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Required alienation? The monitored self in a health promotion programme in secondary schools of three Swedish municipalities

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ABSTRACT
In this article, promotion is an institutionally mediated effort to bolster or redirect a person’s health, strength, and other assets to build resilience. We analyse a Swedish version of the Life in Action promotion programme used in secondary schools in three municipalities. Focusing on types of alienation as framed in the programme, we argue that Life in Action’s treatment of the psyche as an object in need of conscious monitoring, nurturing, and enhancement of qualities such as positive attitude and self-discipline signals the teenage participants’ required alienation. Concluding the article, we discuss how this type of alienation may already be present in participating students, and also how it may be necessary for young people about to enter work-life in the era of late capitalism.

KEYWORDS
Alienation; governmentality; health promotion; secondary school

Introduction and aims
In institutionally mediated soft interventions directed at teenagers or young adults, prevention and promotion provide a conceptual framework to guide how particular sets of problems are addressed. Health in this context is defined in various ways. Many different social, mental, psychological, and physiological health problems are included under the umbrella of prevention/promotion activities. These may include absenteeism, alcohol or drug use, early sexual debut, school failure, insufficient exercise, self-assessed health deficits, sleep deprivation, and low self-esteem (Ferrer-Wreder et al. 2006).

Promotion activities can be directed to the population as a whole, to groups, or to individuals. Activities directed to individuals are designed to accentuate their capacity to assume responsibility and to influence their life outcomes (Eriksson and Lindström 2006). The concepts of prevention and promotion are regularly interwoven and applied to the same types of issues. Apart from bolstering salutogenic dimensions of life, both prevention and promotion aim to reduce or counteract behaviours defined as problematic.

A wide range of promotion programmes are currently in use in Swedish elementary schools, several designed in the intersection between promotion and prevention. Some specifically target a defined problem while others (such as the Life in Action programme)
take a comprehensive approach to foster generally prosocial behaviours (Flygare, Gill, and Johansson 2013).

**Life in action**

The Life in Action programme originated in South Africa where it was successfully used to encourage school attendance and reduce the spread of the HIV virus (Strand 2012). Inspired by the results, Swedish municipalities and an insurance company formed an alliance in 2013 to implement the programme for students in Swedish upper school (i.e., students 13–15 years old). This also meant modifying and adjusting the programme to Swedish social, cultural, and educational conditions. The overall goal was changed from combating HIV to promoting healthy behaviours and self-esteem more generally.

During their three years in upper school, Swedish students receive one or two 45 minute programme lessons every week. The lessons are led by a regular teacher at the school who has been trained in the programme by a university-trained coach. The programme consists of exercises, often group discussions or individual reflections upon the participants’ values and behaviours. Central to its operationalisation is *The Book of Dreams*, given to all students and used throughout the programme. It consists of ‘facts’ about the human brain and psyche, findings about learning processes and practical techniques to train one’s mental capabilities, and short tutorials and tools for the different lessons. Different sections are devoted to particular themes: ‘I go for my dreams’, ‘I am committed’, ‘I decide’, and ‘I make it possible’.

A wide range of capabilities are included as goals for the participants. These include new ways of interacting with peers, relatives, and family; understanding and coping with success and failure; and improving study techniques, all of which are related to the programme’s core idea of the need to articulate one’s hopes, fears, and aspirations. Two proposed mindsets illustrate the desired ‘dynamic’ thought pattern versus unwanted fixed attitudes to life and to oneself. These are used as outer points on a presumed continuum of edificatory behaviour/thinking. The mindsets describe different self-management techniques applied to meeting challenges and tackling obstacles. The ultimate goal is to evolve as a conscious director of one’s life, becoming capable of identifying short- and long-term goals and acting accordingly.

By promoting self-directive behaviour, the programme is one of many tools through which a population might be fostered through techniques of governmentality (Foucault 1991, 100). It could constitute an example of the dressage Foucault laid out: surveillance that is permanent in its effects even if discontinuous in its actions (Foucault [1975] 2009).

The issue addressed in this paper is the potential consequences of the strategic self-monitoring technique fostered through the programme. The aim is to explore what we consider an imperative division of the psyche into an inspector and an object of scrutiny and to discuss the potential results of urging the cultivation of the functional (‘dynamic’) mindset over the less functional (‘fixed’) mindset. In this type of operation, what happens to the teenager’s interior sensations and processes such as criticism, hesitation, resistance, or irresolution? In this paper, through an analysis of the tutorial base in *The Book of Dreams* and classroom observations, we investigate the use of fostering techniques used in the programme and apply the Marxist concept of alienation to probe and
discuss the possible links between these techniques and dimensions of estrangement and their conceivable consequences.

