeutic ethos", where the language of disorder, addiction, vulnerability and dysfunction together with associated practices from different branches of therapy permeate both popular culture and political systems, is now prevalent in an increasing number of countries, including the United States, Australia, Canada and the EU member states (e.g. Ecclestone 2010; Furedi 2004; Nolan 1998;

Dahlestedt, Fejes & Schonning 2011; Wright 2008, 2011; Brunila 2011, 2012a/b/c). In Finland too, the question about well-being has shifted towards a more individual and mental health-based context (Karjalainen & Palola 2011).

Research Data and Analysis

This article is a result of my four-year research project called “Youth on the Move”. The project focused on the remarkable assortment of educational programmes available whose mission it is to assist young adults considered to be at risk into education and working life. Most research to date on these programmes has looked at individualistic assessment schemes, personal growth models and life impact studies revealing moderate successes. There seems to be far less of a sociological focus on critical factors such as how the management of such programmes is influenced by politics, what we mean by terms such as *at risk* and *transition*, and the terms professionals rely on in counselling, educating, curriculum building or skills development. Therefore, the aim was to analyse the extent to which educational politics and educational practices meet the interests of young adults in transition themselves, especially those seen as socially excluded (at risk) (also see Brunila 2011, 2012a/b/c). The study was based on data from 60 projects that train, guide and rehabilitate unemployed young adults. As mentioned, they are short-term projects funded by the EU, ministries, municipalities and associations. Sixty youth project data items such as project reports, webpages, publications and leaflets were analysed.

Alongside project documents, ten publicly-funded projects were visited where in-depth interviews were conducted with 40 young adults (19–29 years of age) and 15 youth workers. The young adults were considered to be ‘at risk’, and 20 of them had a criminal background. I was interested in learning about these youths’ thoughts regarding their situations as well as their hopes, fears and future plans, how the project activities were meeting their interests, and what was important in their lives. I also wanted to know what they had implicitly learned from these projects. I interviewed project workers because it was necessary to hear their thoughts as well. I was particularly interested in learning how the workers sized up situations and developed plans that might or might not have been relevant to the young adults. I provided an informed consent form for signing by each subject, and discussed the aims of my research. I also mentioned that the data would be anonymous. However, I also wanted to keep in mind that if we think of ethics as protecting the weak from abusive interference, we are taking part in creating a passive, fragile victim to be protected.

After analysing the programme documents and interviews, I noticed how these programmes viewed problems such as a lack of education and unemployment through a psychological or therapeutic prism. This is how I became interested in what I call ‘therapeutic’ education and the broader effects of ‘therapisation’ in compulsory and post-compulsory education, and I then began to explore their educational, social

and political consequences (e.g. Brunila 2011, 2012a/b/c; Ecclestone et al., in review). It was soon noticeable that educational policies and programmes regarding young people reinforced the consensus of crisis and that the solution to this problem was felt to be therapeutic.

It was then possible to analyse therapisation as a form of power which is simultaneously an imperative and an outcome (Foucault 2000; Rose & Miller 2008). Therapisation therefore represents a strand of discursive power that intertwines with educational programmes and content, encompassing subjects that can be known and spoken about and gaining legitimacy from the popularisation of therapeutic orthodoxies and explanations. Crucially, it also elicits the self as a subject to know and talk about, both by oneself and others, such as educational professionals, youth workers and young people themselves. Therapeutic interventions do not therefore simply describe the persons but help to create them, not only as objects but also as subjects, due to the way in which they can also influence the individual's sense of self.

After reading Kenneth McLaughlin's book I revisited my analysis regarding the survival discourse by exploring the government policy and educational programme documents concerning young people's education and guidance. Focusing on discourse enabled me to capture the powerful yet subtle ways in which the therapeutic vocabulary, assumptions and practices associated with educational programmes come to look seductive by laying out the grounds for a new kind of therapeutic recognition. I focus here on the survival discourse as a consequence of this therapeutic ethos (McLaughlin 2012) because the article's objective is to show the significance of this discourse in constructing young adults' subjectivity and what functions they serve in the educational context.

Educating young survivors

It is not only competitiveness and efficiency that are shaping young people's education, but even more persistent changes in the ways in which young people are perceived and how they should perceive themselves.

In this programme, everyday life management means that the child or young person is capable of taking responsibility for his or her life, personal finances and emotional well-being, considering his or her development stage. The continuum of programmes seeks to enable all children and young people, regardless of background, to reach their full potential as individuals, members of groups and citizens (Child and Youth Policy Programme 2012–2015).

