

# Control justified

## Discipline as moral regulation in adult education

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the historical changes in Finnish popular adult education. The focus is on how both the differing ideas and the practices of moral regulation have been targeted at social groups and genders. The article concentrates on two historical periods: the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in those periods on the moral regulation of the peasantry and the middle class. The argument is that the disciplinary practices of fostering citizenship in adult education, with their historical emergence and variations, have consistently been attached to an economic ethos disguised as the balanced moral discourses of individual growth and social progress and prosperity.

*Keywords:* history of popular adult education, moral regulation, class, gender

## Introduction

Popular adult education is a product consisting of ideals written in the self-consciousness of the Western Enlightenment. Popular adult education is based on ideals aiming to mitigate superstition, ignorance and uncivilised manners seen as characteristic of previous eras. The economic, material, political, cultural and spiritual changes associated with the modernisation process created a demand for more civilised, knowledgeable people than ever before in history, giving rise to social movements to educate the people to cope with and advance in society.

The ideological starting points of popular education are most often described as humanistic, with connotations of equality and democracy. However, from the beginning of the educational movement during the 19th century, the practices and aims of civilising nations did not uphold these ideals. The aim was to educate people differently based on their social position and gender. My research question asks how social groups and genders were and still are endowed with differing moral and disciplinary ideals within popular adult education. To understand the differentiating processes and their implications for differing moralities, I focus on the education of the adult population in Finland at two historical moments and two social positions and ask how moral regulation has been constructed and, equally, transformed over time.

The first historical moment is the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; the second is the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These historic moments were marked by profound social, political, economic and technological changes in educational systems, labour markets and forms of social interaction. The first moment saw the dawn of modernisation, laying the legal, political and practical foundations for capitalism as a new regulative political and social system. The second moment witnessed the re-organisation of capitalism into neoliberalism and the global economy, marked by both transnational and nationalist movements and crises of democracy and modern institutional structures. My focus is on popular adult education, but it can be claimed that there are similar connotations of moral regulation within vocational education (e.g. Koski, 2009).

During these periods of change, some social classes were more crucial to the desired outcomes than others. During the first period, the critical group was the peasantry, and during the second, it was the middle class. These classes had similar

positions in society, representing for their times the social class whose economic welfare and lifestyle were crucial questions for both the economy and political stability.

## Theoretical background

Philipp Jackson (1968) pointed out that education is always a question of moral control. Indeed, education itself is a moral project. Its core consists of a constant search for answers to the questions of what is right and wrong, good and evil, desired and undesired – and how and why individuals should be educated. The answers offered convey different ideas of physical and material life, inner being, proper forms of social relations and the nature of transcendence (see, e.g., Durkheim, 1979). Simultaneously, education is a means for the reproduction of social differences, power relations and individual empowerment. Education is always disciplinary in the moral sense.

Alan Hunt (1999) argued that moral regulation is a ‘practice of governing in order to focus attention on social action that attempts to influence the conduct of human agents’. Thus defined, moral regulation seems to accord with the very definition of education: attempting to influence the conduct of human minds and activities. Furthermore, moral regulation and education are both inherently forms of power manifested discursively, physically and materially. However, as a means of power, morality is a category without normative presuppositions, as Hunt noted: ‘In moral regulation, “the moral” dimension is not an intrinsic characteristic of the regulatory target since there are no necessarily moral issues’ (Hunt, 1999, p. 4).

In this sense, moral regulation is subtle and fluid and can be imposed on almost any dimension in human life: from taking or not taking a daily shower to economic competition and the fate of human beings in the hereafter. The forms of moral regulation have changed throughout history and almost overnight during social conflicts and crises. In education, morality is manifested in collections of aims and objectives, lists of norms and values and descriptions of ideal humans in an imagined ideal society and the pedagogical means of achieving these ideals.

