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Expectations, identity & goals
A study of student motivation and learning on
the assistant nurse training program in adult education

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Abstract

This paper discusses expectations, identity and goals of students on the assistant nurse program in adult education. This particular program is a compacted version of the secondary level assistant nurse training program in Swedish secondary schools. The meaning of the program is to give people a quick qualification to people who need it in order to enter employment in the healthcare sector. The program is financed by the Swedish employment agency that employs educational contractors to run the program.

 The data in the study was taken from a questionnaire that 35 students filled in, who are currently engaged in the program. Two interviews were also done in order to create a bigger picture of the experiences of the students. The reason for this study was to examine the expectations and goals that students have on the program and see how it has an effect on identity. The Swedish employment agency has expectations for the people given an opportunity to do the program. This study examines if the students expectations and the Swedish employment agency's expectations are in accord with one another.

Keywords: Motivation, self-efficacy, identity, expectancy-value theory, intrinsic/extrinsic values, expectations, goals.

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Introduction

In my work as a teacher in adult education I meet many students who for a variety of reasons have begun studying the assistant nurse program. The Swedish employment agency has the responsibility of offering a place to prospective candidates. After showing interest in the program the students go through a four week introduction to see if they are suited for the program. The program is built up of individual courses that are between 3 to 6 weeks in duration. The courses cover a variety of subjects that range from healthcare 1 & 2, ethics, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, special educational needs, geriatrics and dementia. At the end of every course the student receives a grade that is A, B, C, D, E depending on how well they have achieved or a grade of F if the person has not reached the expected result. The program is secondary level education in a more compact form for adults that are in need of a qualification in order to enter the employment market.

I am very interested in why some students succeed in reaching their goals and why some students do not succeed in reaching their goals. The expectations attached to goals are of interest also. How the identity of students is formed is also of interest. One of the main reasons why I wrote this paper was to investigate how expectations, identity and goals are linked together by the students.

Purpose

The framework for this paper is student motivation. As a teacher in adult education I observe that a large amount of motivation is required on the part of students in order to finish the assistant nurse program. Whereas some students discontinue, other students complete the program to the end and are very goal oriented. The students that are goal oriented have a motivation that leads them to their desired result. It is this area of motivation I shall investigate.

I shall discuss areas that are closely related to motivation. Firstly, there is the area of student expectations. What do students expect of themselves? What goals do they hope to achieve on the assistant nurse program? A second aspect is how these expectations relate to the students sense of identity. Is there a difference between how men and women experience the program? Do their own expectations as opposed to the expectations of the Swedish employment agency add or detract from the sense of self?

It is therefore the questions in the questionnaire and in the interviews are about expectations, identity and student goals. The Swedish employment agency has the goal that participants given a placement on the assistant nurse program shall join the fulltime labour market when finished. This overall goal on the part of an authority may well clash with student goals. The goals that a student has may or may not be in harmony with the goal that the Swedish employment agency has. The question of goals is a very relevant one. Here are some of the key questions addressed:

- What do students see as their main goal on the assistant nurse program?
- What form does their identity take on as a student?
- Do students expect to reach the goal that the Swedish employment agency has for them?

- Does this goal harmonize with the students' main goal?

- Is there a difference between the expectations and self-efficacy of men and women on the auxiliary nurse program? Do men have different expectations in a women dominated work sector?

- To what extent do fellow students have an influence on one another and are they conscious of it?

- How important is the teacher or school's role for the students?

We can sum up the main purpose of this paper with the questions: What expectations do students have and what are their goals on the assistant nurse program? Are they the same as the same as the goals of the Swedish employment agency?

Earlier research

Personal and social identities

Firstly it must be acknowledged that the term identity has many definitions and perspectives. Two of which are personal identities and social identities (Eccles, 2009). Eccles discusses the personal identity as the parts of identity that deal with making oneself a unique person. In contrast, social identity is related to the parts of the person that relates to social bonds. These social bonds can be nationality, class, family, culture, religion, race or sex (Eccles, 2009). In the context of this paper, one can add being a student in adult education to this list of social connections. Eccles helps us to see that the combination of these two types namely, the personal and the social identities that help people ultimately define who they are to others and to themselves.

Hammerén & Johansson (Hammerén & Johansson, 2009) describe one aspect of identity as a psychological maturity, which is grounded in Erik Erikson's developmental psychology. Erikson reasoned that in order to reach psychological maturity it is necessary for the individual to succeed through a series of developmental psychological challenges. A second aspect that Hammerén & Johansson (2009) discuss is identity as a social role and process. This social identity gives individuals a place in society, within the realm of social structures. This is similar to the perspective of social identity that Eccles (2009) explains to us. Through interactions with other people, individuals define who they are for others and maybe more importantly for themselves. It is the definition of personal self that I shall try to hold to in mentioning identity throughout the paper. Yet, it must be acknowledged that personal and social identities are intertwined because individuals are always found in a social setting of some kind that adds or detracts from their personal identity, the core of who they are inside.

According to Eccles (2009) two of the most important questions an individual seeks to find the answer to is who am I? And what am I going to do with my life? It is in the very quest for the answers to these questions that we are motivated to action. It is these very questions that are considered in the course of this paper in relation to the students that answered the questionnaire and in the interviews.

Social learning theory and self-efficacy

Learning from others is a main way in which we gather in knowledge of the world around us. The interactions and the observations we make help us or hinder us in this process. Bandura developed the theory of self-efficacy which he later developed and went on to write the book *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control* (Bandura, 1997). The theory of self-efficacy can be defined as the measure of an individual own ability to reach goals and complete tasks or assignments.

There are four main aspects that Bandura draws to our attention that influence self-efficacy. The first and main source of efficacy expectations is that of *Performance accomplishments*. When an individual builds up a pattern of success on tasks, the *self-efficacy* within the person is strengthened. In contrast, patterns of failure have a tendency to lower expectations. With a strong self-efficacy individuals build up a degree of persistence through experience that helps the individual to see that many obstacles can be overcome if one does not give up. The degree of self-efficacy is determined by the overall pattern of experiences which include the social context and the timing of events (Bandura, 1977).