Previous research

Prevention/promotion programmes may be seen as more or less structured ways to socialise a target group to certain other groups’ preferences. From this perspective they are devices used to structure or restructure society by explaining or advising about life. The formation of subjects-in-the-making, such as children, has universally and always been of interest to hegemonic powers (Bloch et al. 2003; Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz 2004). The current educational trend in the western world encourages individualisation and entrepreneurial self-regulation behaviours, which fits well with neoliberal governmentality (Lemke 2001; Rose 1999; Rose and Miller 2010). In the formation of children in schools, the obvious dimension of fostering new citizen-subjects is always there to consider. This process has taken various forms throughout history, reflecting various social ideals (Lemke 2001). Dean and Hindess (1998) define contemporary techniques of citizenship as those increasing self-esteem and empowering people to further their own ends – in the case of the school system, with the market as the final recipient of the students.

Two trends seem to be salient in promotive programmes in schools. The first is that of individualisation (Crawford 2006; Hughes 1997). The ultimate responsibility for becoming a citizen-subject who realises a healthy and successful lifestyle is placed upon the young person. The second trend is the symbolic function of many of these programmes. When so much of the responsibility for the programme’s implementation is placed on the child with so little supportive structural change such as enhanced school budgets or increased staff, the child becomes symbolically mobilised (Butler-Wall 2015). The child is subsumed in a neoliberal ‘steering of subjects into responsibility’ that, in Edelman’s word (2004), becomes a futurity. The target for preventative efforts is not the resources allocated to the school, but rather the child’s possible outcome in terms of the aims of the programme manuals.

The desired outcome should not be understood as disciplining the target groups into a sense of total compliance. Rather, their free will is acknowledged; those targeted are supposed to act rationally, realise that life is a goal-oriented enterprise, and thereby achieve their dreams. The gateway to this realisation is the teenagers’ ‘motivation’, their perception of themselves as willingly engaging in the programme for their own good.

Several promotion programmes employed and expanded in Sweden could be categorised under a ‘Knowledge of Life’ label (Löf 2011). Their content and goals vary from specific issues such as delaying drug debuts, to more encompassing goals, such as strengthening the young person’s capacities (Forkby and Löfstrand 2010). Evaluations of these goals indicate that both teachers and students often consider them artificial and situated far from the students’ realities. Important norms that profoundly guide behaviour and relations are not always made visible, which could increase a sense of vulnerability in the classroom. Teachers may also maintain that their professionalism is downgraded or not considered in these programmes (Skolverket 2013). Evaluation research points to another critical issue: when the specific needs of a particular area or school are not identified, the risk for failure increases. The programme could also
expose students to risk if they are urged to voice personal stances and opinions in front of their peers (Skolverket 2014, 2011). Considerable critique has also targeted the component of ‘Life Competence Education’ commonly inserted into these programmes in the last 20 years. Children are trained to adopt certain norms and behaviours preferred by authorities, politicians, and consultants but denied real participation and co-construction (Alstam and Forkby 2018; Landahl 2015; Löf 2011; von Brömssen 2013). The norms encapsulated in the programmes are not neutral, but convey a particular type of citizenship: on the one hand an inward-feeling citizenship, characterising the individual as deliberative and emotional; on the other, an outward-making citizenship, where the citizen is portrayed as entrepreneurial and willing. Democracy in these types of programme is portrayed as already achieved (Olson and Dahlstedt 2014).

Non-compliance can be regarded as an Achilles heel of many programmes. It is difficult to control the intervention targets, and without some compliance, with ‘motivation’ as its prerequisite, the programme cannot achieve the expected impact and make its costs seem legitimate (Hughes 1997, 22). The programmes entail certain ways of looking at the world and those who do not adopt this outlook (who fail to adhere to the programme formula) can be constructed as poor or failed subjects. The representation of subjects who do not live up to programme standards (i.e., those with a fixed mindset) is informed by, produces, and affirms social class (e.g., Wright and Halse 2014; Burrows 2011). These labelling practices also imply monitoring and measuring that constitute a kind of surveillant assemblage, given shape in discourses around healthy living and mediated through schools (Welch, McMahon, and Wright 2012; Wright and Halse 2014).

The cases, data collection, and analysis

The data used for this paper emanates from an evaluation study commissioned by three municipalities in Sweden and carried out between the autumn of 2014 and spring 2017. The main assignment within the frame of the evaluation concerned three dimensions: the effects of Life in Action (comparison between intervention and control schools), the executive methods applied, and implementation. The study consisted of a survey sent out three times (autumns of 2014, 2015, and 2016) to students in four intervention schools that had implemented the programme and two control schools that had not. Parallel to the survey, qualitative material was collected in the intervention schools: interviews were held with 22 students, 11 staff and headteachers, and one of the initial project leaders from South Africa; a discourse analysis was conducted on The Book of Dreams, and 31 classroom observations were made, each lasting one to two hours.

