



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND
SPECIAL EDUCATION

PARTICIPATION IN MUNICIPAL ADULT EDUCATION IN SWEDEN

Why and How is the Second Chance Taken?

Yukiko Take

Master in Education:	30 hp
Program:	International Master in Educational Research
Level:	Advanced level
Term:	Spring term 2015
Supervisor:	Ingrid Henning Loeb
Examiner:	Per-Olof Thång
Report number:	VT15 IPS PDA184:12

Abstract

Master in Education: 30 hp
Program: International Master Programme in Educational Research
Level: Avancerad level
Term: Spring term 2015
Supervisor: Ingrid Henning Loeb
Examiner: Per-Olof Thång
Report number: VT15 IPS PDA184:12
Keywords: Life history, adult education, participation, Bounded Agency Model, capability

Aim: The aim of this study is to explore and describe how and why adults who have not fulfilled the current upper secondary education level become adult students in Swedish upper secondary municipal education, Komvux. Under this aim, there are two research questions: 1) why and how the adults decide to study in Komvux and 2) if they experience any barriers to participate in Komvux, if so how they overcome them.

Theory: The study relies on theoretical framework of life history research. Bounded Agency Model and capability approach are applied as tools of analysis.

Method: A life history approach has been used to examine five adult students' experiences.

Results: The results show that a main reason of participation is that the students expected that their studies in Komvux would lead to a new job. Most of the informants had a long term perspective to change their carrier and lifestyle. Using the capability approach (Sen, 1999), I analyzed that the informants had a limited capability for work. Different situations and transitions in life gave them opportunities to think about their future. The participation barriers that were experienced by my informants were 1) age, 2) lack of self-confidence, 3) time span, and 4) no clear purpose of study. These barriers were weakened through 1) encountering with new people and new values, 2) a transition in life that requires new needs, 3) having proper information about education, and 4) cultivating self-confidence.

In relation to the Bounded Agency Model (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009), I first analysed that the influence of the Swedish welfare state regime (Esping-Anderson, 1990) seems to have played a great role in weakening the participation barriers. Secondly, the primary reasons of why these adult students had not taken "the first chance" and needed the second chance were also bounded in the social context. Thirdly, the perceived value of the study in Komvux is continuously renewed and revised by reflecting the experience corresponding to life stage and new environment. The empirical knowledge of dynamic bounded agency described in my life history research contributes to an understanding of the Bounded Agency Model as a continuous and dynamic process of deciding to participate in adult education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank...

...my supervisor Ingrid Henning Loeb, who had given to me a lot of supports and advices. You always cheered me up and encouraged me to go further.

...the teachers and students in the adult school that I conducted this research. Especially for those who kindly participated in the interviews. I admire your courage for new adventures in lives and sincerely wish all of your dreams will come true.

...my IMER friends, for sharing time with me for 2 years.

...Heiwa Nakajima Foundation, which had economically supported me for 2 years. Without their support, I could not have been here.

...my friends, family, beloved supporters in Japan, for their understandings, cares, and prayers. Thank you for understanding how much this 2 years mean to me.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Aims.....	1
Research questions.....	2
Significance.....	2
Literature Review	2
Facts and figures	2
Participants in Komvux.....	2
Completion rate in upper secondary school.....	3
Upper secondary school dropout in Sweden.....	3
Theorizing participation in adult education	4
Human capital theory	4
Participation barriers	5
Chain-of-Response model.....	5
Bounded Agency Model	6
Adult students’ perspectives on participation	8
“Study will lead to work”.....	8
Transitions in life	8
Theoretical Background and Methodology	9
Why life history?.....	9
Empirical setting	9
Data-collection.....	10
The interviews with five students	10
Data analysis.....	11
Ethical considerations and limitations of the study.....	12
Results	13
Adam.....	14
Compensative choice	15
Bob.....	15
Matured mindset	16
Carina.....	17
Physical problems and having a family	17
Diana.....	18
Feelings of deficit and feelings of “I’m ready to study”	19
Erik.....	19
To start a serious career	20