The second area is that of *vicarious experience.* This means that a person, in their watching or observing other people, can see others perform acts that may be deemed as threatening in some way. Yet, in the observation one sees that it is not so threatening after all and that certain threatening situations can be deal with without disastrous consequences. This provides the observer the motivation to continue in an effort to succeed at a task. Even if Bandura related much of this work to people with phobias it shows none the less that it can be possible through sheer perseverance to gain mastery over a task at hand.

Verbal persuasion was another feature that Bandura (1977) draws our attention to in understanding expectations. This is a method that I have personally observed and used in my interactions with students. However, even as Bandura points out, persuading a person to believe that they have the ability and overcome a hinder can easily be crushed by the person's own experience of not succeeding at a given task. A contradiction arises for the person in question. Simply put, the actual previous experience or belief the person has does not match the words that they hear. Therefore, the expectations are due to be weaker than if they had a firsthand experience of succeeding at a task.

Emotional arousal is a fourth characteristic Bandura (1977) brings to our attention. High arousal according to Bandura generally debilitates an individual's ability to deal with a taxing situation. It has a negative effect on the person's self-efficacy and produces a fear factor. By dwelling on their inability, individuals experience a higher degree of anxiety than the task actual brings in reality.

It is these four aspects I shall bring into the discussion part of this paper. The four key pillars of enactive, vicarious, emotive and exhortative sources of information are according to Bandura the areas that individuals use to make a judgement of their own self-efficacy.

Expectancy-value theory

Eccles & Wigfield's expectancy-value model links achievement performance, choice and persistence to the persons' task-value belief and expectancy related belief (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). According to Eccles & Wigfield, value and expectancies are linked to a host of social, psychological and cultural aspects that make them much more complex than previously thought. Another aspect is that values and expectancies have a positive correlation to one another.

There are four major areas which Eccles & Wigfield takes up when discussing task-value. The first is *attainment value*. This is the personal importance for an individual of succeeding in a given task. What is the value of gaining this skill or knowledge to the individual? This can be directly related to the individuals' identity. The person is either confirmed or not confirmed in the task at hand and it is a process that affects identity.

The second aspect is one of *intrinsic value.* This can be defined as the pleasure a person receives as a result of the activity at hand. Being actively engaged in an activity brings an enjoyment to the person. Learning a skill brings a certain satisfaction to the learner. A sense of accomplishment that is related to the individual's identity, comprises this intrinsic value.

The third aspect of *utility value* can be defined as how well an activity relates to the persons' immediate goals now and ones in the future. It can be explained in the terms of how important the actual activity is for the person and what the acquired skill or knowledge person can use it for. Is it of practical value to them? These have also been defined by Deci & Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as "extrinsic" reasons for engaging in an activity.

Fourthly, Eccles puts forth the idea that cost is imperative to a person's engagement. Questions that are raised are: Will I fail or will I succeed? How much effort will I need to expend in order to gain success? These are questions of cost. The opportunities that are lost because one choice has been made and not another choice is also about cost. All of these aspects can be summed up by the question: Is the engagement in a course of activity worth it? There comes a cost with every activity. It can be from the fear of the unknown. The dichotomy of succeeding or not succeeding that can create anxiety. A fear of not knowing what the result will be can add to this anxiety. It is these theories that we shall consider when analyzing the results. The four dimensions of both theories shall be drawn on when discussing the findings in the study. Both s*ocial learning theory* and *expectancy-value theory* shall lay the basis for the dicussion.

One last piece of research I shall draw on is a paper (Magisteruppsats) by Manuela Lupsa titled: *A Study of Dropout from the Vocational Nursing Program on Komvux Söder* (Lupsa, 2010). The main research in this paper is about the reasons why students that have discontinued the assistant nurse program. However, the paper also gives important insights into why students choose this specific program. Lupsa brings to the fore important qualitative interviews that show that although employment is a motivating factor for students, other factors play an important part in the choices made. This relates an aspect of identity that shall be delved into under the discussion part.

Method

In this study there are two main pieces of research. A quantitative study, the means used being a questionnaire that students were required to fill in. To complement the study, two personal interviews were done. The reason for using both methods is too gain a broader picture of the overall view of the expectations, identity and goals of students on the assistant nurse program. At the same time it is also a wish to gain a deeper understanding of the students' inner thoughts and contemplations of their learning.In order to find relevant literature I have used GUNDA, LIBRIS and ERIC. The literature on the course PDG X51 provided a base for the reference material.

The multi choice questionnaire is divided into two main parts. In the first part, the students were first asked to fill in a questionnaire that gave some background information. The initial background questions asked touched on: Gender, age, marital status, whether or not one was born in Sweden, earlier education, has the student worked in the healthcare sector before and why the person wants to work in the healthcare sector. This part of the study was done with a view to get an overall picture of the students involved in the study and on the program. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of seventeen multi choice questions. The questions ranged from how students experienced the assistant nurse program, what their goals were, have they have been influenced by others, have they have influenced others, have the teachers influenced them, did they think studying was hard, will they reach their goal of assistant nurse employment and has the program contributed to their overall self confidence in being an auxiliary nurse.

Using a fixed response scale, the questions where rated on a scale of 1 to 8. When answering, students could circle the number they thought was appropriate for the question. Even though a scale of 1 to 8 was used, there were only four choices to choose from. This meant that when

the students answered, they gave a 1 or 2 for the highest degree of agreement with the question, a 3 or 4 for a high degree of agreement with the question, a 5 or 6 for a low degree of agreement with the question and finally a 7 or 8 for a total disagreement with the question. On all seventeen questions the students must ring in the number that they thought was in harmony with their experience. This method of four choices was a recommended form in *Enkätboken* (The Questionnaire book, translation mine) (Trost, J. 2009). The positive side of this method was to encourage the participants to choose a determined stance when they answered the question instead of choosing the middle alternative if there had of been five choices. It also meant that the answers could be compacted from 8 alternatives to 4 alternatives for use in diagrams and charts. In some of the results I have decided to cluster the answers into groups that are described as positive or negative, in order to give an overall picture of the data.

The qualitative part is made up of two interviews with individual students. In contrast, the interviews gave an opportunity to gain a deeper level of understanding to students' sense of identity. The interviews were performed using a semi-structured method (Widerberg, 2002). An interview guide was used to provide a base structure. Room was left for additional questions if the need arose. The interviews were recorded on MP3, were transcribed and took about 45 minutes each. Under the interviews effort was made to type in the answers directly on the computer as the person spoke. This method gave an opportunity to ask the participant to repeat the answer if it was unclear.

