

# The Formation of Thinking

*Jonna Hjertström Lappalainen*

**I**n recent years, we have seen examples of how political leaders, such as Bolsonaro in Brazil or Orbán in Hungary, have controlled and restricted the freedom of the university in a way that frightens us and reminds us of the inherent fragility of our own societies. However horrible these political acts are, I would like to claim that there is a danger in letting oneself be hypnotized by those who hold political power and who, through dramatic gestures and authoritarian rule, suffocate free thought. Equally important is to pay attention to the slow and barely noticed political processes in which, through government directives and reforms based on economically motivated ideas about efficiency and employability, officials and authorities limit the freedom of higher education. An example of such a process I would like to scrutinize is how *thinking* came to be regarded as a generic skill in the Western education system. Why did teachers, suddenly during the 1990s, begin to regard thinking as a skill that students and pupils had to be educated in. How did training and education in thinking skills become an important focus for the teachers' professional work? At first glance it might not seem like an important change. It strikes us as something beneficial that teachers would strengthen and challenge students' intellectual skills. It is also a fact that every government controls their systems of education. Nonetheless, we ought to ask why different governments at this point started to increase the control and define the forms of education in the skill of thinking.

Especially when it happens on such a large scale. Should not the very fact that it takes place so extensively make us suspect that these changes might be driven by a wish to control thinking? And thus, make us ask why and for whom?

We see this change of focus in different governing documents about the education system. Throughout Europe, greater emphasis is placed on students' and children's thinking skills as something that must now be actively developed and strengthened by teachers and educators.<sup>1</sup> We find in all Swedish elementary school curricula an emphasis on training children and students in thinking skills.<sup>2</sup> It is also enrolled in the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance.<sup>3</sup> In 2007 Sweden had a new examination ordinance, according to which every higher education was obliged to clearly and comprehensively exhibit every learning objective the students were supposed to achieve during their studies. While previous syllabi mainly explained course content, they were now supposed to function as descriptions of what a student would achieve on completing the course. In connection with this, the course

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most striking example of how this transformation occurred and was implemented at high speed is the McGuinness Report published in 1999 in the UK: *From Thinking Skills to Thinking Classrooms: A Review and Evaluation of Approaches for Developing Pupil's Thinking* (McGuinness, C. Department for Education and Skills (DfEE) report). This report, which was a one-person study conducted by a psychologist, led the government to issue directives on the importance of teaching students to think. Just a few months later, "Thinking skills" were introduced to the national curriculum. Winch C. (ed.) (2010) *Teaching Thinking Skills* (London & New York: Key Debates in Educational Policy, p. 2f.

<sup>2</sup> We find thinking skills as objectives in all Swedish curricula: the curriculum for Preschool (Lpfö 18), the curriculum for the compulsory schooling, preschool class and school-age educare (Lgr 11) and the curriculum for upper secondary levels (Lgy 11).

<sup>3</sup> In the Higher Education ordinance (Högskoleförordning 1993:100), one principal objective for Teachers education as well as doctoral students in the fine, applied and performing arts is the "ability to reflect" and "reflect critically".

objectives also began to include various generic skills that the students should acquire, for example "identify", "relate", "compare", "analyze", "motivate" and "criticize".

In this paper I will investigate how this focus on thinking came to be incorporated as an explicit task in Swedish higher education. Changes in the higher education are a topic that has been discussed in innumerable ways. One prevalent discussion has been related to trends such as standardisation, digitalisation, and specialization in the welfare state in recent years as well as effects of the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s (Hood & Dixon, 2015; Bornemark 2018; Bejerot & Hasselblad 2002; Lindgren, 2006). Another lengthy discussion has been about the difference between education and *Bildung* in Humboldt's traditional sense (Humboldt, 1960; Bloom, 1987; Gustavsson, 2007). Both these discussions are highly relevant for my investigation and I suspect that the reader might detect my positions in relation to these debates. My intention, however, is to take a different angle of incidence to these changes; I will look closer at how the detailed governance of education in the skill of thinking entered the Higher education governing documents from a practical perspective. I will take departure in the Bologna declaration, study these directives' itinerary from the European committee down to the local universities. How they were implemented, by whom and what role did the universities, and their employees, play in this implementation.