Concluding remarks	20
Comprehensive Analysis	21
Barriers and overcoming barriers.....	22
Age.....	22
Lack of self-confidence.....	22
Time span.....	23
No clear purpose of study	24
Limited capability for work and Komvux as social mobility	24
Implication for the Bounded Agency Model	25
Conclusion	26
Limitations and recommendations for further research	27
References.....	29
Appendix 1: A letter to the principal and teachers.....	32
Appendix 2: A letter to the students.....	33
Appendix 3: Interview guide in English.....	33
Appendix 4: Interview guide in Swedish	35

Introduction

Background

Sweden is a country where more than 70% of the adult population participates in some kind of adult education (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Different organizations for adult education have been historically developed in Sweden. One of the unique systems is municipal adult education, known as Komvux in Swedish, which offers compulsory and upper secondary education to adults free of charge. Initially, Komvux was established to compensate for the widening knowledge gap between generations after the nine-year comprehensive school for everyone was introduced in 1962 (Andersson & Wärvik, 2012). Komvux started in 1967 as a formal education for adults who lack compulsory and upper secondary education. At that time it was officially emphasized that Komvux aimed to enhance 1) equality, 2) democracy, 3) economic growth and 4) the satisfaction of individual preferences (Fransson & Larsson, 1989). Although it is still possible to see these ideas and concepts in the current curriculum for adult education (Skolverket, 2012a), the meaning of goals and the emphasis of its mission has been changed over times (Andersson & Wärvik, 2012; Beach & Carlson, 2004; Henning Loeb, 2007; Höghielm, 2010). Today, one of the important roles of Komvux is to provide “second chance education” to compensate people’s earlier decisions and experiences in their lives (Bäckman, Jakobson, Lorentzen, Österbacka, & Dahlmed, 2011; Nordlund, Stehlik & Strandh, 2013).

Why some adults participate in adult education and some do not is a classic question that participation research has worked with for many years (Cross, 1981; Fransson & Larsson, 1989; Miller, 1967; Rubenson, 2010). The participation issue is especially important in the field of adult education, because the “voluntary” aspect of adult education often gives more advantages to already educated and privileged members of society (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2010). This study can be regarded as participation research. It takes a life history approach and explores why adults participate in education. Although previous research has identified some barriers and motives for the participation in adult education (Cross, 1981; Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013; Fransson & Larsson, 1989; Miller, 1967) and established some models that explain participation patterns (Cross, 1981; Rubenson & Desjardins 2009), less attention has been paid to how these barriers are experienced by adult students and how they become adult learners.

Aims

The aim of this study is to explore and describe why and how adults who have not fulfilled the current upper secondary education level become adult students in Komvux, municipal adult education in Sweden. It is based on a life history approach in order to describe the participation in Komvux in a relation to adult students’ earlier experiences.

Research questions

The study is guided by two main research questions.

1. Why and how do adults who have not fulfilled the current upper secondary education level decide to study in Komvux?
2. Do they experience any barriers to participate in Komvux, if so how do they overcome them?

Significance

This study provides the perspective of adults who have not fulfilled the current upper secondary education level. Although the importance of a learner-centered approach has been widely recognized in the field of adult education, there is limited knowledge of students' perspectives on taking second chance (Drayton & Prins, 2011). Especially in the participation research in adult education, the perspective of individuals life histories tended to be neglected (Rubenson, 2010). Therefore, life history studies of adult students in Komvux have a great significance in order to understand the possibility of second chance education in Sweden and how it is actually taken.

In addition, I also want to mention a possibility of empowerment. Some of my informants who took part in this study wished that their experiences could be an encouragement and empowerment for other adults who are considering to study in Komvux. Most of the adults experience some kind of anxiety to go back to school. It was my informants' wish that this study might be a help for others to feel "I'm not the only one".

Literature Review

In the first half of this section, I provide some facts and figures about Komvux and the participants in Komvux from official documents and reports. Since the research field of my study is upper secondary education in Komvux, I also describe the situation of upper secondary completion and dropouts in Sweden. In the latter half of the section, theories and perspectives on the participation in adult education are presented. In particular, Rubenson and Desjardins' Bounded Agency Model (2009) has a great influence on my study. In the end of this chapter, I present a relevant study that focused on biographies of adult students.