The Child and Youth Programme (2012–2015) implements the EU's youth strategy by, for example, promoting the entrepreneurial skills of young people (also see European Commission 2006). In addition, preventive measures are taken to ensure the well-being and health of children and young people. In the above extract taken from the Child and Youth Programme the neoliberal and therapeutic discourses are

already intertwined. The position given to the young person is both vulnerable and necessarily competitive. They are expected to be responsible for taking care of him or herself and not dependent on society. Emotional well-being is highlighted. In addition, an emphasis on emotions is easy to find in any Finnish educational policy texts such as the reports and guidelines of the Finnish National Board of Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture. In policy documents, concepts such as emotions, emotional well-being, emotional education and emotional pedagogy are prevalent (e.g. OPH, 2010a/b; Brunila 2012b/c). Finland is not alone in this matter. The idea that emotional well-being is synonymous with successful educational practices and outcomes has permeated policies all over Europe (e.g. Ecclestone & Hayes 2009; Furedi 2009; Helve & Evans 2013).

The discourse of survival was also found in government policy documents. For example, in the Ministry of Education and Culture's National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, surviving through different kinds of challenges is mentioned several times (MinEd. 2004). According to the Core Curriculum, in health sciences it is important to offer resources and skills for survival. Teaching should also offer resources for crises and survival regarding life changes. The role of the survival discourse becomes stronger when the government's focus turns explicitly to young people. The Ministry has been active in arguing that young people with emotional problems are prone to mental illness, low educational achievement, anti-social behaviour and social exclusion. The Ministry has also published several reports on its webpages where survival has been attached to concepts such as problem behaviour, behavioural vulnerabilities, aggression, anxiety, learning problems, anti-social behavior and motivational problems (MinEd. 1999, 2010). The survival discourse has in many respects been cultivated by government, which not only plays a part in depicting young people as such but also then implements policies with the ostensible aim of protecting such a fragile and at-risk population.

The discourse of survival has not only been limited to governmental documents and measures. Young people have been the targets of multi-specialist teams and short-term projects (Määttä 2007; Rantala 2006; Lähteenmaa 2006; Brunila 2012a/b; Linnakangas et al. 2004). For example, the Finnish Association for Mental Health has worked together with other actors such as universities, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and the National Advisory Council for Youth Affairs in an effort to support good mental health in young people by recognising and preventing early symptoms (e.g. Ruohonen 2008).

Social anxieties, experiences of failure, early parenthood (...) exposure of young women to adulthood problems. Aggression and alcohol problems among men make social survival difficult. It does not make the situation easier that among boys and men problem behaviour is acceptable. Risk factors in childhood and problems regarding social survival in adulthood have a tendency to pile up: the consequences of earlier difficulties cause problems later on. (Youth seminar leaflet, Ministry of Education & Health, 1999).

This Youth seminar quoted above was arranged by a network of actors including the Ministry of Education. The seminar was a follow-up to the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare's "Youth Project" which arranged seminars tackling the problem of young people's social exclusion. This seminar received good publicity and later an anthology was published in which the survival discourse for young people was strongly present (MinEd. 1999; Kuorelahti & Viitanen 1999).

A current project involving nine national partners is focusing on mental health services. Known as the *Young People's Mental Health House* (see webpages), the project provides webpages for young people where they can choose from among nearly 30 symptoms regarding mental health problems such as "strange experiences", "fears" and "tiredness". By clicking on one of these, it is possible to find more information and evaluate the seriousness of a particular symptom. In addition, the pages offer net therapy.

These examples show how therapeutisation in subtle ways turns an existential, ontological vulnerability into a condition of young people's existence. Therapeutisation works by producing an expanding range of internal 'risks', such as emotional vulnerability, that can be addressed through various forms of therapeutic activity:

Education of emotions means monitored activities that direct the recognising of emotions. With the help of this method, a young adult can learn new ways of behaving and surviving. It can influence the forming of an individual's self-esteem, social skills and morality. (Extract from a project in 2000 that aimed to enhance the emotional skills of boys using emotional education).

From the customer's point of view, emotion-based matters can be the most critical aspect of survival. (Youth Project document, 2000).

Expressing one's emotions in a pleasant and secure environment is crucial for the young person's survival. (Extract from a project report, 2000s).

The aim of the project is to help the young person to survive the pressures and crises of everyday life. (Extract from a project report, 2000s).