Before I go into how this focus on thinking came to be incorporated as an explicit task in higher education, I would like to philosophically delve a little into the question of how we should understand thinking skills: what are these skills that teachers are supposed to focus on? What is it to think? I thereby hope to make the reader aware of that the present discussion of how to strengthen students' thinking skills rests on a narrow and unilateral understanding that misses how complex and versatile human thinking is.

## Philosophical notions of thinking

Thinking is often regarded as what separates human life from other forms of life. Although different forms of organic life can feel, react, sense and strive for survival, it is the capacity to think that indicates the specificity of human existence – with its thoughts, concepts, inventions and dreams. From a philosophical perspective, thinking is both something revolutionary to organic life and something essential to human life.

## Thinking understood as problem solving

One philosopher to have considered the question of how to understand thinking, and who had a great influence on education and the educational system, is the American pragmatist John Dewey. While Dewey views thinking as essentially human, he understands it as something fundamental that springs from the animal and bodily constitution. Dewey understands thinking as an essential part of every experience. According to him, every experience we make implies the act of thinking. Dewey makes a distinction between the purely perceptive experiencing and *an* experience. A child sticking her fingers into a candle flame does not automatically have an experience. But when the child associates the event with its consequences, i.e. pain, it becomes an actual experience. The pure perception becomes *an* experience by thinking. An experience is the consummation of a moment of perception (Dewey, 2007).<sup>4</sup>

When thinking is regarded in this broad sense, it turns out to be something that humans have in common with animals. A cow can learn to recognise different types of grass and a cat can learn what to expect from different residents in its neighbourhood. Here, I think that Dewey's way of locating thinking in human practical life shows an essential aspect of thinking. According to him, thinking is understood as something almost instinctive arising out

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<sup>4</sup> See also *Art as Experience* (2005) in particular in chapter 3 "Having an Experience".

of our everyday practices, and which later turn into more complex and sophisticated forms of thinking. What is interesting in Dewey's view of thinking is that the pragmatic and bodily aspects of thinking become significant. Thinking is something that takes place in an embodied self within a social environment.

According to Dewey, what is essential to human thinking can display itself in a more developed sense. From this primitive thinking more sophisticated forms can arise. In his book, *How We Think* (1986), Dewey tries to show in detail how *reflective* thinking arises out of action and a willingness to solve emerging problems. Thinking occurs when problem solving leads to perplexity. He also emphasises that not all problem situations lead to reflection. If I run into a problematic situation and immediately follow the first best solution that springs to mind, I do not critically evaluate any arguments or facts, i.e. I do not reflect. Even if every problematic situation in some way makes us think, reflection only occurs when "one is willing to endure suspense and to undergo the trouble of searching" (Dewey, 1986, p. 123f.). Dewey writes:

When a situation arises containing a difficulty or perplexity the person who finds himself in it may take one of a number of courses. He may dodge it, dropping the activity that brought it about, turning to something else. [...] Or, finally, he may face the situation. In this case, he begins to reflect. (Dewey, 1986, p. 196)

Based on this description, Dewey divides reflective thinking into five steps: (1) suggestion; (2) intellectualisation; (3) hypothesis; (4) reasoning, and (5) testing and action (Dewey, 1986, p.123ff, 196).

Dewey thus provides us with an interesting account of thinking, showing how at one and the same time it is at its very basis bodily as well as revolutionary in opening up a human world of thoughts, concepts, inventions and dreams. In presenting such a clear division, Dewey also lays the philosophical ground for talking about thinking as forms of skills – a principal reason why he has had a major impact on pedagogy and educational institutions.

Dewey's understanding of thinking is not without its problems. First of all, he presents thinking primarily as a form of problem

solving. Such an understanding, however, risks reducing these skills to instrumental tools in search for practical solutions or knowledge. Thinking is not only a matter of problem solving. It is also the ability to navigate in different thought spaces than those offered by tradition, politics and the market; it is the capacity to push beyond and to rebel against existing orders. This negating, or rebelling, aspect of thinking interested the German philosopher Hegel with respect to the emergence of human consciousness.