Facts and figures

Participants in Komvux

In 2012, about 190,000 adults in the age range of 20 to 64 studied in Komvux. This is equivalent to 3% of the whole Swedish population. A majority of students studied at the upper secondary level (Skolverket, 2013a). Two thirds of the participants were female. About 30% of the upper secondary school students in Komvux were born outside of Sweden. The age and educational background of Swedish born students and non-Swedish born students differ greatly. Half of the Swedish born students are under 25 years of age while the proportion of the same age group among the non-Swedish born students is only 20% (Skolverket, 2013a). About 30% of the non-Swedish born students have been to university while only 8% of the Swedish born students have studied in university (Hydén, 2013). Most of the Swedish born students in Komvux fell into a group with more than 2 years of education in upper secondary school (Hydén, 2013).

Completion rate in upper secondary school

In order to understand the background of Komvux students who are studying the upper secondary level courses, it is important to know the completion rates for upper secondary school. The completion rate refers the proportion of students in upper secondary school who have received the school leaving certificate within a certain numbers of years (Skolverket, 2013b, p. 51). In Sweden, about 98% of the students who finish compulsory education continue directly to upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2013b). However, a number of students drop out or fail some courses and do not get the school leaving certificate. During the last ten years, the completion rate after 5 years in upper secondary school is 74-78%. This number includes those who started the individual/introductory programme¹-which corresponded to 18% of the entire upper secondary students in 2012 (Skolverket, 2013b). Among those in the individual/introductory program, the completion rate after 5 years is 22-26% (Skolverket, 2013b). Focusing on the group of students who entered upper-secondary school in autumn 2007, the completion rate after 5 years was higher for the girls (80%) than boys (75%). Similarly, 62% of students with immigrant background completed upper secondary school after 5 years while 80% of Swedish-born students did (Skolverket, 2013b).

Upper secondary school dropout in Sweden

The reasons for leaving school varied. Skolverket (2007) conducted interview research with 16 young adults asking why they dropped out upper secondary school. One of the major reasons was school fatigue, from a variety of factors. Most of the dropouts in the report already had difficulties focusing on their studies when they were in compulsory school (Skolverket, 2007). They tended to have low final grades in compulsory school and therefore it was even harder for them to catch up with the faster study

¹ Individually adopted education for students who are not eligible for national programmes (Skolverket, 2012b). Under the new curriculum in 2011, former individual programme was changed to introductory program.

pace in upper secondary school. Compared to compulsory school, the study in upper secondary school was faster and more demanding. The students felt that they had less support from teachers and it required a lot more self-responsibility (Skolverket, 2007).

Another important factor was the choice of the upper secondary program. Some students left upper secondary school because they found that the program they had chosen was not interesting and felt that it was a wrong choice (Skolverket, 2007). Similarly, the status of the program mattered as well. Sometimes, the students in a vocational program felt that they were allocated lower status and subordinated by those who were in higher education preparatory program and even by the teachers. Being the only girl or boy in a program, or taking an introductory course or having special support also gave rise to feelings of abnormality and marginalization (Skolverket, 2007).

There is also a political factor as well. In the beginning of 1990s, a substantial reform took place and the former two-year vocational programs in upper secondary school were turned into three-year programs. The dropout rate increased after the reform not only because of the extension but also due to the change in the grading system (Bäckman et al., 2011; Hall, 2011; Murray, 2007).

Most of the dropouts occur in the 3rd year of upper secondary school (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2012). One of the reasons is that students who had a low grade from past 2 years find that they will not be able to receive the diploma so they decide to drop out tactically (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2012, p. 35). For those who did not fulfill the upper secondary education, Komvux provided an alternative path to a diploma (Skolverket, 2007; 2008; 2012c).

Theorizing participation in adult education

In this section, I present several useful concepts to theorize why people participate in adult education. Historically, there were economics oriented and psychologically oriented understandings of participation. The Bounded Agency Model (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009), lately, brought a socio-political perspective and united all the important perspectives into one model. Therefore, I will use the Bounded Agency Model as a tool to analyze the different aspects of interview data.