I have used a method of sentence concentration to shorten the interviews to make easier reading. This also provided opportunity for a more meaningful context when analyzing the responses and gave the possibility to reduce longer texts to more precise, accurate formations. I specifically chose two younger students with a purpose in mind. I wanted to see if their age played a part in how they viewed the program. The interviewees consisted of one man who

was 24 years of age and one woman who was 22 years of age. I choose a man and a woman to compare gender differences and similarities with one another. Both of the candidates have also been involved in filling in the questionnaire. The purpose was clearly explained and the interviewees were given the interview questions a couple of days in advance to give them time to reflect on the answers. The ethical issues of voluntary engagement were also explained and they were also given the choice to stop participating if the need arose.

Both methods complement one another and serve the chosen purpose. The questionnaire format gives a broad view whereas the personal interviews give a depth to the understanding of the students. There are three main groups of questions that were asked. The first groups of questions are about the student's expectations and the goals attached to those expectations. The questions related to goals became an important part of the study that shall be discussed in the sections on result and discussion. The second grouping had to do with the individual's learning on the program. The final group of questions took up the area of motivation and the reasons why the person began studying. Using these sets of questions provided a basis for extracting the appropriate data.

All participants are students in adult education. They are studying the assistant nurse program at a private school that has been contracted by the Swedish employment authority. In total there were 35 students that participated in the filling out of the questionnaire. The students come from priority groups who the Swedish employment authority deems are best suited for the program. The students that filled out the questionnaire have all been on the program for more than six months and study fulltime, that is, forty hours a week. Two interviewees have been picked specifically to give an in-depth picture of what it means to be a younger student on the program. This was done to gain a deeper understanding of the identity forming process amongst adults on the program.

There are certain aspects that must be considered in relation to reliability and validity. My work as a teacher here at this school influences the result in different ways. I have tried to counteract this effect by explaining clearly to the participants that their participation is voluntary and at anytime they wish they can stop participating. It was also clearly explained that participation would in no way affect the result they received on the program and that was of scientific nature. Those that requested a copy of the paper after it was completed would receive one. Both the filling in of the questionnaire and the interviews took place at the school.

I did a "trial run" with a test questionnaire, one week beforehand, with the group of students that filled out the questionnaires. This was done to make the students feel more comfortable with the idea and acquaint them with the questions. The meaning was to acquaint the students with the format of the questionnaire. One week later the students filled in the "real" questionnaire.

The questionnaire and the questions for the interviews were also tested on a "test person" that was not involved in the study, to see if they would be understood or if adjustment needed to be made. Minor adjustments in the wording of some of the questions were made. To ensure reliability, all questions were reviewed by the supervisor before the questionnaire or interviews were undertaken. This was done to make sure that the study measured what we set out to measure namely, students' expectations, identities and goals on the program

I was conscious of the role and power that I have as a teacher and that the students might provide what they believe to be the correct answer in order to please me and not reflect their true opinions. This also was one of the reasons why I chose to do a "trial run". One aspect that led to lesser participation than expected was that 15 students were out doing practical work experience for a month. This meant that when the arranged questionnaire was filled in this

group of 15 students were not available to participate. Weighing this up I do not conclude that it shall affect the overall pattern of results. The 15 students out on their practical do not represent a special group of students. They are a random group of 15 selected from the total number of students on the program. On the given day chosen, all of the students invited to participate did so which meant that the fallout was zero at the time the study was carried out. People who arrived late that day were given the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire under my supervision.

A point that is worthy of note is that all the participants have completed more than half of the program at the time of answering the questionnaire. Some students have finished because of health reasons, absenteeism, and lack of engagement in their studies, unforeseen events or private difficulties in their lives. Some finished voluntarily and others not. The Swedish employment agency has the responsibility for all decisions made regarding each individual student. This group that did not complete the program is interesting in itself ironically they may be in the biggest need of an education. On the other hand it is the groups of students that has persevered and are completing the program that participated in the questionnaires and interviews.

This is also true of the interviewees. They both were young adults who have completed more than half of the program and are on their way to completing the education. It must be clarified that they are not a cross section of the young students who joined at the beginning of the program. Many young people have not continued. This is a group which needs further research in the future.

A factor that must be considered is the area of comprehension or understanding of the questionnaire. A number of the students have been born in lands outside Sweden and therefore may have a certain difficulty in reading, understanding and interpreting the

questions. One example of this was where a female student born outside Sweden answered the name of her country of birth when filling in the details on *status.* The required answer was one of single, married, lone-parent etc. I was able to correct this detail at the time by explaining to the participant what *status* meant.

Whether a generalization of this data can be made depends on certain factors. Many individuals take a study loan (CSN) in order to study the assistant nurse education each year in Sweden. This means that a person has voluntarily sought out the program and shall pay back the money borrowed for the study loan. This group differs from groups that are signed on at the Swedish employment agency. All individuals that participated in both the interviews and the questionnaires belong to a group that is signed on at the local employment agency. They have not taken a study loan because they are provided with an economic contribution from the Swedish employment agency to support them under the time they study. This contribution does not need to be repaid even if the student does not complete the program whereas someone who takes a study loan and does not complete the education must pay back the study loan.

Another difference is that the students who take a study loan must also pay for all literature used on the program whereas students from the employment agency are provided with all literature from the school, on a loan basis. This may mean that there is a larger element of voluntary involvement on the program for those who actively seek out the program of their own volition. They make a deliberate career choice of auxiliary nurse whereas those allocated a place by the Swedish employment agency are in a measure provided by society, that can be deemed as non-voluntary.

This means that the data cannot be generalized to all groups that study the assistant nurse program. However, to groups that are signed on at the Swedish employment agency and are

given a placement on the program one may be able to generalize but, with caution because even within a group there can be variance. Another variable which must be considered is that the town where the study was carried out is a medium sized town with one of the highest unemployment statistics in the whole of Sweden.

The principles outlined in the *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning* (Ethical principles in humanistic and social science research, translation mine) (vr.se, 2009) state four main principles guiding ethics within research. The first aspect is that the researcher shall inform the participants about the purpose of the study. Secondly, the participants have the right to decide over their voluntary participation. Thirdly, participants can stop their participation whenever they choose to do so. Fourthly, if the participant chooses not to be involved there should be no repercussions as a result of the decision.