### **Thinking as a way out of illusion**

In *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1986), Hegel uses the Biblical story of Adam and Eve as an image of how human beings developed the capacity to reflect. Adam and Eve are analogous to innocent children. They live in the present, unaware of consequences, ignorant of right and wrong, and unaware of themselves as subjects. Yet everything changes at the very moment when Adam and Eve eat the fruit of knowledge; they are thrown out of Paradise and into a world of consequences, labour and death. Their innocent childhood is lost. The moment when they begin to see the world in a new way is described in the Bible thus: “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons”(Gen 3:7). Adam and Eve start to see themselves with a viewer’s gaze. This is the moment when there is a crack in the innocence of the childish life in absolute presence, a gap in the relationship to being. The child sees itself. Hegel understands the story as a picture of how human consciousness arises as a split between subject and object. The human sees herself; she sees her subjectivity as an object. Through this, the human can begin to reflect; she can regard herself as an object among other objects in a world. This is an illustrative picture of how philosophers have understood thinking; as an impersonal and distant gaze that liberates a human being from her natural state, she is no longer governed by pure instincts and desires. According to Hegel, this distanced gaze is located in a subject who is something more than either an innocent child or an animal desire. An ability that arises and that makes the human free to think beyond both the animal and the given (Hegel, 1986, pp 87-91).

Hegel's account is compelling because it shows how the thinking subject emerges as a revolt against, for example, religious or traditional explanations. The decisive factor here is that, in order to be understood as thinking, the subject's negation of the prevailing state of things, must be motivated by a form of rationality. It must not be merely an expression of the subject's feelings or desires. What Hegel emphasises, among other things, is how thinking is something that emerges or arises. In this way, thinking becomes something other than pure problem solving, instead it opens up worlds and surprises the subject. This is an account of thinking that takes us beyond the model of the problem-solver. Hegel's interpretation of the Biblical story thus displays a view of thinking rather as a force or a power to transcend what there is.

In the history of philosophy, Socrates is the one who personifies the belligerence or power of thinking. In Plato's dialogues we find elaborate descriptions of Socrates' simple life, his ability to stand above his physical desires, his courage and his persistent engagement in discussion. Socrates' struggle with the rulers of Athens - which led to his trial and execution - becomes thus a display of an imperturbable will to objectivity. Plato dedicates much space to these traits in Socrates' character, clearly showing that Socrates cannot be understood as motivated by self-interests, such as strengthening his economic or social position. Plato's Socrates cannot be understood as personalising thinking in the sense of problem solving. Socrates does not solve any problems, on the contrary, his thinking creates problems; it endangers his own personal situation as a citizen in Athens. Characteristic of Socrates is his elevation of his thinking as something more important than all the problems he confronts. For Plato, thinking can rather be said to be a form of truth-seeking.

One possible objection here is that the figure of Socrates could in some sense be an expression of the highest form of thinking presented by Dewey. For example, Dewey argues that the form of developed thinking he calls reasoning is about "extending knowledge" (Dewey, 1986, p. 204). According to Dewey,

reasoning can lead the thinker to reformulate his hypothesis and thus, in a sense, transgress the framework for his investigation (Dewey, 1986, p. 204). I would now like to claim that, while it affirms thinking as a changing force, Dewey's pragmatically oriented study still misses the uncontrollability and immense power of thinking. It gets stuck in an understanding of thinking as a process in relation to knowledge and problem solving. The figure of Socrates highlights other sides of thinking. Let me develop this on the basis of two other philosophers who have written about Socrates as the image of thinking, namely Sören Kierkegaard and Hannah Arendt.