Human capital theory

Researchers in the economic tradition see education as investment in human capital (Becker, 1964; Rubenson, 2007). Human capital theory is premised on rational individuals who make decisions based on calculation of costs and benefits (Becker, 1964; Rubenson, 2007). Under this perspective, participation in adult education occurs when the costs of the self-investment, such as time, money, energy, and opportunity cost are compensated by the greater benefits. If no reward for studying is

anticipated, the cost easily exceeds the benefit. However, what people think in terms of cost and benefit are not always economically rational (Rubenson, 2007). For example, the adults with low competency express more reluctance to participate in education (Illeris, 2006; Paldanius, 1997), although participating in education raises one's lifetime earnings in the long term (Nordlund, Bonfanti, & Strandh, 2013; Nordlund et al., 2013). The calculation of costs and benefits is not simply measured by objective criteria but inevitably affected by how the person interprets the situation.

Participation barriers

Under a psychological perspective, “the strength of the motivation to participate in adult education is the result of the individual's perception of positive and negative forces in the situation” (Miller 1960, as cited in Cross, 1981, p. 123). The implication of this is that even if there are some positive forces urging participation in adult education, participation is hindered when the perception of negative forces is stronger.

Classically, scholars have identified three types of barriers that hinder participation in adult education: 1) situational, 2) institutional, and 3) dispositional barriers (Cross, 1981; Desjardins & Rubenson, 2013; Fransson & Larsson, 1989). Situational barriers include job and family related issues, and institutional barriers include the condition for participation and the contents of program. The third barrier, which is the fundamental negative force, is related to attitude toward education and self-perceptions as learners. If a person believes that he/she will not succeed in studying, participation is not likely to occur. The dispositional barriers are the most difficult ones to overcome, because the adults who have a less educational background very often have negative learning experiences and low confidence toward the school activities (Beder, 1990; Belzer, 2004; Davis, 2014). Illeris (2006) explained that these adults have an “ambivalent” feeling toward studying. Usually the adults with low educational background are aware of their needs to learn basic education but the dispositional barriers such as lack of self-confidence and the unpleasantness of studying are stronger (Illeris, 2006, p. 18).

Chain-of-Response model

Cross (1981) developed a participation model, the Chain-of-Response model, which has strongly influenced participation research (Rubenson, 2007). The important assumption of this model was that the participation process starts from self-evaluation and attitude toward education. The self-evaluation and attitude toward education affect the next psychological step of the value of goals (valence) and the expectation of meeting the goals (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2007). This step is also affected by transitions in life. In the final step, once a person is motivated to study, available information about study and the barriers modify whether the participation happens or not (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2007). Although Cross (1981) admitted the inevitable importance of societal factors on participation, the

model is far more grounded in a socio-psychological understanding of human behavior (Rubenson, 2007). Therefore the model “tend[s] to neglect the individual's life history” and “do[es] not directly address how the main constructs in the model are related to, and interact with, the broader structural and cultural context” (Rubenson, 2007, p. 9). Rubenson (2007) insisted that sometimes people are ordered to participate in adult education and therefore it is misleading to assume that participation is voluntary behavior resulting from individual's interpretation.

Bounded Agency Model

Rubenson and Desjardins's study (2009) was especially insightful because they theorized participation in adult education combining with a socio-political perspective. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) focused on the different participation tendencies among countries and found that the difference could be explained by Esping-Anderson's (1990) typology (Boeren, Holford, Nicaise, & Baert, 2012; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). According to Esping-Anderson (1990), there are three distinct welfare state regimes characterized by different interrelations between the state, the market, and families. Nordic countries are categorized as social democratic welfare state regimes, which have welfare system that are highly integrated with work (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). With this perspective, the high participation rate of adult education in the Nordic countries is understood as a product of the welfare state regime, including a flexible labor market system, sufficient social care service, and civil society that value adult education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). Thus, the set of social systems that the Nordic welfare states have established have constructed the conditions to overcome the various barriers and promote the participation in adult education.