The quantitative analysis showed that the programme failed to reach its goals in every important aspect measured. Students exposed to Life in Action came out worse compared both with baseline measures and with students in the control group (Alstam and Forkby 2018). In the analysis to follow, however, we focus on results stemming from the latter two inquiries. Through this analysis, some explanations for the programme’s failure may be suggested, but our aim here is to analyse the programme’s ideas and intervention techniques, not whether it reached its goals.

The classroom observations were analysed on various dimensions, such as fidelity to the programme material, interaction in the classroom, and potential student resistance strategies. Participant observation was used to get an understanding of the daily life or
the cultural mores and interactions of a defined group in a specific social setting (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). During data collection the researcher (Alstam) took the position of a moderate participant (Spradley 1980). Very few interactions with students took place outside the classroom settings. Field notes were taken, but not recordings. Notes were composed in three steps: taken in the classroom (summarising the character of a situation, noting only a few specific moments), clarified immediately afterwards, and expanded upon later the same day. In this later stage, relevant background information was added or comments made before or after the lessons commenced were inserted. This last step also included a rough categorisation of data, which continued as a lengthier process throughout the period of observation (2015 and 2016). The data were sorted into broad groups related to the research questions and then merged with the results of interviews with students carried out previous to the observations. The analysis proceeded through open coding (Layder [1998] 2005, 53) related to theoretical concepts. Interrelated themes between observations and interviews were compared and investigated for how opinions voiced in the interviews played out in front of the teacher and the class. This data triangulation enabled an investigation of emerging patterns and themes, as well as a more in vivo coding (Rivas [1998] 2012, 372).

The analysis was informed by discourse psychology (Potter [1996] 2012) which applies analytical principles to everyday speech acts on themes concerning human beings, behaviour, psychology, attitudes, and feelings (Potter and Wetherell [1987] 2013). Considering the statements in The Book of Dreams as fact constructions (Potter [1996] 2012, 158), the analysis focused on questions of authorship (or lack thereof) by applying the concept of out-there-ness (116, 150ff.) and modalisation hierarchies (112), whereby matters of perceived importance or truth in rhetoric may be analysed. Both the way an utterance or statement was constructed and the kind of ‘reality’ it reflected was of interest (Wahl 2007, 197). In the evaluation report, the focus was on both of these dimensions, while this paper pays attention mainly to the latter phenomenon.

**Discipline for the young, by the young**

Disciplinary power is usually thought of as a device in the production of obedient self-regulating citizens (Nilsson 2008). Traditional rule of law can never touch more than indirectly on the mechanisms that control human behaviour: the intentions, desires, and norms where disciplinary power has its greatest potential. Foucault [1975] 2009, 141) described discipline as power’s micro-physics that function through mechanisms working from inside the individual subjects. Magnus Hörnqvist (2012), described discipline as a repeated learning process in which the individual is motivated to behave in a particular fashion. It works through the individual being seen and categorised through differentiation, homogenisation, hierarchisation, and exclusion. Most importantly, for discipline to work, the individual has to be aware of potentially being watched (Foucault [1975] 2009). In a promotive programme intended to instil particular mindsets (i.e., to affect how teenagers view their own attitudes) vital issues to consider are who is watching and who is ensuring that the mindset is perfected? A subject who suspects being monitored assumes coercion from power, and so enacts a dual function as both the supervisor and the supervised, thereby becoming self-controlling. This duality makes power so complete it does not have to be exerted. Hamann (2009) describes the relation
between governmentality and the subject as the former giving a degree of freedom to the latter. Governmentality is not a dominant force imposing itself on the subject, but rather a condition within which individuals conduct themselves a certain way of their own free will. In this case, the manager of the teenagers’ mindsets would ultimately be the teenagers themselves.

**Inevitable alienation?**

So, if governmentality works through the power of self-discipline, resulting in our acting in the preferred way of our own presumed free will, what must be instilled in the individual for this to happen? Something is supposed to be socialised by someone or something in these programmes. Might this socialisation occur as an interior (mind) split between the supervisor and the supervised? We argue that what is sought, at least partly, is alienation.

Alienation can be linked to discipline and governmentality in different ways. This paper uses two main approaches: the Marxist position and that of Lacan/early Foucault, describing discourse as primary and human beings as the result of discourse (Butler 2005). Foucault’s notion of discourse relies on Lacan’s view of alienation as the ‘I’ born in a structure of already existing culture and language, alienated at the very moment of self-awareness, as self-awareness is reached by applying language to articulate oneself. 5 In other words, the subject is petrified by culture and language but simultaneously able to speak and function through them. As Judith Butler puts it, language does not belong to the subject but to ‘the other’ and the subject acquires it through mimesis (53).