The explanation has been given to all the participants in the study relating the purpose to which the study is undertaken. It has also been explained clearly that the study is specifically about students' experiences on the assistant nurse program in relation to expectations, identity and goals. The right to decide themselves over their voluntary participation was also explained and at any time during the questionnaire or interview can students decide to terminate their participation. It was also explained that this study is not related to the assistant nurse education and the grade that they receive on the program. The students that have filled in the questionnaire and those that have participated in the interviews have all been given the chance to decline their participation voluntary if they so wish. However, all those that were asked have consented to be involved and have responded positively to the invitation.

Certain aspects remain worthy of consideration. One of the aspects is my position as teacher and whether or not the choice to be involved on the part of the students was voluntary. The

very fact that the students interact with me everyday has an effect on this choice. Some may have felt this was not really a choice but more of a compulsion and gave in to the pressure however real or imagined that might be. Fellow students also have an effect on one another and so participation may have been based more on peer pressure than an inner desire to willingly be involved. After a careful weighing up of these factors I deem the results reliable.

The aspect of confidentiality arises and has been explained to the participants as clearly as possible. The name of the school shall not be used or the town where the school is located. It shall be referred to as "the school." When referring to the town, where need arises, it shall be described by me as a middle sized town in west Sweden. At the school where the study was carried out, verbal consent has been given by the principal.

To insure anonymity, all participants in the questionnaire have been given a number instead of using their name. In the study they shall be referred by the number allocated to them. This means that people not involved in the study cannot identity the participants. The two interviewees have been informed that all recordings shall be deleted after the study is completed. The information shall not be used for any other purpose other than the study at hand. Everything shall be done to protect the integrity of the individuals involved. This is in accord with rule 6 found in *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk samhällsvetenskaplig forskning* (Ethical principles in humanistic and social science research, translation mine) (vr.se, 2009)

Result

Population & selection

In displaying the results I shall first describe the results of the questionnaire then later I shall discuss the results from the interviews. I have also clustered the questions together to gain a clearer picture of the main theme of expectations, identity and goals.The age span of the

participants is between 21 and 60 years of age. The average is 38 years of age. There are 27 women that answered the questionnaire and 8 men. Of these 35 students 23 were born in Sweden and 12 were born outside Sweden. A total of 25 students had completed secondary education, 8 students had completed some form of university education and 2 had only completed primary level education. Of these 35 students, 27 had experienced working in the healthcare industry, to a greater or lesser degree, whereas 8 students had not worked at all in the branch. The distribution of age and gender can be seen on the accompanying chart.
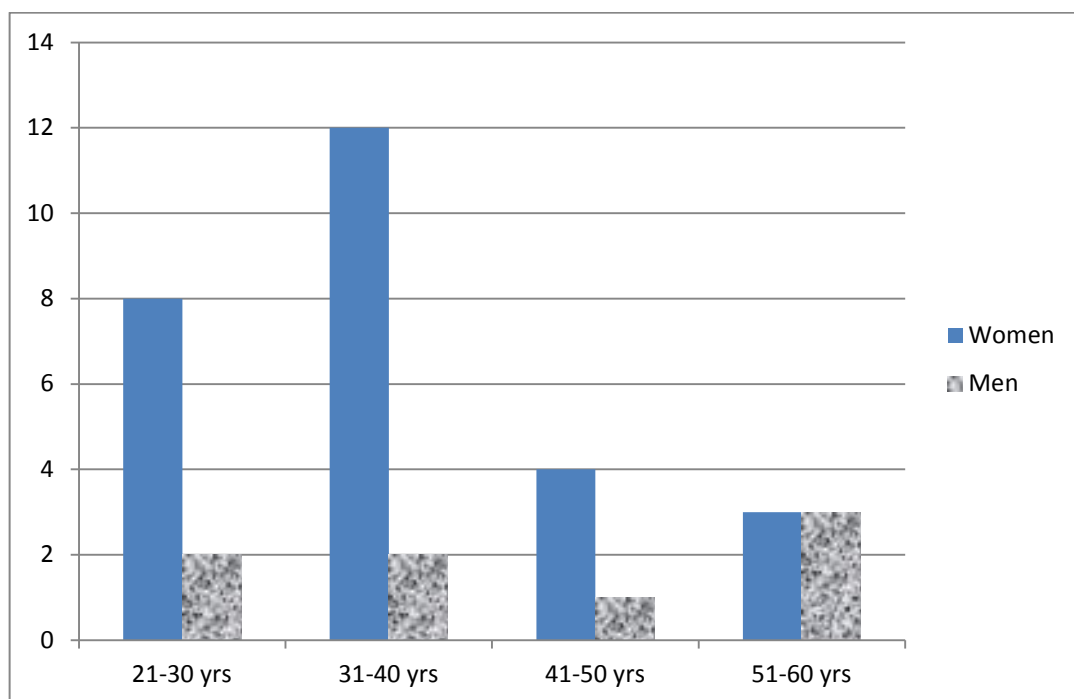
Figure 1. Age and gender distribution of students on the auxiliary nurse program that partook in the questionnaire. (N=35)

Goals

Starting with the realm of goals, the first question on the questionnaire asked: *Was the main goal you started studying to get a job?* All the students answered the question positively. Not a single one answered in the negative. It showed that overall, the 35 students have a very specific goal orientation and that goal is in harmony with the goal from the Swedish

employment agency. That goal is to provide an education within a specific branch that enables individuals to enter fulltime employment in the healthcare as an assistant nurse. This indicates that the main goal is clear and well defined by the student themselves. When asked if they thought that goal would be reached? Every student answered affirmatively and not a single one answered negatively. This was also reinforced by question 8 and 12, which took up the area of possibilities on the job market and whether the program will lead the person to employment. The answers are affirmative and not one student answered in the negative. This indicates that the self-belief and the expectations of the students are on a high level and have a positive orientation. The goal is clear and defined and their belief in fulfilling their goal is positive. The main goal for the student on the program is to get fulltime employment as an assistant nurse. There seems to no sign in the answers to the first question that indicate anything else. This main goal is one that the student expects to reach.