In education, the most profound forms of moral regulation are embedded in the changing ideas of the inner being of the human and the relationship of that inner being to the social. Despite historical and contextual changes, definitions of the inner being are consistently connected to questions of becoming a subject, an agent or one's true self, according to the definition in different contexts (Koski, 2014). These definitions are not merely philosophical (or religious) but are related to economic and political processes: the constitution of individuals and their inner beings is shaped by the social conditions at any given moment in history. The quest for the self has, as Michel Foucault (1983) pointed out, become obligatory for the modern individual, and this obligation is attached to the normalising practices of power. Thus, in educational contexts, defining the constitution of the inner being, the actions in the search for it and its connections to the social is a vital means of regulatory and disciplinary power.

Moral regulation is a naturalising means of political and economic power. The ways in which morals are constituted and justified at any given moment reveal the social divisions within education. Moral regulation occurs through everyday practices, promoting physical, material and spiritual ideals held to be self-evidently true and desirable. In education, regulation works by articulating norms and deficiencies and introducing educational programmes to correct them. In changing social conditions, the definitions of deficiencies vary, along with the social groups and individuals defined as needing correctional activities. In the history of adult education, moral regulation, as well as other activities, has varied according to which social group is defined as the most important target for enhancing economic and social wellbeing. Historically, moral regulation within adult education has not treated 'adults' or the 'people' as one entity; from the very beginning, moral regulation has been imposed differently on different classes, genders and groups.

Educational practices are aimed at individual humans and collectives simultaneously. Questions about the social, political and economic conditions constituting the preconditions of ideal individuals and their social relations, therefore, form a key to understanding the practices of moral regulation and disciplinary adult education.

## Moral regulation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

Moral regulation and control in the birth of popular adult education in Finland<sup>1</sup> at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were inseparable from the rise of capitalism, which generated new forms of social and economic relations. The educational project aimed at the adult population, in both the founders' writings and the activities taken, was intended to lay the practical and spiritual foundations for capitalist relations in economics.

Most importantly from the perspective of adult education, monetary economics started to change the social positions and wealth of the Finnish peasantry. The peasantry had representatives in the corporative Parliament and owned substantial proportions of the Finnish forests. With the birth of the forest industry, the value of forests skyrocketed, and selling timber introduced novel forms of monetary economics into the peasants' lives. At the same time, agricultural production faced profound changes as the development of farm machinery reduced the need for farmhands. A whole way of life was changing, transforming social relationships, the idea of human beings and their rights, duties and possibilities in society (e.g. Jutikkala, 1958). During this critical period, educationists believed that peasants had become imprisoned in their old, traditional habits and beliefs while the traditional preconditions of that culture were inevitably deteriorating. (Alapuro, 1998). Furthermore, the inner being of peasants also seemed to be somehow wrong, hidden to themselves or lost altogether, causing moral degradation and thus endangering the progress foreseen (Koski & Filander, 2013). The conclusion of the Finnish intelligentsia was that the peasantry was in urgent need of awakening spiritually, economically, materially and practically (Alapuro, 1998). This logic can clearly be seen in the writings of J.V. Snellman, the most famous Finnish Hegelian national philosopher and later head of the Bank of Finland:

Civilisation and welfare require each other. Education multiplies the human[']s needs and, by giving him better insight, also teaches him to fulfil them better,

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<sup>1</sup> The Finnish term referring to popular adult education translates as 'the work for the edification of the people'.

to increase his welfare. Prosperity, thus again, offers capital to industry and spare time for higher civilisation or the soul. (Snellman, 1929, p. 182)

This was the presupposed causality: education leads to welfare, welfare to industrialisation, and these together to the civilisation of the soul. Or, vice versa, as Niilo Liakka stated, adding religious Lutheran ideals (see Koski, 2001) to the process:

The course of progress will be: *inwards*, to personal improvement, independence, unique conviction; *upwards*, away from selfishness, self-interest, to succumb to forces and purposes, which are greater than yourself, to recognise the fatherly power of God, which makes the weak strong. Only thereafter, *forward* to valuable and fruitful activities for one's own good, and to progress the common good. (Liakka, 1909, p. 116)

However, these idealised causal chains could not be found among the peasantry. Instead, quite to the contrary, the peasantry seemed to have adopted the idea of growing their wealth without understanding its social and spiritual implications. For example, Yrjö Koskinen (1868, pp. 87–88) described how monetary economics were breaking a traditional, modest, pious way of life and thus degrading the peasantry's morality:

As matters have been so far, one must really pity the narrow field of civilisation where the wealthy peasants in our country are restricted. It is quite natural that when the means are sufficient, they will, with a greater fancy, satisfy their desires. ... The men have been showing off with their handsome traps and vehicles, exquisite, prepared weddings and feasts, perhaps even bought champagne from the cities. ... Women, for one, have sought their joy in handsome clothes, silk, velvet, and golden jewelry. (Koskinen, 1868, pp. 87–88)

Following Pierre Bourdieu's (1983) ideas, the peasantry had gained economic capital and was in the process of acquiring forms of cultural capital hitherto distinctive to the upper middle class (or the gentry), such as champagne, silk,

velvet and gold. These desires did not accord with the ideal of the educational edification process. The idea that the peasantry's economic prosperity would lead to the worship of material goods, and consequently, selfishness and greed completely contradicted moral ideals. The inner being had higher purposes than ostentation: living to benefit the nation and to exalt God's praise was seen as important, as well as practical knowledge and skills. Concentrating solely on economic wellbeing was seen as a danger to the new political order. Texts stressed that the aim of education was to refine the spirit for higher purposes than pure pageantry. Such refinement was an especially urgent task as national romantic philosophies constructed the peasantry as a symbol of the nation-to-come: it was pictured as noble, humble before the face of God, resilient, tenacious and proud of their work – the embodiment of the 'Spirit of the Land' (Koski, 2006, 2011).

The civilisation project initiated was comprehensive. It promoted the ideology of the nation in the service of sublime and edifying purposes, producing individuals who had awoken from the darkness of ignorance, 'showing off' and old-fashioned habits. The final aim linked the educational process to the familiar, traditional religious discourse of the salvation of the souls:

The human heart will be best edified by rooting out everything that is low, selfish and unclean, and instead, everything that is noble, sublime, ideal and heavenly. The spirit of the people's institution is good if all the activities are inspired by the warm, burning love for the heavenly and mundane Fatherland and if all the questions are judged in light of the eternal truth. (*Yearbook of the Folk Institute of East Karelia, 1907*)

All these dimensions were introduced into practice by several educational institutions and organisations founded around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: Martta associations for peasant women (see Ollila, 1993), folk institutions for young boys and girls and Pellervo associations for farmers. These institutions wove together the practical, aesthetic and moral into two main purposes: the salvation of souls and financial management (Koski, 2011).

The salvation of souls was an aim for both genders, but in many other ways, educational practices were gendered. Men were taught financial management, mechanised agriculture, woodwork and basic mathematics and biology. Their

education concerned founding co-operatives, dairies, sawmills and such. Women's education, in contrast, was focused on housekeeping and proper habits, learning to do fine embroidery, plant flower gardens for the aesthetic refinement of the soul, grow new vegetables, cook nutritious food for healthy bodies and keep the home clean and tidy. It was believed that the tidiness of the home led to purity of heart and honest, kind, patient, vigorous women with strong character.

From the perspective of moral regulation, the inner being and the external world were intertwined in the causal logics of the definition of progress. A tidy home, well-kept machinery and land, exact book-keeping and meticulously made ornaments, clothes and food led to and were signs of inner refinement of the human being. In these processes, the economic and social relations of capitalism were tied to both traditional and novel religious and spiritual orders: the Lutheran religion, highlighting the idea that everyday chores are acts of service to God, and nationalism or national romanticism, sanctifying the Fatherland as a gift from God (see Koski, 1998, 1999). All these ideals intermingled as justifications and practices of moral regulation and resulted in the construction of disciplinary power.

Moral regulation and control thus surrounded individuals from every direction as a productive form of power (Foucault, 1983), persuading them to change their whole lives. The causal logics (see Koski & Filander, 2013) were indisputable: from proper management of finances and housekeeping followed refinement of the soul and vice versa. Simultaneously, all these deeds constituted acts praising God and advancing the common good of the Fatherland. However, the idea of the hidden inside of the human being was profoundly religious, given the notion that God only knows the truth of one's soul and that humans will become their true selves only in the hereafter. Consequently, the inner being was, to a degree, sheltered from social and economic constraints. In Basil Bernstein's (1990, pp. 82–83) words, the pedagogical control was external, focused on teaching to act according to the rules. The practical and the spiritual were two sides of the coin, yet at that historic moment, they were balanced to prioritise the practical to enhance the



construction of the capitalist economy. The 'spiritual' as such was then still left to the teaching of the Lutheran Church.

## Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

The decades after the Second World War was a time of profound political, economic and cultural changes in Finland, including democratisation, urbanisation, secularisation, expansion of educational organisations and gradual transformation of the ideals of moral regulation. The redefinition of moral ideals took place soon after the end of the war. The emphasis was laid on a new basis, attached to traditional foundations:

Popular adult education and democracy are parallel phenomena. They create opportunities for each other; they need and support each other. ... It is self-evident that we adopt democracy as the basis for popular adult education because only this will guarantee the unity of our nation, guarantee its high quality, guarantee its future. (Wuorenrinne, 1945, pp. 51–54)

The authoritarian, class-based social and moral orders, along with nationalist educational ideals, had become restraints on the foreseen progress even though the ideals of the nation and its high quality still persisted. The middle class was emerging as the social strata holding key positions related to political and economic stability and progress. Middle-class women gradually replaced working-class men as the major group utilising all sectors of adult education (Koski, 2005b), which also changed the curricula in popular adult education. In the 1960s, the view of adult educationists was that the educational modernisation project, as well as the project of the edification of the people, had been completed successfully. The 'people' had learned to read and write, eat properly, utilise washing machines and vacuum cleaners and tidy their homes, surroundings and themselves. The overall educational level had risen due to reforms in compulsory education, vocational training and universities.

However, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the education of the adult population was at a new turning point as neoliberal economics and digital technologies

changed the structures of both the labour market and the educational market. Former educational forms and ideals of disciplinary moral regulation had to be re-interpreted amid changing social conditions. As early as the 1970s, the concepts of ‘continuing education’ and ‘lifelong education’ were introduced to adult education, primarily by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as answers to the demands of the re-structuring labour market and rapidly changing qualifications. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of lifelong education had become the prevailing discourse setting the ideals and practices of adult learning. On the social level, the ideals were attached to democracy and equality and, on the individual level, to personal growth. These ideals became the foundation for the social and moral justification and disciplinary regulation of adult education. The ideals were written in most important texts, such as the Law on Finnish Popular Education:

[The purpose of] the principles of lifelong learning [is] to arrange education that supports cohesion, equality and active citizenship in society. The aim of popular adult education is to promote diversity of individual growth, wellbeing, democracy, pluralism, sustainable development, multiculturalism and internationality. In popular adult education, the principles of self-directed learning, communal orientation and increasing belonging to society are emphasised. (Law on Popular Education, 2009)

The democratic values connected to the ‘diversity of individual growth’ and the ‘principles of self-directed learning’, defined as self-reflectivity, self-realisation, self-esteem and self-directivity as references to the inner being, have a twofold justification. First, they accord with the economics of late capitalism, for instance, in the Federation of Business Life in Finland’s educational policy documents in the early 2000s (see EK:n linjaukset, 2015). A declaration by the European Parliament directly connects the awakening of the inner being to economic principles:

The aim of lifelong education is for example to increase creativity, competitiveness, employability, and entrepreneurial ethos.

Second, the ethos of individual growth in the law is aimed at empowering individual students as citizens by using traditional humanistic values. The educational emphasis on the self includes the idea that the self, the me, the inner being is somehow hidden, lost or imprisoned and thus in need of being unveiled, found or liberated (Koski, 2005a, 2014). In both adult educational institutes and commercial institutes offering learning opportunities for adults, courses on finding or freeing the inner being multiplied over the previous decade. These courses are based on multiple self-techniques, as can be seen in the following examples, one a curricular description of a course offered in many institutes of popular adult education in Finland and the other a parallel curriculum offered by a commercial institute:

Start to live instead of just surviving. ... This course is aimed at awakening creativity, the use of feelings and intellect in order to become what we already are. Based on their own experiences, students will work to free both their feelings and psychic energy. As a tool for the study of the self is the Gestalt method, in which it is essential to learn to recognise what I want and need just now and to act in order to accomplish these goals.