Kierkegaard's authorship is largely about his endeavour to try to think beyond his contemporary illusion [*sandsebedrag*], that is, beyond common perception, and common thinking. The factual illusion Kierkegaard devoted all his writing trying to escape was the scientifically and politically sanctioned Christianity that prevailed in his day. He sought a position where he could believe and relate to God in ways other than through the traditional theological or ecclesiastical interpretations of scripture or of the Church's sermons on Jesus' meaning and goodness. In this sense it is a form of opposition or destruction of prevailing thinking of faith and God. Kierkegaard sought a position of faith beyond what his contemporary Christian institutions and fellows put at his disposal. In this search, Socrates was his role model. In the book *Philosophical Fragments* Kierkegaard develops this point, understanding Socrates as an example of a teacher who leads his disciple out of the illusion of his contemporaries. He lets Socrates personify thinking as a passion. Kierkegaard describes it as the paradoxical passion of the mind. It is a passion that does not end until it brushes up against its own boundaries. He writes that what this passion wants, without really understanding itself, is its own downfall. Kierkegaard compares this passionate thinking with love, writing that a man lives his life undisturbed in himself, until suddenly he wakes up in love with another human being:

Just as the lover is changed by this paradox of love so he does not almost recognize himself anymore, so also that intimated paradox of understanding reacts upon a person and upon his self-knowledge



in such a way that he who believed that he knew himself now no longer is sure whether he perhaps is a more curiously complex animal than Typhon. (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 39)

Kierkegaard points out that Socrates thus prefers being uncertain about whether he is a human or a beast rather than having an unfounded idea about in what his humanity consists, which would mean staying in illusion. For Kierkegaard, Socrates is the image of a movement of thinking, which is not primarily about finding an answer, but instead about the passion of thought, which is driven to its very limits. This thinking is something quite different from an instrumental means of reaching knowledge or solutions. Instead, it is an insatiable passion that tends to get frustrated when it has at its disposal readymade answers. A searching that finds itself at ease with an answer is not thinking in the Socratic sense; it is instead a desire for knowledge, that is to say, a problem solving. That is why Socrates, in constantly touching the boundaries of thought, is a role model for thinking.

In his dialogues, Plato depicts Socrates as being “aroused” by his interlocutors' self-righteous opinions and statements. And although Socrates, in his passionate seeking, is looking for answers, he is constantly caught up in aporias. For Kierkegaard, it is a display of the difficult art of how to escape the illusion.

### **Thinking as a destructive power**

Arendt was also interested in Socrates' uncompromising strive for answers and how this would often end up in aporias. She does not call thinking a passion, but an *eros* that can only be satisfied through thinking (Arendt, 2003, p. 179). Like Kierkegaard Arendt emphasises how Socrates does not give any positive instructions or answers. She further claims that Socratic thinking turns out to be something that, in Kant's word, has “a natural aversion” against accepting its own result as “solid axioms” (Arendt, 2003, p. 167). Like Kierkegaard, Arendt sees Socratic thinking as leading man out of contemporary illusion; it is a task that allows one to discard unexamined prejudices and shallow opinions.

Arendt goes further than Kierkegaard in emphasising the difference between thinking and knowing, describing this very difference as a conflict. Knowledge is cumulative; it is with the thirst of knowledge we build worlds and civilizations. Knowledge benefits society. Thinking, on the other hand, “does not create values, it will not find out, once and for all, what ‘the good’ is”. Thinking dissolves rather than confirms (Arendt, 2003, p. 188). Arendt emphasises how thinking is an act of dissolution, it is destructive and dangerous. But it is also precisely this dangerous dissolving power that both Kierkegaard and Arendt are looking for. Arendt continues:

The purging element in thinking, Socrates’ midwifery, that brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them – values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions – is political by implication. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another human faculty, the faculty of judgement, which one may call, with some justification, the most political of man’s mental abilities. (Arendt, 2003, p. 188)

When Arendt writes that thinking is implicitly political, she links it to the traditional idea of *Bildung*. The destructive and subversive side of thinking is a part of the traditional idea of *Bildung*, since it enables the individual to relate to himself as a temporal being, to tradition, religion and history.