Peer influence

There are 3 questions linked the effect that students have on one another: *3.Have your fellow students affected your goal under the program? 13. Do you feel that fellow students have affected your studies? 14. Do you feel that you influenced other fellow students in their studies?* Only 2 men answered positively to question 3 and 6 men answered negatively, whereas 10 women answered positively and 17 answered negatively. To question 13 only 1 man felt that others affected him and 7 felt that other students had little or no influence on them. When we compare this to women answering the same question, we find that 10 answered that others had an effect on their studying, whereas 17 felt that there was little to no effect. In answering the question on influencing others in question 14, only 2 men felt that they influenced others and 6 felt they did not. There were 10 women that answered affirmatively and 17 felt that they had little or no effect on other students on the program.

Differences between men and women

One may well draw the conclusion that women on the program believe that they are affected to a greater degree by their fellow students, in the realm of goal and studies. They believe that they to some degree affect others and are affected by others. Men on the other hand answered in the majority that they do not influence others and are not influenced by others. This could indicate that men do not acknowledge that they are affected to the same extent as women do, even if they are affected to some degree. There is a salient feature here amongst women students that shall be discussed further in the discussion section of this paper. When answering the question relating to identity and self belief (Question 11) 6 men answered positively and 2 answered negatively. This can be compared with 25 women who answered positively and 2 negatively. This may indicate that the program increases women's self belief, affecting their identity more than it does that of men.

Role of the teacher and school

There are two questions that focused on the role that the teachers (who are the main representatives for the school) played on the program (Question 15 & 16). When answering questions related to the role the teachers played and the demands placed upon them, the students were asked if the teachers had contributed to their motivation. There were 7 men that answered positively whereas 1 answered that he was not really affected by the teacher. On the contrary, 24 women answered positively and 3 responded negatively. This suggests that there is little or no difference between the effect the teacher had on students, between men and women. In relation to the demands that teachers put on the students on the program, 1 man responded that the demands are too high and 7 answered that they are too low. In comparison, 6 women responded that the demands were too high and 21 answered that they were too low. When we add the two groups together we have a sum of 7 that believed that the demands

imposed by the teachers are too great, whereas 28 experience that the demands are too low.

We can draw a conclusion that the majority of students experience that the teachers do not

 place high enough demands on the students on the program.

As regards the role of the school and the content of the assistant nurse education, most of the

students answered affirmatively when answering about the questions relating to the content if

the education (Questions 5 & 9). The difference between men and women can be seen in that

all men answered positively to these questions whereas 2 women answered negatively and 25

positively. However, the negative answers may indicate a lack of personal confidence in the

role of assistant nurse on an individual level, even after completing the program. It appears on

the whole, that the role of the education and the school is experienced positively by the

students, contributing to their identity and prospects for future employment. The last question

(Question 17) asked: *Do you think studying has been enjoyable?* All the students answered

positively to this question. This indicates that the overall experience of students on the

assistant nurse program is one of enjoyment. However, in contrast to question 4 which asked:

If you did not get a place on the program would you have taken a study loan and done the

program at another school? The results showed that 3 men answered positively and 5 would

not have done the program somewhere else. On the other hand 15 women said that they would

have done the program at another school whereas 12 said they would not. This may indicate

that women to a greater extent may be more inclined to further their education than men in

this particular area.

Other motivating factors

A result which was unexpected was one I discovered under the process of gathering in the

data, was in relation to the main goal that the students have of entering the employment

market. Even if that was the main goal, another motivation presented itself that indicates a

multi-faceted dimension to the overall goal which relates to the sense of identity. During the procedure for data collection the students were asked a main viewpoint question in relation to their motive to work as an auxiliary nurse. Of the 35 that responded to the question, 6 replied that the main reason they wanted to work as an assistant nurse and work in the healthcare branch was that "there is work there," there is work opportunities," "they need personnel," "there is work for immigrants there" and "I want to support myself." This reflects the answer that all the students responded positively to in the first multi choice question: *Was your main goal to begin studying to get a job?* However a deeper motivation was given than the functional aspect of work choice in providing for oneself.

Overwhelmingly 29 students answered that some of the main reasons were that they "love people and will help them," "I want to help people," "I think it is interesting and fun," "I like to take care of other people," "I think it is humanitarian," "I want to help people and I think it is worthwhile," "I think the best thing you can do in life is help other people," "I feel good helping other people," "I think that it is interesting working with people" and "I like the work and I like taking care of others." There seems to be a deeper motivation that cannot be explained solely in terms of the practical value of the program and the work opportunities that it presents. None of these 29 students mentioned the employment value as a main reason. Of the 6 that gave employment as one of the main reasons for the choice of work, 5 of them added another factor as contributing to the reason why they wanted to work as an auxiliary nurse. Of these 5 many gave the same reasons that the 29 other students gave above. This shall be discussed further I the discussion part.

Interview and questionnaire comparison

The results from the questionnaires harmonized with the responses I received I the interviews. Both of the participants had high expectations for the program and had a

conviction that it would lead to employment. The man was 24 years of age and the woman 22 years of age. I chose these two young adults to see if there were anomalies in how younger adults on the program viewed the education. The responses showed a clear goal strategy on behalf of these two students. They were convinced the program would lead to work and had a long term goal of furthering their education after the program. However, one difference did arise and that was to do with identity. When asked if the program had changed them in some way, the man responded that it had not changed him whereas the young woman's response was the opposite. She experienced that the program had changed her in many ways. One way she experienced a change was in relation to her overall attitude to life. She now felt much more positive to her life situation.

In conclusion, the results of the questionnaires and interviews showed that the students' expectations are high and they have a clear picture of the main goal and it is in agreement with the goal set out by the Swedish employment agency. In relation to the students' identity it appears that they have a strong sense of who they are, what they want and where they are going with their education. The majority of students have enjoyed partaking in the program and this particular education has been a positive experience. In total, 20 students have the desire to further their education at some time in the future after the program is concluded. The role of the teacher has played a big part for the students, 31 students of the 35 students answered on the questionnaire that the teacher has had a positive effect on their studies. The students also exhibited a deeper reason for studying on the program and working in healthcare than just employment. These reasons appear to stem from certain deeper values the students have, that are attached to their identity. This shall be discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Method discussion

The use of a questionnaire was used in order to get a broader perspective of how students view the assistant nurse program. The interviews were used as a supplement to the questionnaires. I chose this method after much thought about what would be the best way to gather in data. I had originally planned to do the study with only interviews but decided against it thinking that qualitative interviews can have a tendency to be very specific and not so easy to generalize. On the other hand with a larger group it was easier to see larger trends.