In our coaching method, the approach is based on solving problems in an appreciative manner. Every human being will be met as their own person who has the potential to create their own success story – the seed for success must only be dug up from within.

From the perspective of moral regulation, connecting democracy and the search for the self is a continuation of the traditional (religious) ideas of observing one's conscience in order to lead a sinless life and make the right decisions (see Hunt, 1999). In popular and commercial adult education, the self is predominantly defined as hidden, lost, imprisoned or in state of becoming. The vocabulary consists of symbols such as a seed that, once found and watered, will both empower and liberate the desired qualities from within: creativity, innovativeness, competitiveness, success, spirituality or some other social invention for the labour market at a given moment. Ozga and Lingard (2007, p. 70) summarised the ideals attached to lifelong learning and success in the competitive labour market:

the individual must be creative, productive, sociable, flexible, stress tolerant, cooperative, emotionally controlled and committed to hard work.

Beverly Skeggs (1997) noted that the focus on the self is a female middle-class project. In her analysis, self-projects are a means of distinguishing oneself from the lower classes in a project highlighting the value of spirit over matter. With the expansion of interest in focusing on the self, new trades and businesses of life coaching have emerged. Mäkinen (2012, pp. 110–113) labelled them ‘individualised feminism’, emphasising individual empowerment for individual success while neglecting structural injustices. Thus, each individual should, and can when properly coached, achieve any social position. It seems that highlighting the self as a symbol of the inner being, perhaps unintentionally, serves as a disciplinary discourse aimed at educated middle-class women.

## Conclusions

With the birth of both capitalism and popular adult education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the connection of the inner being to the economic market was transmitted through the idea of the progress of the nation. For the peasants, this idea was justified by Lutheran spirituality aimed at refining the human being, the immediate surroundings and, ultimately, the Fatherland. In the neoliberal formation of capitalism, the inner being is directly connected to the economic market. Other justifying discourses connected to transcendental, spiritual and social aims are weak and scattered. At the same time, the disciplinary and regulative practices considering the inner being have been strengthened as individuals have been persuaded to find the hidden self and transform it as their resource. The task is narrated as normative but stripped of institutional or transcendent connections; the individual encounters moral regulation without protective structures, as if naked. Individualised morality, along with ‘self-ethic’ as Heelas (1996) noted, is aimed at ‘exorcising those voices of authority which have become internalized as the ego. ... The individual serves as his or her own source of guidance’ (Heelas, 1996, p. 23). However, the ‘voice of the authority’ and its use as a ‘source of guidance’ must be taught and learned; only then does the inner being of the individual, the self, serve as a precondition of social progress. Following Basil Bernstein’s (1990,

p. 67) analysis of pedagogic control, external control has become internal and implicit with formerly open hierarchies masking their communication, blurring the boundaries of the inner being and the social demands.

The quest for democracy remains, however, a social justification in adult education. Participation in activities offered by communal institutes of adult education is understood to increase democratic practices. Democracy then seems to equal participation in adult education. The most popular courses in adult education, though, focus on various handicrafts, physical exercise, foreign languages, information technology, painting and other practical skills. Even though courses are offered to the entire adult population, participation is clearly both gendered and class-based, dominated by educated, middle-class women.

Moral regulation aimed at population control has been multiplied, extended and at least partly disengaged from traditional institutional organisations of adult education and found its agents in commercial businesses and therapeutic practices. The deficiencies perceived in the lives of individuals and the demands and ways of improving them have also multiplied. Moral regulation no longer aims to go onwards and upwards through spirituality and the common good; instead, it aims to compete and survive in the precarious labour market and life.

In all these changes, adult educationists have reformulated their definitions to justify the moral regulation of the prevailing social and economic structures. The disciplinary practices of fostering citizenship in adult education, with their historical emergence and variations, have consistently been attached to an economic ethos, disguised as the balanced moral discourses of individual growth and social progress and prosperity.

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