*Bildung* in this traditional sense strives to give the student the possibility to relate to his or her personal life, life-world and contemporaneity in an independent way and not just on the basis of animal desires or one’s obedience to higher authorities. I would like to claim that it is thinking in this particular sense that causes some political leaders to feel threatened by free thought. Arendt further claims that thinking must never be reduced to serve only knowledge or solely be guided by practical purposes; it must not become what she calls “*a handmaiden of knowledge*, a mere instrument for ulterior purposes” (Arendt, 2003, p. 166). Thinking is the power that purifies and removes solidified values, and the power that uncovers unknown areas. A human incapable of thinking in the Socratic passionate sense, uncritically maintains the prevailing dogmas of knowing. She is simply a henchman, a

bureaucrat or a tool. In “Thinking and moral considerations”, Arendt discusses the German Nazi officer, Adolf Eichmann, as an example of such a henchman, someone who is “incapable of thinking”. (Arendt, 2003, p. 160).<sup>5</sup>

Arendt and Kierkegaard address aspects of thought other than those shown by Dewey's sub-divisions of thinking. These thinkers also explore how thinking might be something completely different from problem solving, namely the human capacity to question and to oppose unexamined convictions, prejudices and doctrines. They also show that to a certain extent such a thinking tends to become an uncontrollable power. Arendt further points out that this uncontrollable power plays an essential role in political life. With all this said, I would now like to move on to my original question: what kind of thinking is the education system required to teach?

## The Bologna Declaration and its implementation in Sweden

Let me start by saying something about the abovementioned change within the European higher education systems and how this took place. The ability to think was introduced as a generic skill in the governing documents of the higher education institutions in accordance with the so-called Bologna process. The aim was for European educational institutions and governments to jointly strengthen the competitiveness of European universities internationally. One of the most important goals was the creation of the European area of higher education as a pathway in promoting European citizens' mobility and employability and the continent's overall development (The Bologna declaration, 1999). The idea was to facilitate citizens' movement between European countries and at the same time to make use of their previous education by making it comparable with different countries. The Bologna Declaration states that co-signatories must strive for six

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<sup>5</sup> This is further developed in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil* (1963).

operational objectives. The first objective (the principal focus for this text) was to adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. This goal explicitly advocates a demand for the bureaucratic equalisation of all countries' education systems. At the same time, the document also contains an important caveat, namely the assertion that this transformative process must take full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy. In addition, it is claimed that this will be undertaken in collaboration with both governments and non-governmental organisations that have knowledge of higher education.<sup>6</sup> The risk of a unilateral focus on higher-tier changes seems to be modified by the declaration's stated vision that the transformation should take place in collaboration between different countries and in cooperation with their widely different higher education institutions.

The problem is that the declaration says almost nothing about how this transparency and comparability should be implemented in practical terms. Initially, several discussions about the form of implementation were conducted, according to which the views of different educational institutions about how to actualise these changes played an important part. One issue discussed was the comparability of degrees. Let me give an example from such a discussion in a report from the former Swedish National Agency for Higher Education [*Högskoleverket*] 2001 (today the Swedish Higher Education Authority [*Universitetskanslerämbetet, UKÄ*]):

There are slightly different views around Europe in terms of setting requirements and conditions for different degrees. According to QAA [The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK], they can be summarized in the formula "time served versus

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<sup>6</sup> "We hereby undertake to attain these objectives - within the framework of our institutional competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy - to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competence on higher education." (The Bologna Declaration 19 June 1999)

outcomes achieved”. In line with an increasingly diversified group of students, universities in the UK have shifted towards the latter. It is the results and not the time that is most important. The same tendency can be noted in some continental countries. (Högskoleverkets rapportserie 2001:10 R. p. 27.)

Interestingly we here see an explicit discussion concerning whether exam requirements could be designed in ways other than by focusing on ensuring that students achieve learning objectives. We find discussions taking place concerning how the amount of time a student has spent in education might be part of the degree requirements. In these discussions, however, it can be assumed that even the Swedish view conforms to the idea that results are to be determinant over time. Indeed, this is confirmed by the report’s later discussion of the importance of how higher education institutions must guarantee that students actually meet the objectives of course syllabi. (Högskoleverkets rapportserie 2001:10 R. p. 89f.)