To understand the Marxist view of alienation one needs to put it in relation to his rather idealistic notion of ‘un-alienation’, a state which could metaphorically be described as ‘healthy’. This implies that to be alienated is to have a ‘disease’ (Ollman [1971] 1976, 132). This type of separation between conditions would require us to know something about what it is to be ‘healthy’. The descriptions of a healthy condition for the human subject are perhaps best found in Marx’s idea of the natural man.

Marx uses two models to define human beings, one biological and one historical. Biologically, we are different from animals because we have emotions and intellect and the ability to reflect upon ourselves. Marx uses the concepts of ‘powers’ and ‘needs’ to describe the nature of human beings. ‘Natural’ powers and needs such as hunger are shared with other species. ‘Species’ powers and needs, on the other hand, are expressed by humans only. Powers are notable in human beings as specific capacities and functions and look different depending on the historical setting (Kesson 2004, 48). Alienation is to some extent an unavoidable aspect of human activities. All types of productive activities generate a general alienation (externalisation), but estranged alienation occurs when subjects can no longer direct their productive capacity (49). When a human’s means of life belongs to someone else, alienation has occurred. However, alienation also occurs when a person’s desires and activities ‘are the unattainable possession of someone else’ (Marx [1867] 1961, 151). This formulation, we argue, allows an analysis of alienation stretching beyond the domain of paid work.

One of the potential consequences of the particular variant of governmentality notable in Life in Action is precisely this: parts of the psyche become the possession of the internal supervisor that is reared through the exercises in *The Book of Dreams*. 
Desires and activities are to be managed in keeping with the programme manual, rather than be an explorative journey for the young individual. This management is obviously carried out in a specific cultural context aimed at conformity, but its mechanism is located within unique individuals with personal aptitudes and dispositions. The programme can be said to explain to the students why they should want and strive for this particular interior split. As we propose, this means that the governmentality that visibly disciplines the students is achieved by instilling alienation. Governmentality as the condition within which individuals conduct themselves a certain way (Hamann 2009, 55), is thus carried out through alienation. In a sense, it would be possible to define alienation as both a technique and a result of the formation occurring in Life in Action.

Marx comprehended alienation as two separate processes: Entäusserung (distinctions) and Veräusserung (disposal). Entäusserung means that something – in this case work – is separated from ‘Man’; he cannot manifest himself in his work. (Workers experiences work as something outside themselves; it becomes instrumental). Veräusserung arises as a consequence or a practice of Entäusserung and refers to the situation of separation that emerges when the worker sells his labour as a commodity (Israel 1982, 66). In this paper we do not label the mental processes of the students as products of labour, but we understand the concept of alienation in terms of Entäusserung in the sense of the programme’s urging students to treat their mental processes as distinct entities that can be separated from each other. Such a distinction turns a person’s thoughts and emotions into objects of scrutiny and control and allows an even harsher process of disciplining.

The Marxist outlook on (un)alienation can be criticised for its romanticism. It would, however, be a mistake to believe Marx saw no suffering in the state of un-alienation. The ‘natural man’ does indeed suffer regularly, because there will always be unattainable goods (Marx and Engels 1963, 112). The concept of alienation aims to describe the suffering that arises from existence being shattered into a number of parts over which the subject has no control – a shattering that is not an inevitable part of the human condition (Ollman [1971] 1976, 135). In essence, alienation is the case when the subject is:

... separated from his work (he plays no part in deciding what to do or how to do it) – a break between the individual and his life activity. Man is said to be separated from his own products/ ... /a break between the individual and the material world (133).

This paper combines a normative (Marxist) stance on alienation and a less idealistic one (Foucault’s view on discourse). Hence, when alienation is applied in the analysis, we intend partly to convey this break between the teenagers participating in the programme and their activity of thought and the shattering of this mental activity into parts over which they have little control. We intend to analyse an alienation imposed on, or demanded from, the subject.

We also comprehend alienation perhaps even more cogently as a process representing some fundamental conditions organising (any type of) society. If language is prior to the self; the process of thinking and expressing oneself is always a matter of force, because the cultural system that produced language was there before the individual subject. When seen this way, an analysis that examines alienation in promotive programmes accepts that such alienation is inevitable and focuses on whether there
perhaps exist better and worse types of alienation. The type of alienation described by Lacan ([1977] 2001) may potentially bring about something creative or constructive: the ability to articulate oneself. But at the same time there may exist alienation of another type – a type that requires a break between individuals and their life activities, rather than just causing it because language and culture help to form the subject. This paper is interested in a kind of alienation that is requested or nurtured; alienation as a favoured state of mind.

**Everyday relationships up for scrutiny**

*The Book of Dreams* addresses a vast number of topics including attitudes towards challenges and adversities, ways of interacting in peer groups, techniques to stay alert when doing homework, and ways to sleep and eat healthily. What stands out in the tutorial material of *The Book of Dreams* is an orientation towards the intimate or even futile spheres of life, in which the controlling mechanisms can be envisaged.