One of the main reasons why I chose this group was that I had access to this group of students through my work. It was easy to gain contact with this group. When I introduced the idea to the students there was no resistance to involvement. All that were asked were willing to be involved and it was not necessary to convince them. This meant that the group chosen was easy to cooperate with because of the relation we had already built up.

A down side to this is that the answers may be an attempt to provide the right answer for me because I am the teacher there. After weighing up the factors involved I decided that the choice for involving this group was the right choice.

A factor which I must bring to the attention of the reader is that under the course of the interviews the students and teachers received information from the Swedish employment agency they would no longer use this school as a contractor for the program. Naturally this had a dampening effect on the students because they had not received information about who was taking over the contract. The situation was uncertain for all parties involved. This may or may not have affected the outcome.

Student motivation

The answer to the question as to why certain students succeed on the assistant nurse program and others do not is a complex one with many different dimensions. When I refer to the word "succeed" in this context, it is used in the meaning of students who complete the program with the minimum grade possible to attain a pass. Having attained a pass in all parts of the program, the student has the formal qualification needed to work in healthcare. This grade gives the students an opportunity to seek work as a qualified assistant nurse in the sector.

According to the data retrieved from the questionnaires and interviews, the students that got involved in the survey have a clear picture and expectation surrounding their main goal. However, even if the main goal expressed by the students was one of employment, the reason why they chose the assistant nurse program provided a motivation that was more "intrinsic" than "extrinsic." In this context I define "intrinsic" as reasons that stem mainly from within the student in comparison to "extrinsic" that are reasons from sources outside the individual. When discussing identity on the part of students, the results indicate that students have a clear identity of who they are, what they want to achieve with their education and where they are going in life. The overall goal of employment harmonizes with that of the Swedish employment agency. However, the deeper reasons as to why a person wants to work in healthcare are more to do with the student's identity and perception of who they are. This choice is not made by the employment agency but, by the individual.

This agrees with Lupsa who discussed some of the motivations behind why people choose the assistant nurse program. Even if her research was many in relation to students who drop out of the assistant nursing program, in her research interviews it came to the fore that many students she interviewed wanted employment in healthcare for reasons that lay on a deeper level than purely an employment related goal. Some of the students that were interviewed in

her research expressed a strong desire to work with people and that working with people suited them. "I wanted to work taking care of old people" and "I felt that I had found the right place and that the work suited me," are two of the expressions made by students (My translation) (Lupsa, 2010). This is in harmony with the answers to the questionnaires and interviews I conducted. Many of the participating students in my paper (29) expressed a desire to help others and have employment with something that was deemed worthwhile as opposed to just getting a job. Although the program provides the opportunities for employment the main "intrinsic" reasons are deeper and humanistic in their orientation.