At the beginning of the 2000s, a strategy was adopted to ensure that the Swedish education system would meet the requirements for both transparency and comparability. In 2007, amendments were made to the Higher Education Act, which clearly defined the requirements for course syllabi and for enhanced clarity in the articulation of course aims and objectives (Regeringens Proposition 2006/07:107).<sup>7</sup> As the new law was implemented at various universities, the relevant authorities and organisations began to formulate their own internal directives. The now closed authority NSHU (Swedish Agency for Networks and Cooperation in Higher Education [*Myndigheten för nätverk och samarbete inom högre utbildning*]), also drafted a support document to

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<sup>7</sup> See also press release from Utbildningsdepartementet June 21 2006: <http://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/pressreleases/hoegskolereformen-2007-kvalitet-och-internationalisering-39440>

provide clear directives and assistance for universities designing new course syllabi.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the Swedish Association of Higher Education Institutions SUHF [*Sveriges Universitets och Högskoleförbund*] started issuing support documents. In 2011 they stated, among other things, that a syllabus should contain the course's learning objectives, the main content of the course and "the forms for assessing students' performances". These guidelines and directives began to emerge as a way of concretising the content of the law, at the same time as they aimed to tighten the requirements for clearly formulated course objectives. It is worth noting, however, that directives are still formulated in a way that leaves it to the individual educational institutions to define the forms of clarity and the objectives to be written into course syllabi. Owing to the fact that they were open to interpretation, individual universities were uncertain about how they would actually live up to the requirements. In order to support the teachers' work with syllabus writing, the individual educational institutions now began to prepare internal documents. It was in these later stages that the control and formation of thinking skills became both rigorous and detailed.

## **The university's implementation of the declaration**

Before exploring these internal documents in detail, it is worth noting that they were created at a time when the educational situation was beset by other challenges. An important factor here was the university's transformation from elite to mass education, leading to the substantial expansion of higher education during the second half of the 20th century.<sup>9</sup> No longer is university for a few; today, about 50 percent of young people enroll on higher

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<sup>8</sup> NSHU (Swedish Agency for Networks and Cooperation in Higher Education [*Myndigheten för nätverk och samarbete inom högskoleutbildning*]) "Att skriva förväntade studieresultat. Stöd för förväntade studieresultat på kursnivå". This material was produced within the project "Webbaserad kvalitetsstöd för högskolornas pedagogiska arbete kring lärandemål, examination och läraktiviteter". 2006-10-11.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g., Ostermann (2002), Gustavsson (2009) and Bohlin (2008).

education courses and programmes. (Högskoleverket 2007) This means also that the composition of the student cohort, which university teachers encounter, has changed. Today's student groups are significantly larger and more heterogeneous than before. Many students are, as explored in documents and reports, often less well equipped for university studies in comparison to previous student generations (Trow 1973, 2006). It was in this new teaching situation that higher education programmes were obliged to formulate measurable examinable goals. This also led to the emergence of a new type of administration that was partly financed by fewer teaching hours. The Bologna Declaration's directive was thus implemented in a situation characterised by large organisational transformations, fewer teaching hours than before, and demands for savings and profitability. Because of this, teachers, who were responsible for the implementation of formulating clear and comparable course objectives, also faced the challenge of getting large heterogeneous student groups to complete their education with less time for teaching.

Considering this lack of time and funding, it is understandable that the institutions' own guidelines set out significantly more detailed directives. The guidelines are in the form of manuals that inform teachers about which things to think about and how to go about thinking them. An example of this is the guidelines for the Faculty of Social Sciences at Stockholm University. The following is written under the heading "Expected study results":

This point can probably be said to be the core of the syllabus, and the one that requires the greatest consideration when it comes to content and formulations. Important to note is that all the expected study results of the course must be achieved in order for a student to be approved for the course, which in turn means that all of these must in some way be included in the examination.