But we also need clear images and visions for our close relations and how we want them to grow and develop. We need dreams for our health, for our exercise and other parts of our leisure time (*The Book of Dreams* Section 1:14).

Two central ideas in the programme are elaborated in the quotation above. The first one relates to training the formulation of dreams to reach the more intimate dimensions of life, while the second appears to argue that dreams may function as an engine of constant development or improvement. Maintaining the status quo in existing relations is suggested to be insufficient and should be replaced by a vision for refinement. This required striving leaves us with an image of the individual in the relation, as well as of the relation in itself, as an object for scrutiny and review (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2013, 6). The way we socialise and how we exercise and spend our free time become objects of study.

In the next quotation the separation between the teenagers and their experiences is a little more articulated and leisure, recreation, and amusement are treated as tools for enhancing and activating the subject’s interior domains.

All over the world music gives people rich and emotional experiences. The power of music affects our wellbeing, but also has *cognitive effects* [emphasis in original]. Researchers in Finland have seen how music making activates the whole brain and opens up new nerve paths in the brain. We also know that music activates the same areas in the brain as do concentration and empathy (*The Book of Dreams*, Section 2: 9).

The benefits of emotional experiences described in the text above are not only that they are signs of us being alive and vibrant, but that they provide the brain with advantageous cognitive effects. Music is almost portrayed as a workout for the brain. Aside from the pleasure we have when listening to music, its other positive side effects could be used strategically. As the text continues, the side effects become the showpiece; possible salutary effects become the main reason we should listen to music, not the joy of it.

As the text continues, this almost technical manipulation of the brain becomes more pronounced.
We don’t have to be active musicians to activate our brain through music. Just listening to the music of others affects our wellbeing. / … / According to school researcher John Hattie music can be used as a tool to evoke a new frame of mind, for example a sensation of serenity, where the music draws out positive feelings and thus the situation becomes more favourable for us. Other researchers support this reasoning and argue that depending on what type of music we choose we can cheer ourselves up when depressed, reduce sensations of pain and fall asleep easier. So, it is vital to choose the right type of music, suitable for the situation (The Book of Dreams, Section 2: 9).

In this section of the text the utility of listening to music is more pronounced. A researcher is brought into the argument to assure us that we can produce serenity (presumably a desirable sensation) through music. It is now actually vital to choose the right type of music, and what is more, music must be calibrated to fit the managed life as a whole and be adjusted to the current situation and expected effects. Still, the text apparently manifests other connotations. If it is vital to choose music in a calculated way, a more casual, impulsive, or pleasurable relation to music can be viewed as less useful. In this technical approach to art there may indeed be relaxation, enjoyment, and release, but these sensations seemingly hold little value in themselves. When articulated as planned exercise, they are valuable only if they are used as a rudder for our emotions or energy, because the value of music emerges as a force for self-manipulation. This, we argue, is indeed a way to strategically encourage a break between the individual and his life activity (Ollman [1971] 1976, 133), to achieve alienation.

All experiences and sensations can be used in this strategic way – even individual memories can be exploited.

Using an event or a memory from the past is a useful tool to find inspiration in the moment. When we think about earlier achievements and efforts which led to happiness, we recreate the memory and the sensations we once experienced become activated. This means we trigger the incentive and we will probably experience delight and inspiration to perform and succeed once more. As we remember that we actually made it at the time, we feel self-confident. To be able to find and retrieve these memories when we need them, we may have to practice the art of really observing situations in which we experience happiness. (The Book of Dreams, Section 2: 13).

This text proposes that memories from our lives can be applied as tools. This implies that our experiences are to be made into objects that do not entirely belong to us; we should not be fused with our experiences but regard them more technically. This inducement to technically manage oneself presupposes an active reinforcement of alienation. Furthermore, it seems that this alienation can be handled as a skill which can be augmented: finding and retrieving functional memories is an act of observing experiences of happiness. Moments of enchantment, joy, or blissful serenity should be recognised and cultivated from an internal example, enabling us to coach ourselves in the right direction. The inner coach, however, seems a little less serene and happy and more reserved – someone taking notes. Thinking of the Entäusserung dimension of alienation applied to the way workers experience work as something outside themselves, something instrumental, we can better understand the separation endorsed in the text above. In this case it is not work that is placed outside of the subject, but mental capacities. In the appeal to manipulate these capacities, we get to see alienation not only as the way in which the subject becomes formatted through
pre-existing language and culture, but as the even more active process of treating memories (in this case) as instruments to be carefully managed and trained for use in the continued improvement of the self.

*Necessary alienation or unnecessary complication?*

One main road towards improvement in *The Book of Dreams* is mastering and cultivating a dynamic mindset that leads to a productive, healthy, and energetic life through manipulating one’s attitudes. How then are less energetic or productive subjects (those with a static mindset) regarded? To get a clearer image of this, we need to look both at the texts in the tutorial material and the classroom teachings.