A common view that I have heard expressed by some is that individuals who are "signed on" at the local employment agency are more or less being forced into education that they do not want, just to have something to do. The assumption that people have nothing better to do or lack motivation and direction may be interpreted as misleading in this case. This assumption seems to be incongruous with the findings in the case of the students on the assistant nurse program arranged by the Swedish employment agency. According to the questionnaires and interviews of these students, the decision to pursue this particular program is because of deeper motivations and it is not just wasting time in fruitless measures by a state authority. These students appear to be motivated and focused on what they want, they know where they are going and have a strong sense of who they are. We can state that the students who participated in both the interviews and questionnaires expect to finish the education and have high demands on themselves. They are motivated by a functional aspect, namely, employment. However, this is not the main motivating factor. The factor of caring for other people supersedes the functional aspect and is the main reason stemming from identity or who the person believes they are. I have made an application of an expectancy-value from Eccles et al. (1983) by inserting some of the conclusions I have retrieved from this study and placing it in the Eccles et al. model. The application of the model is shown in figure 3.
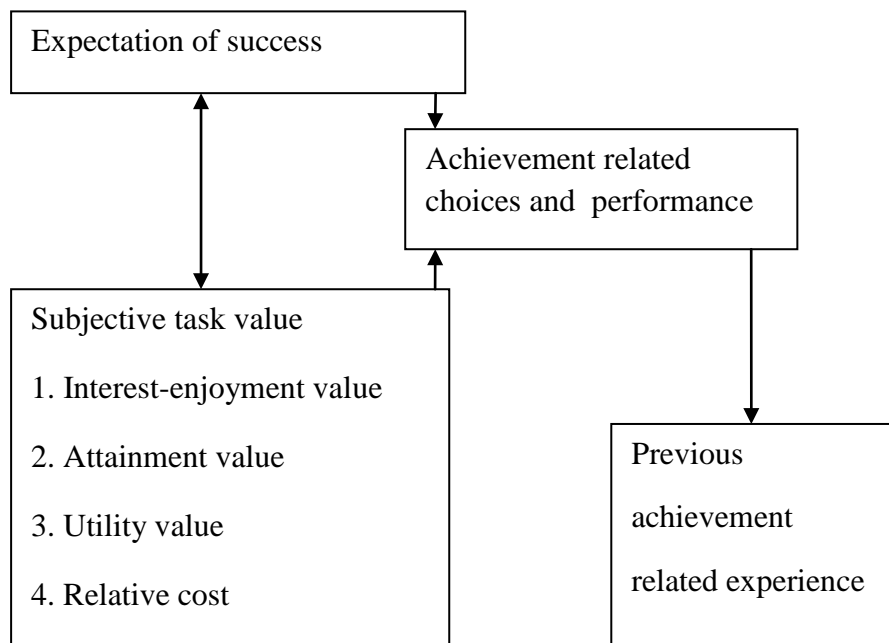
```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Expectation of success      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
            ↑                ↓
            │      ┌──────────────────────────┐
            │      │ Achievement related      │
            │      │ choices and  performance │
            │      └──────────────────────────┘
            │              ↑            │
┌─────────────────────────┐│            │
│ Subjective task value   ││            │
│                         ││   ┌──────────────────────┐
│ 1. Interest-enjoyment   ││   │ Previous             │
│    value                ││   │ achievement          │
│                         ││   │ related experience   │
│ 2. Attainment value     ││   └──────────────────────┘
│                         ││
│ 3. Utility value        ││
│                         ││
│ 4. Relative cost        ││
└─────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 2. Eccles et al. expectancy-value model of achievement (Eccles et al., 1983)

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Expectations of succeeding on│
│ the program                 │
└─────────────────────────────┘
         ↑               ↓
         │     ┌──────────────────────────┐
         │     │ Definite goals, choices  │
         │     │ that lead to those goals │
         │     │ and deeds that confirm   │
         │     │ the choices made         │
         │     └──────────────────────────┘
         │             ↑          │
┌──────────────────────────────┐ │
│ Learning to be an assistant  │ │
│ nurse                        │ │
│                              │ │
│ 1. Interested in the program │ │
│    and enjoy the learning    │ │
│                              │ ┌──────────────────────┐
│ 2. Confirmation of student   │ │ Assistant nurse      │
│    identity.                 │ │ qualification.       │
│                              │ │ Employment           │
│ 3. Employment market         │ │ in healthcare        │
│    prospects. Higher salary  │ └──────────────────────┘
│    in the sector.            │
│                              │
│ 4. Duration: 40 weeks. No    │
│    study loan. 40 hours a    │
│    week .studies. Discipline.│
│    Focus.                    │
└──────────────────────────────┘
```
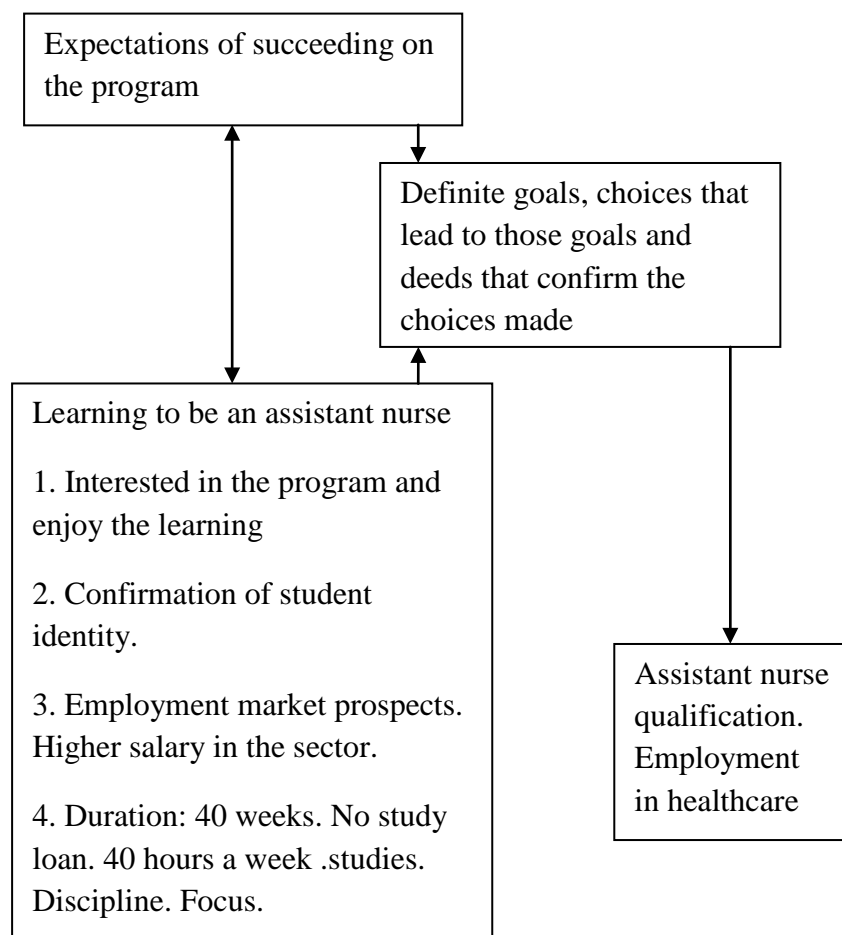
Figure 3. Application of Eccles et al. expectancy value model of achievement

Differences between men and women

When discussing the differences in the expectations between men and women on the program, the data indicates that there is little difference between the overall expectations of the two. Men and women alike have high expectations to finish the program and work in the healthcare industry.

However, one difference which became noticeable was the difference between men and women in relation to how other students have affected them. In total 3 of the 8 men thought that their goal of becoming an auxiliary nurse was affected in some way by other students whereas 15 of the 27 women experienced that their goal and studies were affected by their peers. This influence may have manifested itself in relation to study motivation, study technique and choice of courses within the program. It appears that women studying this particular program experience that they are more influenced by other fellow students than men. Eccles (Eccles, 2009) makes the point that women place a higher attainment value on a number of different activities and goals whereas men are more focused on fewer goals. It may be that the social aspect of being a student has more value to women than men on the program and therefore is reflected in the perception of how one is influenced by others. Another factor which can have a bearing on this is that there are a higher percentage of older men on the program than older women. Half of the men are over 40 years of age whereas only a quarter of the women are over 40 years of age. This may indicate that identity is more fixed in this category of older students and therefore outside influence from other students is not that important on an individual level.

A noticeable difference that arose between men and women was in the area of whether or not they perceived themselves as better suited to be an assistant nurse now than before they began the program. Only 1 (N=8) man thought that they were better suited now. If we compare that to the result from the female students the result was 10 (N=27). This indicates that female

students on the program generally perceive themselves as better equipped or more suited to work as an assistant nurse now, when they have completed over half the program, than when they began. This trend was also reflected in the view that the program had given the students adequate knowledge as an assistant nurse. Over one third of the women thought that they received adequate knowledge in contrast to one quarter of the men. It appears that a greater percentage of women experience that they have learned sufficient knowledge on the program.

In relation to future goals and enjoyment, both men and women experienced the program as enjoyable and all the students will further their education in some shape or form in the future at some stage. It is possible to draw the conclusion that the program has a positive influence on the students and that the students appreciate the opportunity provided and are highly motivated. It must be acknowledged that these students are ones that have continued on the program and have not dropped out or left for various reasons. The groups of students that do not continue or drop out are an interesting group for further study in the future.

Expectancy-value theory

Using Eccles et al. (figure 2) one can place the interest that the program arouses in the students under the *interest-enjoyment value* heading. The students experience the program as stimulating and enjoyable. They enjoy the learning and see the program in a positive light. The *attainment value* provides the students with a feeling of meaning, making the learning experience worthwhile. This confirms the choice that the student has made in becoming an assistant nurse, adding to their identity. The program also has a *utility value* that provides the students with a certificate that shows their potential employer that they have the competence required. Without a certificate that displays the level of knowledge or competence, the program may seek meaning. For the students it appears that the practical value of the program is an important factor.