Another important work that Rubenson and Desjardins' study (2009) is built on is the capability approach of Sen (1999). Capability is a concept to understand social justice by looking at how much actual freedom a person has to do things that he or she values to do (Sen, 1999). The capability approach is especially important for understand participation in adult education because there is a tendency that people with less education is less aware of its value (Cross, 1981). It might widen the knowledge gap in society if individual rationality is emphasized too much. Indeed, “people living under difficult conditions tend to accept their fate because they cannot imagine any reasonable alternative” (Rubenson, 2010, p. 235). Therefore, it is important to pay attention to whether choice is an actual possibility. In this sense, as Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) wrote, capability should be understood:

not only as having resources available—internal (i.e., knowledge or skills such as literacy) or external (i.e., money)—but also in terms of individuals knowing about the range of possibilities of how these resources can be used to realize things that matter to them and knowing how to do so. (p. 196)

Obviously, adult education can be an instrument to foster one’s capability, but the prior decision of participation in adult education is already affected by one’s capability which might be restricted by the barriers.

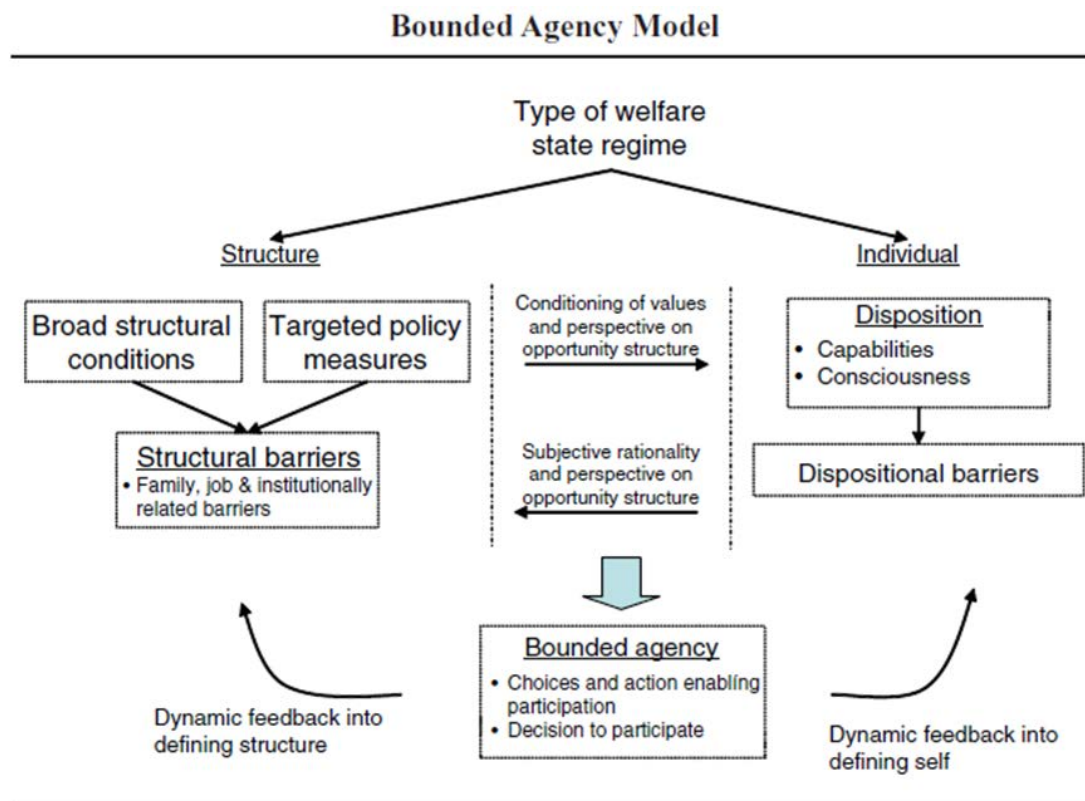


Figure 1. Bounded Agency Model. *Note.* From “The impact of welfare state regimes on barriers to participation in adult education: A Bounded Agency Model,” by Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59 (3), p. 195.