According to *The Book of Dreams*, to have a dynamic mindset equals knowing the difference between a ‘dream’ and a ‘goal’. We begin the classroom interaction analysis by looking at the manner in which dreams and goals are discursively separated from each other. In the extract to follow, the students have been introduced to the idea of the two mindsets, and are now asked to reflect upon the differences between two categories labelled ‘DREAM’ and ‘NOT A DREAM’.

On one side of the whiteboard she [the teacher] writes ‘DREAM’ and on the other ‘NOT A DREAM’. She goes on to ask the students to sort the differences between these two categories. The students reluctantly debate the differences for quite some time, without concluding. The teacher then tells the students that all types of change start with a dream, but to be able to realise the dream one has to have strong feelings about it. She tells them that all of them have what it takes to influence and change their lives. After a while the teacher states that dreams can be characterised by long-term or short-term thinking and planning. They may concern something we want to become or something we want to get. The teacher stresses that dreams, regardless of their content, must be clear and distinct. It is not enough, she asserts, to say ‘Tonight I’m going to go for a run’. Instead one must specify the dream by adding time and place: ‘Tonight at 7 o’clock I am going to run three laps on the track’ (Extract classroom, 2015).

This extract shows a couple of recurrent features of the classroom. The first is that the teachers do much of the programme-required talking themselves. The second is the technically infused discourse in which the participants are instructed to separate different faculties of thinking or categories of objects (e.g., ‘dreams’ and ‘not dreams’). The third feature is the discursive focus on presumed abilities to influence or steer one’s life expectancies. In the teaching there were no accounts of life changes that did not relate to the subjects themselves, meaning that change in this particular discourse results from interpreting the meaning and carefully managing dreams. Seemingly, changes do not come about by chance, unexpected events, or from opportunities gained through no effort from the subject. The fact that dreams need to be so precisely defined may be seen as an extreme version of governmentality in the literally sense of the concept: the pedagogic work aims to govern (control, regulate, adjust) the mentality (reasoning and emotions) of the participating teenagers. Dreams have to be specified. In this case, to simply have a dream of running is insufficient; to receive the epithet of ‘dream’ it needs to be quantifiable.

In terms of governing, this means training young people to think in terms of evaluable and concrete results, rather than experiences. To just go running may actually
produce similar sensations as running three laps around the track: one might feel alert, satisfied, and revived. When the dream is to specifically run three laps, what is added is the sensation of a concrete achievement that can be evaluated as ‘better’ (better than before or better than a friend) or for that matter ‘worse’. The latter type of dream (defined as the correct type of dream) implies a more articulated possibility of improvement.

We now move on to investigate the teachings about the static/dynamic mindset. The most common classroom observation was that the student responses were very brief. In what follows we look at two examples of when mindsets were addressed. In the first, the students did not respond at all and the teacher provided the answer; in the second a response was finally elicited.

Teacher: If I have a static mindset, how do I reason? [NO ANSWER]. ‘This doesn’t work’. That is, you are discouraged already at the outset. You … You don’t even try. If you instead have a dynamic mindset but still fail, how would you reason? [NO ANSWER]. You think ‘I can learn from this, now I know what I need to practice more’ (Classroom extract 2017).

What is striking in this account is its reductionist simplicity. Almost all context around the exemplary situation is removed and the students are faced with a situation painted in black and white: either you fail, or you fight no matter what. The exemplary situations provided, lacking any detail or additional information, also point towards individualisation in which all responsibility for success or failure is actively placed on the subject, Crawford 2006; Hughes 1997; Share and Strain 2008). In the example given by the teacher, the participants’ answers can really only be arbitrary, as the situation suggested is so vague that it could be described as virtually non-existent. The extract above thus provides a tentative explanation for the students’ silence.

Complexity is also reduced in the situations suggested for practising a dynamic mindset. In one classroom observation, the students were given different scenarios and asked to choose a course of action and discuss what their choices might lead to.

Teacher: [Reads aloud from the instructions in The Book of Dreams] ‘My friends want to go for a coffee after school, but I don’t have any money.’ How can this problem be solved? [NO ANSWER]. How would you address this? [NO ANSWER]. Any suggestions? Marietta perhaps? [MARIETTA SHAKES HER HEAD]. Have you been able to think about this? [NO ANSWER]. Perhaps you may want to go home to a friend’s house and bake a cake?

Student, boy: No. If you lack the money for coffee, you probably don’t have the money to buy ingredients either.

Teacher: So that suggestion was no good?

Student, another boy: Ask your friend to pay this time and you’ll pay the next.