This formulation states that the core of the syllabus is the expected study results. The most important thing is not what the course contains or instructs but what the student should achieve. This shift in a sense may seem small but in reality it is not. The core is no longer what the course offers, but what the students are expected to achieve. When this shift in focus is combined with the

requirement to adapt education for large student groups with varying qualifications, it is clear that the core is now about how the teacher, with fewer teaching hours than before, should as effectively as possible succeed in getting as many students as possible to achieve degree objectives. Another aspect emphasised is that all objectives are formulated in a way that can be examined. This formulation is more extensive than is immediately apparent, since in practice this implies that the syllabus defines not only the course content but also the structure of teaching instruction. When the syllabus clearly describes how the objectives are examined, it thus also defines how the teacher should organise his / her teaching time; the syllabus thus restricts the teacher, encouraging her to spend a certain part of her allotted time on the assessment of course objectives (for this is what will be controlled in case of evaluation). The syllabus places great emphasis on how the course is examined, not what it contains nor on ensuring that the quality of teaching reaches an adequate level. Here we see how a detailed regulation of the teaching structure creeps in.

In the guidelines from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Stockholm University it is further stated that “expected study results should be formulated with the student as subject and with active verbs” and that “the study results should be observable and possible to examine” (Stockholm University, 2018). What is interesting here is the introduction of active and examinable verbs that are linked to the student's ability. It is in this way that the guidelines begin to focus on the student's generic skills. It is among these generic skills that we find thinking skills. The guidelines for Södertörn University (2010) are more detailed and also give concrete suggestions on which active verbs to use depending on the level of the course:



<b>Introductory level</b>	<b>Intermediate level</b>	<b>Supplementary level</b>
Define	Relate	Analyse
Describe	Explain	Criticise
Identify	Compare	Value
Exemplify	Summarise	Contrast
Name	Defend	Motivate
	Illustrate	Categorise
		Generalise

While a student at the introductory-level should learn to describe or exemplify ethical theory, a student at the supplementary-level should be able to analyse or critically interpret ethical theory. The guidelines states: “Of course there is no absolute connection between verbs and level”, but otherwise there is no further discussion of the choice or selection of verbs (Södertörn University, 2010, p. 12). These guidelines have been designed with the aim of supporting teachers in the work of writing syllabi. Legal considerations are also important. The document serves as a way for the university to ensure that the syllabus meets the legal requirements. But since the support document is designed as guidelines, this means, in a Swedish context, that they become rules that the employees must follow. Thus, this support document also becomes a way of regulating how university’s teachers should work with teaching thinking skills.

To support the design of how students’ generic abilities would be formulated into examinable learning objectives, two taxonomies about thinking were used: Bloom’s taxonomy and the SOLO taxonomy. The active verbs used in the guidelines are also identical to the verbs used in these taxonomies. SOLO stands for “Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome”. It divides the skill of thinking into different modes linked to different levels of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p 76ff.). Like Bloom’s taxonomy, this model is designed for a pedagogical purpose, namely to make teachers reflect on how they can help students achieve the course objectives. The taxonomies were thus developed as an instrument to support teachers in their work with students and to induce them

to reflect on students' different learning phases from a psychological and pedagogical perspective. It is possible here to see an influence from Dewey's classification of thinking as different levels of problem solving.

This instrument, designed to induce teachers to reflect on students' different learning phases, in conjunction with the systematic work of establishing support for syllabus writing, was increasingly used as a manual for student learning.<sup>10</sup> This is precisely how the internal documents came to define which thinking skills universities ought to teach their students. The forms of thinking that are conspicuous by their absence are the subversive, exploratory and perhaps ultimately destructive forms of thinking that the Socratic picture shows us, and which Arendt linked to the traditional ideal of *Bildung*. Such thinking might also be difficult to formulate as an examinable generic ability. Instead, thinking skills are understood as different forms of problem solving, in accordance with Dewey's levels. In this way, Swedish universities have, on the basis of the Bologna Declaration's directive, interpreted and defined how students should learn to think, and also what form of thinking they should learn, namely problem-oriented thinking, which can be formulated in examinable objectives, and which moreover is possible to evaluate and compare.<sup>11</sup>

In the support directives and guidelines, we see, on the one hand, a clear focus on legal security and transparency. But, on the other

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to these guidelines, several higher education institutions often drafted even more specific documents for the committees that would review course syllabi and additional supporting documents to assist the individual teachers in syllabus writing.