In numerous programme documents as quoted from above, young people's lives are constantly presented as problematic. Young people are diagnosed with different kinds of personal and emotional problems. Low self-esteem is seen as a constituent of emotional vulnerability and as a typical problem that can easily lead to depression, according to several youth educational programmes. Young people are described as experiencing personal struggles but, after emotional work or other types of therapeutic activity provided by programmes, they have the possibility of becoming survivors and being autonomous selves. Consequently, when the education of young people considered at risk is discussed more and more in terms of survival, direct attention to the relational, affective and emotional aspects of young people's lives as well as the psycho-social dimensions of social and educational inequality become seen as integral to socially just educational goals and practices.

Moreover, the survival stories of young people suffering from various kinds of problems are a popular subject in research (e.g. Ojanen 2009; Lämsä 2009; Reinikainen 2009; Kuorelahti et al. 1999). For example, Juha Mikkonen's (2012) study *To Be Socially Excluded or to Survive* analysed young people's experiences living with a small income. The researcher argued for the importance of seeing young people as active agents who react to economic, political and social changes. Nevertheless, the young people's experiences were discussed in therapeutic terms. A small income was seen as leading to a stressful life, diminished well-being, anxiety, feelings of guiltiness and social isolation – surviving with a small income being equated with psychological survival.

Based on my analysis of government reports etc., it seems that young people are left with two choices: either survival or social exclusion. In my earlier research, I argued how in educational programmes young people have been the targets of various activities aiming to encourage them to speak out (Brunila 2011, 2012a/b). Typical of such programmes in Finland was taking part in individually based analyses of emotional needs, sometimes in the form of instruments to assess category disorders such as ADHD, but also broader diagnoses of anger management and behaviour problems followed by individual and group activities to help participants explore, understand and manage their emotions. I presented how the young people I interviewed described the therapeutic activities they had participated in. They also explained how the project workers gave them direction, including what one should be thinking and saying, and then instant feedback. The discourse of survival was so taken-for-granted that as a researcher I was not even able to recognise it at first until I read McLaughlin's book. When revisiting my research data, I noticed how young people also well occasionally spoke in terms of survival. Pekka and Lauri, for example, described how the project they were taking part was helping them:

I have had emotional problems and all kinds of problems, but this project has taught me how to survive.

Some time ago I did not know if I would survive but I have learned to get rid of old surviving models and use new ones, better ones.

These extracts from Pekka's and Lauri's interviews also describe how young people's existence is shaped by therapisation and how, as a consequence, they begin to position themselves as survivors. In this way, the therapeutic discourse seems to be seductive. It guides young people to understand what is desirable for them, and what is possible, and how to get heard. Some of the youth workers I interviewed also spoke in terms of survival. They described the activities of the programmes and how these supported the survival of the young people they worked with.

In the therapeutic and survival discourse, young people comply with such demands in order to be recognised as 'properly' flexible, active, self-disciplined

and responsible. While the act of speaking might offer the possibility to change the power dynamics, it is not always to the benefit of the young person. Young people relate their stories and their views, and it is the project worker, interviewer or other people who interpret what the young person has said and present its 'true meaning'. In this process, far from being an active subject, the young person is reduced to an object of expert analysis. In order to be heard, the young person must play the role of a victim. The identity assumed is one of victimhood or trauma; it is the therapeutic identity required for the achievement of recognition (McLaughlin 2012, 71). The biggest problem here seems to be that this discourse uses the subjective response in therapeutic terms as a way to understand the conditions in which young people live outside of education and working life. This risks depoliticising the problems young people face in society such as unemployment, a lack of education and poverty.

In all of the above extracts and examples, identifying as a survivor is only possible by incorporating the self into expert discourses that are themselves instruments of power. As a consequence of the neoliberal and therapeutic crisis, education seems to be finding a new role as a therapeutic entity employing therapeutic interventions, and is legitimatised by providing the 'real truth' about young people in therapeutic terms.

Crisis as a possibility for a new kind of discourse?

An important step in refusing therapisation and surviving is to be aware of the discourses through which we are spoken about and speak about ourselves (Davies 2005). It is therefore crucial to find the fault lines in these discourses, fracture them, and then find new discourses and new subject positions. Bearing in mind Foucault's famous quote "Where there is power there is resistance" (Foucault 1979, 95), what then can we say about crises from the point of view of the subject?