The question arising from this classroom interaction may be how this everyday situation relates specifically to the mindsets. Should we understand that mindsets regulate the tiniest details in life, the minutest difficulties students might encounter? If so, the exchange above can be seen as alienation in two senses. First, what happens in the
extract seems to be that familiar contexts are estranged and made into objects of scrutiny. Second, elementary problems are made more complex. Everyday life turns into a complex technicality and an unreflective impulse (to ask a friend for money) is suddenly defined as a ‘solution’ to a ‘problem’. The familiar becomes unfamiliar.

Alienation: business as usual or resistance?

There are two other ways in which alienation is notable in the classroom settings. The first one is how regular attitudes, relations, or approaches in the classroom live on in the context of Life in Action, apparently unthreatened by the discourse of the programme. The second feature of alienated behaviour is intimated in situations where students, implicitly or explicitly, challenge the ethos of the programme.

Next, we look at how condescending views were launched in a situation where the students were supposed to find uplifting messages to help maintain motivation. Instead, they made jokes and self-loathing remarks.

Teacher: Okay, think like this: ‘What’s my quote today?’ Something you can keep in mind during the day to feel motivated and engaged. So that you are responsive.

[The students, seated in smaller groups, start searching the internet on their laptops. A couple of boys stand together and browse through web pages. Two boys on the other side of the classroom are practising to stutter].

Student, boy: Th-th-th-th-that’s g-g-g-good, th-th-th-that’s j-j-j-just f-f-f-fine.

[They laugh].

Student, another boy: Th-th-th-that’s g-g-g-good, hahahaha.

Teacher: [Studying a page in The Book of Dreams, seemingly talking to herself] ‘Every step you take is growth.’ God, that’s such a great quote. That’s how it is.

[Two girls are seated, in front of the teacher].

Student, girl: Shit, look at me. I mean, my God, I’ve become so fat.

In this sequence it is as if two worlds of meaning exist parallel to, but not affecting, one another. What we see in this situation may be a kind of immunity amongst the students to the message from the programme. Although Life in Action aims to instil democratically infused and productive values, the life worlds of the students goes on without much change. Their world – as it is performed in this situation – seems to consist partially of condescending outlooks upon people with speech defects and an internalised misogyny where the female body falls short. In that sense, the students are estranged from the very outset; the message has not reached them. Their pre-existing values, however destructive and exclusionary in this case, keep them from taking in the cheerful advice conveyed in the programme, much as Lacan ([1977] 2001) described the ‘I’ born into a cultural structure that forms and limits the ability to speak. The norms by which these students seemingly abide, the culture into which they are born, is remarkably stable; it is business as usual.
Simultaneously, other situations in the classroom should perhaps be seen as a kind of resistance, or at least reluctance, to abide by the unspoken postulates of the exercises. In an observed sequence, the students were asked to discuss dilemmas in smaller groups before a group discussion with the teacher.

Teacher: [Reads aloud from *The Book of Dreams*] ‘You find tomorrow’s maths test at the copying machine – what do you do?’

Student, boy: That one is easy, I’ll just take it. I’d photograph it with my phone and then give it to you to make myself look like a total teacher’s pet.

Teacher: I normally consider how I myself would like events to turn out if I was the one affected.

This student is apparently untouched by the discourse about personal responsibility and improvement, or he uses the discourse for another type of comportment; he maintains an enterprising form of conduct stating that he would cheat *and* flatter the teacher in one move, and he is open about it.

When we debate advanced liberal techniques, we usually conceptualise them as social transformations, but in economic terms. Liberalism, especially in the metaphor of the economic man, seems to portray individuals as calculating subjects making choices in their own interests (Rose 1999, 142). This student seems to fit that economic model, and perhaps his answer should not come as a surprise given the circumstances. The reply from the teacher, however, indicates she is not satisfied with the response. She intimates that the student is not compassionate enough because he does not consider the situation of the teacher who set the test. Does she consider the student too economic in his reasoning? Perhaps this boy has embraced only half of the discourse, the part that presses for personal success, but left out the part encouraging self-knowledge and reflection. He certainly appears to have a dynamic mindset, but not that of a reflective and moderate citizen who is willing to work hard to get ahead. Instead he displays the mentality of a crook who definitely goes for his dreams and is precisely the conscious director of his life that Life in Action demands; however, the programme is meant to foster another type of consciousness.

This type of resistance (or frank declaration) and the teacher’s response are chosen to illustrate another point altogether: perhaps alienation (in the Marxist) sense was already there at the start of the programme? The programme’s teachings instil one type of alienated behaviour, but it is also possible that many of the students are already alienated at the outset, only more brutally, making them crass and action-oriented. If that is so, the programme cannot reach the students and fails to alienate them in the desired fashion, as this formation is already complete.