<sup>11</sup> Something else that is worth noting is that this also means less trust in the universities and the teachers. Their overall teaching competence and professional judgment no longer came to be seen as a satisfactory assurance that the student achieved the learning objectives. Now, each student's achievement of the individual goals would instead be documented and ensured primarily by external scrutiny based on legal considerations.

hand, we lack the caution and openness that emerged in both the legislative texts and higher authorities' discussions and directives on what specific form of thinking universities should cultivate. Certainly, from an organisational perspective, these internal guidelines and supporting documents were needed to implement the legislative changes. What is remarkable is how these documents were enunciated.

The guidelines have been enunciated on legal requirements with scant reference to a psychological model for thinking, which has been modified by pedagogical theory. The very question about what the teacher should really be teaching the student has never been subject to any deeper educational or philosophical examination. What is remarkable is that it is the Swedish higher educational institutions themselves that have created this detailed regulation surrounding what it means for generic skills to be taught. Thus, it is ultimately the institutions themselves that have transformed the question of what it means to teach a student to think into a purely practical and legal question, namely, how the teacher can ensure that the student achieves the objectives of the course syllabus.

## **Conclusion**

In one sense, the Bologna Declaration's vision of a transformation towards equalization has been achieved in consultation with the different countries' educational institutions. The various universities have themselves formulated the directives that aim to create transparency and comparability. What is striking, however, is that this discussion was never conducted in relation to the Higher education institutions' own enquiries about the quality, task or purpose of higher education. Nor was it discussed how to understand the task of teaching people to think. No one seems to have asked the question whether thinking is something that can be captured and allowed to be defined in the examinable active verbs such as "describe", "compare", "justify", "analyze", etc. Instead, existing directives are accepted as legal documents that must be adhered to.

By formulating the internal documents based on legal positions and pedagogical taxonomies, contending understandings of thinking that, for example, Kierkegaard and Arendt, with the help of Socrates, reveal have simply been erased. It is also difficult to see how such an understanding of thinking could be captured or formulated as a generic skill or an examinable course goal. Rather, the uncritical acceptance of the taxonomies' presentation of thinking as skills has led the universities to end up in the very situation that Arendt warned about: thinking has now been reduced to the handmaiden of knowledge.

The establishment of the university was to safeguard the freedom of thought. Universities have traditionally been places that not only gather and teach knowledge, but also rely on leaving room for unruly or disobedient thinking that can challenge and question current politics, norms and ideas. For this reason, universities have also often been threatened by various men of power who wanted to curb such disobedient thinking and instead emphasise the role of thinking as the handmaiden of knowledge. We also see these threats today. But not just from power-hungry politicians. The threat also consists of the university's own researchers and teachers who, in a world of growing demands for transparency and documentation, risk turning themselves into bureaucratic henchmen, incapable to think.

Finally, I would like to remind of the original Bologna Declaration's invitation to the European higher education institutions to actually participate in its transformative work. In recent years, this involvement has mainly been characterised by teachers uncritically accepting and following internally established guidelines. There is a culture in the university of obediently bowing to these directives while bottling up one's anger and cynicism about the importance of the syllabus as an educational instrument. However, in a larger historical and political perspective, this is not an innocent act. On the contrary, it is a way of actively supporting and consolidating a legal and political tightening of university freedom. Teachers and university staff still have the freedom, and hopefully also the ability, as thinking individuals to approach the

declaration's call for participation. Such a thinking participation could actively relate to the question of what forms of thinking universities ought to encourage and to teach. It could also question guidelines and established visions with greater professional authority. A thinking contribution would probably quickly also come to the conclusion that administratively enunciated legal documents never can be, or try to be, a secure way of preserving or restoring academic freedom.

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**Jonna Hjertström Lappalainen** is (associate professor) of (the Theory of Practical Knowledge) at (Södertörn university), (Sweden). Hjertström Lappalainen is primarily interested in (practical knowledge, existential philosophy, thinking). E-mail: (jonna.lappalainen@sh.se)

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