Along with the crises of the economy and mental health, we seem to be experiencing yet another crisis, that of rationality and of the rationalist subject. This Cartesian vision of a stable, rational and coherent subjectivity has become contested (Braidotti 1991). Referring to Nietzsche, Rosi Braidotti (1991) argued that at times of any type of crisis every culture tends to turn to its 'others', to become feminised in the sense of having to face its limitations and deficiencies. It might therefore not be a surprise that therapisation and its interest in 'the other' in a dualistic order of things (reason/emotion, cognitive/affective, mind/body) has been legitimised to such an extent.

Instead of turning to its feminised other, in order to understand itself as in line with Nietzsche's assertion it seems that because of the therapeutic turn neoliberalism has found a pervasive new way to harness the whole personality for its use, shaping it more effectively by focusing on the emotions in order to shape a properly flexible and adjustable subjectivity (Brunila 2012a). In an era of economic and educational crisis, therapeutic solutions as regulatory practices seeking to govern

individuals seem to come in handy. The neoliberal and therapeutic discourse together tend to strengthen the Cartesian idea of subjectivity, the idea of the human as essential, as malleable and as potential. The idea of therapisation and the position of survivalist offered to young people is tied to selfhood so that the autonomous self is able to discover itself through therapeutic education, getting rid of psychic and emotional chains and vulnerabilities, and becoming a flexible, self-disciplinary agent (also see Brunila 2012a; Ecclestone et al., in review).

The illusion of individual autonomy is created within both neoliberal and therapeutic discourses as a consequence of the 'autonomisation' and 'responsibilisation' of the self. Human potential can be fulfilled when essential human needs are encountered and realised in the right way (cf. Naskali 2003). The skill to facilitate this seems to have been given to all types of specialists, not only therapists and psychologists but also trainers, personal coaches and so on. This means addressing human beings as if they were selves of a particular type, with individualised subjectivity as well as similar kinds of feelings, hopes and dreams waiting to be recognised and fulfilled to their highest potential. Such intervention appears to give education a legitimate basis in the market of education.

It could be argued that the aim of first psychologising societal problems such as unemployment and a lack of education and then offering young people therapeutic education is to make them more adjustable to the labour market. As long as this kind of approach remains untouched it is able to shape and retool young people to conform to it without using force or domination, but by enabling youth to realise what is supposedly good for them. In this way, flexibility and self-responsibility mean a diminished self, as well as limited possibilities to speak and to be heard by ensuring that one implicitly learns to find mistakes in, and blame only, oneself (also see Furedi 2004; Ecclestone et al. 2008, Brunila 2012a/b/c).

The main argument in this section is that the problem remains as long as we stay within the dualistic order of cognitive/affective, reason/emotion and mind/body. There is a need for an alternative perspective to this dualistic and conventional image of subjectivity as stable, individualised and coherent. Should we not begin by asking questions about the relationship between subject, agency and politics?

To open up channels that allow us to create some distance from existing identities and identifications and their pre-set meanings and categories it is crucial to recognise this dualistic subjectivity as well as power relations related to therapisation. To avoid these identities and identifications one must, as stated above, question the relations between subject, agency and politics. And one way is to begin is to ask how discursive constructions related to therapisation take hold of the body, take hold of desire, and how certain discursive constructions are appropriated while others are discarded, relegated as irrelevant or even threatening (Petersen 2008, 55).

Judith Butler's and Bronwyn Davies' accounts of subject and agency provide a way of understanding agency as a subject-in-process and as the redeployment and

effect of power (Butler 1997; Davies 1998). Butler stated that the “the subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process” (Butler 1992, 13, Davies 2005, 1). If therapisation is a regulated process of repetition taking place in discourses, this simultaneously means that the possibility exists to repeat it differently. Indeed, according to Butler, it is the very constitutivity of the subject that enables her/him to act within these forms of power, which are not only regulating but also productive. Because the capacity to act is not a possession, there is no need for a pre-existing subject in agency (Butler 1997; Pulkkinen 2003). This releases one from having to choose ‘sides’, such as whether something is good or bad or whether one is for or against something. For example, when involved in therapeutic discourse one is both conditioned by and dependent on the prevailing norms, and at the same time one needs to find one’s way ethically and responsibly (c.f. Butler 2008).