**Alienation is my relation**

In this paper, we have analysed technologies of promotion in relation to how they are articulated and practised in the Life in Action programme. So, what are the main products of this type of programme? From this analysis, two seemingly paradoxical conclusions can be drawn. Nothing much at all is produced and, simultaneously, the participants’ minds are forcefully made up. As demonstrated in the observations, the programme does not seem to be meaningful to the students. The participating
teenagers were largely uninterested at the outset, sometimes openly resisting the programme, and were difficult to reach as pre-existing classroom norms appeared to remain dominant. Discipline as a learning process (Hörnqvist 2012) therefore apparently failed, at least partially.

However, leaving the content of the training sessions aside and focusing on the meta-message of the programme, it can be argued that it is a potentially strong governing tool, at least in its intentions. Achieving alienation by provoking a psychic split is suggested in this paper both as a working mechanism within and an outcome of the programme. Different scholars have touched on a similar division, such as the tension between ‘I’ and ‘me’ discussed by Mead (1982) or the reflexivity and plasticity of the self-posited by Giddens (1991). Bringing alienation into the analysis adds the possibility of discussing the systematic manner in which these kinds of programmes might estrange familiar realities and psychological states, turning them into alien objects. The ways a person goes running, listens to music, or interacts with peers are made the topics of scrutiny and regarded as suitable for intervention. The programme seems unable to leave things alone, a feature that perhaps distorts the habitual: everyday reality is presented to participants inside out. One feature of alienation as Lacan ([1977] 2001) described it, is that subjects are mostly unaware of its operation in their interior domains; they were born into alienation. The estranged alienation taking place within Life in Action, however, seem to interfere after a discourse about the mundane had been consumed by the individual: it was launched into the thinking of the participants and aimed to alter the way they understood the world. In that sense, this type of Entäusserung is possibly more invasive, or has greater ambitions, than the alienation of the pre-existing culture and language into which people are born.

Presumably, this Entäusserung would be the ‘worse’ type of alienation, as it is not the result of everyday socialisation, but is actively brought into the classroom where students are urged to participate. For that reason, one may presume that a ‘desirable outcome’ of participation in the programme is precisely alienation; alienation is required. The self supervising the self, as conceptualised in The Book of Dreams and in the classroom settings, requires constant work. In that sense there appears to be a relation between this specific type of inner work and alienation: in order to remove negativity, doubts, and criticism from our psyche, we need to allow alienation. It is perhaps even possible to consider the promotion of the preferred dynamic mindset as a kind of fetishising activity. In the same way a fetish is separated from Man, something ‘manufactured’ if following the original Lain meaning of the word (Pietz 1985, 5), parts of the psyche are separated from the individual in Life in Action, and manufactured into something else. Hence, the positive emphasis on the dynamic mindset may be conceived of as both the result of, and an expression of, Entäusserung.

Within the programme, we noted three specific dimensions of governance in which Marxist alienation evolves. The first is the way alienation is looked upon as a strategy for manipulating the mind (e.g., students being asked to use art to manage their emotions). The second is the use of alienation as a technique (e.g., encouraging students to use happy memories to enhance motivation). The third is viewing alienation as a skill (e.g., in how the participants are encouraged to distinguish dreams from goals).

Nevertheless, it is vital to point out how these applications of alienation are aimed to improve the lives of the teenagers, making them healthier and more productive. Seeing it that way, becoming somewhat alienated is perhaps a necessary condition for a person who wants to prosper in late capitalist societies. As Dean and Hindess
(1998) suggest, techniques of citizenship are designed and performed within the context of the market. Alienation may therefore also be defined as an adequate workout for the brain that prepares the young minds for what is to come. The required alienation is a consequence of how structural characteristics transform the pedagogics of citizen formation. Improved social and emotional skills could be viewed as integral to a kind of mental mobility required by late capitalism. That would, paradoxically, make the Entäusserung launched though Life in Action well-intentioned. The self that monitors itself is the very promotive ingredient in the promotion programme of Life in Action.

Notes

1. The study was approved by the regional review board of research ethics in Gothenburg (Dnr 467–14).
2. The institute ordering the evaluation – Ideas for Life – is independent from, but funded by, the Swedish insurance company Skandia. For more details, visit: https://www.ideerforlivet.se/.
3. The baseline measures were carried out in all schools working with Life in Action in September 2014.
4. In Spradley’s (1980) typology, nonparticipation describes a situation in which the researcher gains knowledge by observing phenomena from the outside. The researcher may for instance consult blogposts, magazines, or TV shows. Passive participation is carried out when the researcher is present but purely as a non-interacting observer. In moderate participation the researcher is present and identified by the group members as a researcher, but rarely actively participates or interacts. In complete participation the researcher becomes a member of the group being observed.
5. Fredric Jameson presents an illuminating example of that type of alienation in asking how many share his experience of trying to recount an enthralling dream, only to find ‘the qualitative incommensurability, between the vivid memory of the dream and the dull, impoverished words which are all we can find to convey it’ (Jameson 1977, 339).

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