Finally the *relative cost*, which for the students is one of time, discipline and energy. It means being able to structure the 40 week period in such a way that they can study 40 hours a week and be present in school. It also means that the students do not need to take a loan for their studies and are debt free after they have accomplished the program. These values provide an incentive for the students. If the students put these in connection with the expectations of succeeding on the program, they can lead to the choices and deeds that bring definite goals to fruition. In this case for the students, employment as an assistant nurse. It must be added that not all who seek the program are deemed suited for the education and some students drop out. This is an area that requires further research in the future to understand the reasons behind this phenomenon.

Social learning theory & self-efficacy

Within the realm of *social learning theory* Bandura brings to our attention to *self efficacy* and divides it into four different dimensions that influence individuals. These areas being: *performance accomplishments* or *enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion* and *emotional arousal* (Bandura, 1997).

In relation to students on the assistant nurse program we can see the first of these dimensions manifest itself in what Bandura labels *performance accomplishments.* The students that partook in the study are ones that have completed more than half of the program with at least a pass in the relevant courses. As shown by the results to question 1, 2, 8 & 12, students have a belief that they will and can achieve the main goal set out by themselves and by the Swedish employment agency. This belief appears to be strengthened under the program, which seem to indicate that students develop a clearer picture of their own expectations as the program unfolds. According to Bandura this may be due to a person's self efficacy being strengthened for the most part by *enactive mastery experience.*

When individuals perform successfully it lays the basis for a higher belief in their own efficacy. However Bandura points out to us that an oversimplified view that the very thoughts of past performance are the basis of self-efficacy are not correct. In order for people to change their beliefs of efficacy many other factors play a role. The conclusion drawn by Bandura is one that lays weight on how an individual perceives their own self-efficacy is a better indicator of success than just previous accomplishments (Bandura, 1997, p.81). Applying this to the students that are on the assistant nurse program, we see a core belief from the very beginning, that they will succeed or that they have the ability to achieve their goal. This enables them to fulfill their expectations. Although a belief in past performance experiences strengthens their sense of self-efficacy, the students that are achieving their goal appear to have high sense of self-efficacy already. This self-efficacy appears to be strengthened the further students go on the program. The core belief that they will succeed in completing the program is solidified over the time that they spend on the program. A belief from the beginning of one's own ability coupled with the experience of finishing courses with a good result strengthens the student's self-efficacy over time. In short, the student becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In the area of *vicarious experience,* we see that students on the program are influenced by each other and to some extent compare their own progress in relation to others. In the case of the program, this comparison can be done by the students at the end of every individual course that makes up the program. The course is graded by the teacher and the attained grade is then compared to the performance of other students. Observing how others did on the program and imitating them can enhance self-efficacy for them.

Verbal persuasion was another area Bandura draws our attention to. The aspect of social persuasion plays a role in solidifying the beliefs that individuals have the capabilities to bring goals to fruition. When answering question 15, the students (N=35) answered

overwhelmingly (31) that the teachers had contributed to their motivation whereas only 4 answered negatively. In reflection, I see many students that need confirmation that they can succeed on the program. For the most part this takes the form of mentor discussion and private conversations with the individual students. The next aspect was partly touched on in the study but, is also an observation from my interactions with the students. To begin with many students harbor some doubt about their *self-efficacy*. However, as the program continues they become more and more confident of their ability to succeed to the level they want to achieve. Many of the discussions with the students are confirming the students' identity and what they can achieve, based on other areas of achievement in life up to the point where they joined the program. Verbal persuasion in this case reinforces the individuals' *self-efficacy*.

The last aspect is that of *emotional arousal* or *physiological and affective states*. One aspect that Bandura draws to our attention is that of "mood states" (Bandura, 1997, s.106). Depending on how an individual's mood is influences their *self-efficacy*. Even if this can vary from day to day I make an application of this in relation to how the students overall experience was on the program. All participating students (35) answered that it was a positive experience. To different individual extents they were emotionally aroused. When answering question 11: *Do you think that the program has contributed to your self-esteem and your belief in yourself?* 31 of 35 students answered positively. In relation to being aroused emotionally, it appears that the overall experience of coming to the program was a positive one, influencing the students' sense of self-efficacy in a positive way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to study the area of student expectations, identity and goals. The students who participated in the questionnaires and interviews expect to finish the program and reach their goal of entering the employment market whereas some students

on the program do not succeed. The main goal of the students is in agreement with the goal of the Swedish employment agency, which is to enter the employment market with a qualification that will ensure employability The students have a firm belief of who they are, what they want and where they are going with their education. It has a clear purpose and this is not ambiguous for them. We also see that even if the main goal expressed of one of employment, students have other motivations for joining the program than purely instrumental. Many of the students want to work in healthcare because they want to help others or for other "intrinsic" reasons. The expectations of men and women are similar in many ways in relation to overall goals and employment. All students saw the program as a positive experience that increased their possibilities of joining the employment market. However, in areas such as being affected by student peers, men on the program answered that they were less affected by others than women. Men to a greater extent than women had the expectation to educate themselves further after the program and were less likely to take a student loan to do the program. Men also experienced that teachers had too few demands but the majority of students thought that the teachers contributed positively to their motivation.

Many of the questions require further study. Motivation, identity and goals are vast areas of research yet, there is not a great deal of research in relation to the assistant nurse program in adult education. To generalize the conclusions must be done with caution. Thousands of students every year participate in the assistant nurse program in adult education and there is a great need to understand the groups enrolling and what it is that motivates them. An interesting aspect for further research would be comparing a group of assistant nurse students who choose the program and take a study loan with the group of students who are allocated a place by the Swedish employment agency. There may or may not be factors that other than the ones mentioned in this paper that affect expectations, identity and goals. We can thus draw the conclusion from this study that: Students on the program organized by the Swedish

employment agency have high expectations, a clear identity of who there are, have specific goals set before them, have high *self-efficacy* and so-called "intrinsic" reasons more than "extrinsic" reasons motivate them. It appears that the goal of employment is clear for the students and that this goal harmonizes with the goal the Swedish employment agency has for them.

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