Bounded Agency Model (BAM, see Figure 1) theorized the impact of the welfare regimes on individually based barriers and structurally based barriers, and explained how these factors affected each other, eventually determining participation or non-participation in adult education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). BAM is based on the idea that although there is individual agency in the decision to participate, that agency is also affected by social structure and context which are derived from the nature of the welfare state regime. It implies that the dispositional factors of participation barriers should not simply be understood as an individual and personal issue because the perception of reality is constructed within the social context that one lives in. The perceived reality determines how much capability he or she actually has. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) built BAM on Bourdieu’s concept of

habitus. Habitus is defined as the culturally inculcated way of thinking which affects behavior and choices of actions (Bourdieu, 1990). In BAM, habitus mediates between social structure and individual disposition. As shown in the figure 1, bounded agency is conditions of values which is continuously affected by the social structure (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). According to this model, the decision to participate in adult education is made as an outcome of the complex process of interaction between the structure based and individual based forces.

Adult students' perspectives on participation

Although the study with adult students' life history and narratives is relatively limited in the field of participation research, there are a few exceptional studies that are highly relevant to my study. They deal with perceptions of the relationship between education and work, and the effect of life transitions on the desirability of study.

“Study will lead to work”

Inspired by ethnographic and biographical approach, Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson (2005, 2006) conducted in-depth qualitative research on adult students in Sweden. Although the main focus of their study was adult learners' identities, to some extent they examined the reasons for participation in adult education. According to their study, the adult students expected adult education to lead to jobs that guarantees being able to make a living and a higher material standard (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2006, p. 100). Most of interviewees were 25 to 30 years old and therefore it was hypothesized at the stage where they are ready to leave their adolescents identity (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2006). At some point, they wanted to start doing things that symbolized adulthood, such as making a family and buying a house. In this sense, adult education was used to change their life in the long term.

Transitions in life

Another study supported the analyses of Assarsson and Sipos-Zackrisson's (2005; 2006), in which the shift of life stage can be a cause of adult learning. The assumption that tested by Aslanian and Brickell (1980, as cited in Cross, 1981, p. 95) was that a transition in life requires adults to seek new possibilities to deal with new needs. Life transitions did not merely mean the shift from adolescence to adulthood. In their interview, changes in jobs or careers were the most common cause for learning (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, as cited in Cross, 1981, p. 95). Some adults went back to school to keep up with their present jobs, and some were learning in order to advance or change their career. It was also suggested that retirement allowed some adults to have time to study. The other frequently mentioned causes were changes in family life, such as marriage, arrival of child, moving, divorce, and death of a family member (Aslanian & Brickell 1980, as cited in Cross, 1981, p. 95). The study indicated that life transitions were experienced as “trigger event[s]” (Cross, 1981, p. 144) that drove the adults to study.

Assarsson and Sipos-Zackrisson's study (2005; 2006) was important to my study because they were also interested in life history of adult students in Sweden. Their findings of the reasons for participation helped shape the approach I used in my study. However, their study paid less attention to participation barriers and overcoming the barriers. Therefore, it is significant to take their findings into my study and develop better knowledge of participation in Komvux.

Theoretical Background and Methodology

In this chapter, I first present the theoretical framework of the life history approach and explain why this approach is suitable for my research. Secondly, the empirical setting of my study and the collection and analysis of data is presented. Finally, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are described.

Why life history?

The aim of my study is to explore and describe how and why adults who have not fulfilled the current upper secondary education level participate in Komvux. To do this, I use life histories because they have three unique characteristics that enable this kind of study.

First, life history research captures both the logic of individual decisions and the impact of social context on them (Hatch & Newsom, 2010). This especially matches my research about the participation in adult education. Secondly, life history research takes subjectivity as a point of departure rather than something to be controlled (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Hatch & Newsom, 2010). The fundamental focus of life history research is the individual stories of subjective experiences; it assumes that "the general can best be understood through analysis of the particular" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 13). This does not mean that the particular can explain everything about the general but the individual experience can be a great help to understand the complex structure of society (Hatch & Newsom, 2010). Thirdly, life history allows taking into account participants' perspective and voices, especially those whose voices are not usually heard (Hatch & Newsom, 2010). This aspect is also suitable to my research because the population of my research participants, adult students taking second chance education in Sweden, has a relatively limited opportunity to express their perspectives.