Therefore, it is crucial to find a way to analyse therapisation as a site of constant negotiation and agency without an essentialist subject. This would allow for seeing that problems concerning therapisation are not objects but the products of different practices, policies and power relations and therefore always negotiable and changeable. In addition, this would hold several implications for young people’s education. Educationalists as well as young people themselves should understand the alliance of neoliberalism and therapisation, and look more closely at how they work and their consequences. Being able to challenge the ‘therapy first, education later’ orientation would also provide young people with more possibilities for various kinds of agency in society. It is possible to transcend the dualistic order of compliance versus resistance, and take up the master narratives versus resisting them. Quoting Bronwyn Davies (2005, 13): ‘it is in our own existence, the terms of our existence, that we need to begin the work, together, of decomposing those elements of our world that make us, and our students, vulnerable to the latest discourse and that inhibit conscience and limit consciousness’.

Conclusion

According to McLaughlin (2012, 51), many of today’s survivors need not have experienced such horrors as rape, the Holocaust or other horrors to which survival has traditionally been associated. The expansion of the survival discourse has taken place in an educational domain that is increasingly amenable to therapeutic explanations of individual and social problems. This article has argued that the therapeutic mode of personal understanding is permeating educational policies and programmes for young people. These programmes tend to categorise young adults without troubling these categorisations in any way. These categorisations that take place have consequences that result in certain outcomes which have not yet been carefully considered. A central dynamic is that young people’s lives are described in therapeutic terms. It is therefore no surprise that the term ‘survivor’ serves to endow young

people with the position of a victim who has survived, and consequently this is the position from which they get heard.

The discourse of survival is becoming more powerful. Within it, young people are allowed to narrate their situations and subjectivities. Consequently, the position from which they get heard is established by recognising their vulnerabilities, injuries, emotional problems including low self-esteem and stress. The idea that young people are unable to learn unless they are happy and possess confidence, self-understanding and social skills represents a clear statement of the ethos of therapeutic education: psychology first, education later (Furedi 2009, 181).

Based on my analysis, young people tend to be recognised through the prism of a therapeutic mode of understanding, of inherent vulnerability and the parallel notion of a self that is damaged and fragile. The role of education in the therapeutic discourse is to help such young people cope with their difficulties in a way that is held to be empowering, a process through which they learn to deal with their emotions, which in turn leads to survival socially and, most importantly, coping in the labour market.

At first glance, the neoliberal discourse involving competitiveness and the urge to succeed may seem quite different from the therapeutic discourses of self-centredness, vulnerability and survival. Yet, despite their differences, both work towards a similar objective. The therapeutic discourse offers to free young people from their psychic and emotional chains so that they may take control of themselves and their lives and become more self-disciplinary and effective in terms of labour market demands. Therapeutic solutions are consonant with the political rationales that are currently at play during this period of 'welfare-state crisis'. Their espousal of the morality of freedom, autonomy and fulfilment provides for the mutual translatability of the languages of psychic health and individual liberty (Rose 1999, 260).

It is not the aim of this article to underestimate the understandings and practices involved in working with those who have indeed been traumatised. Regarding the therapeutic discourse, there seems to be a good intention to secure equality of opportunity as a way to help people achieve more educationally and generally in their lives. However, the present article focused specifically on education that has been permeated by the therapeutic ethos where the question is not *whether* to intervene but *which* interventions are therapeutically more effective. In addition, therapisation reaches much further than this. According to Kathryn Ecclestone, it offers a new sensibility, a new cultural vocabulary as well as explanations and underlying assumptions about appropriate feelings and responses to events, and a set of associated practices through which people make sense of themselves and others (Ecclestone et al. 2009, 379). Normalising young people's problems, traumas, policies and practices inadvertently undermines subjectivity and resilience among them. Young persons, who cannot know themselves, are not subjects but objects in the therapeutic culture. In neoliberal times, well-being needs a further deconstruction

because neoliberal discourses work by disguising their real purposes. So what are the governments seeking with their language of well-being? What this paper suggests is that it provides legitimation for shaping young people and others as more economically productive subjects.

Kristiina Brunila is Professor of Social Justice and Equality in Education in the University of Helsinki in Finland. She combines theoretisations and critical analysis of sociology and politics of education with feminist, youth and criminological studies. Themes such as marketisation, knowledge capitalism, governance, power, societal differences, inequalities and marginalisation have been the focus of her publications.

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Note

- ¹ The Ministry of Education and Culture steers and develops youth policy by means of legislation, studies and reviews, as well as budgetary and lottery funding. The government adopts a development programme every four years with the aim of stepping up cross-sectoral youth policy action (see the Finnish Government's Child and Youth Policy Programme 2007–2011, 2012–2015). In addition, there is the National Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, a consultative body attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture. It produces information about young people's living conditions by means of reviews and a regularly updated statistical database. Further, the Council drafts programmes, action plans and other initiatives relating to young people.

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