Empirical setting

The research field of my study is upper secondary education in Komvux. In order to define my potential informant population, I first identified the requirements for the upper secondary educational diploma. This differs between the vocational programs and the higher education preparatory programs. "English

5” is one of the common courses and I thought it was likely that students with diverse backgrounds attended this course in Komvux. In addition, I assumed that students studying English are used to the language and therefore there would be a possibility to talk to them in English. For these reasons, I decided to recruit my informants from the English 5 course. In addition, I limited my informants to those who had been registered in the Swedish compulsory school system. It is also an important aspect that Komvux provides English education to adult immigrants who never had chance to study English in their home country. However, my research interest in this study is the possibilities of Komvux as a second chance in Swedish educational system.

Purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012) was used to recruitment the informants. In the beginning of February 2015, I contacted one of the schools that provide Komvux education in a city, which is called Enstad in my study. A few days later I received permission to conduct research there. The reason why I selected this school was that I had studied Swedish as a second language at this school in the previous autumn and I had been in contact with one of the principals and talked to her about my project. This contact provided me with access to interview students in the English 5 class. I asked the principal to introduce me to the teachers who taught English 5 and I wrote an introductory letter explaining my research (See Appendix 1). This was sent to the teachers and in the following week, I went to the school for a short meeting with two English teachers. We agreed that I could attend a 20-week-long English 5 class, which had started in January. This class had around 30 students, and the lectures were twice a week. In the middle of February, I went to the English 5 class for the first time, and in the beginning of the class I was given a few minutes to introduce myself and my research. I distributed a letter to the students (See Appendix 2) and ask if there were any students who would consider participating in the study. From that day, I participated in this class for five weeks and did the same activities with the other students in the class. Since not so many students showed interest after my first presentation, I mostly recruited my informants through doing group activities with the students. I established rapport by talking to them personally and they became comfortable being with me.

Data-collection

The interviews with five students

The five students had different backgrounds. Basic information is provided in the table below (See Table 1). A large proportion of students in the English 5 class had migrated to Sweden as adults. I included some of them in the interviews, and eight students were interviewed in total. However, I decided to exclude these cases from my main analysis because theirs cases did not fit the analytic framework for second chance education in Sweden. It was difficult to arrange the interviews because most of the students were busy due to the combination of study and work. Sometimes the scheduled interviews had to be cancelled or postponed.

Table 1

Information about the five informants

Informant	Age	Gender	Work experience	Upper secondary school
Adam	40+	M	Yes	Dropped out in the 3 rd year
Bob	30+	M	Yes	Graduated without English 5
Carina	40+	F	Yes	Graduated from a two-year program
Diana	20+	F	Yes	Graduated upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities
Erik	20+	M	Yes	Dropped out in the 3 rd year

The data was collected through life history interviews, which intend to elicit narratives from individual lives (Bryman, 2012). All interviews took place at the school, mostly at the cafeteria, either before or after the class. I made an interview guide both in English and Swedish (See Appendix 3 and 4) referring to the Bounded Agency Model (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). For example, the questions were made to ask about family and job related barriers as well as dispositional barriers. The questions were phrased to avoid yes-no answers but rather let them talk about their experiences and their perceptions and values to it. Thus, the interviews were semi-structured: guided by a prepared interview guide, but also unstructured in that the informants were encouraged to talk about their lives freely. Spontaneous follow-up questions were asked occasionally. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent of informants and transcribed afterwards.

The language of interview was chosen by the informants and eventually most of the interviews were conducted in English except for one case in Swedish. Even though most of the informants could speak English well enough to communicate, talking in a non-native language might hinder the richness of expression of their life experiences. Since the informants were studying English, some of them were willing to practice English and my intermediate Swedish skill made them feel safe enough to try an English interview. However, I noticed that talking in English made them speak in simpler and less-detailed ways sometimes. On the other hand, an interview in Swedish required a lot of effort and sometimes it did not go deeper enough because of my lack of Swedish skill. This is why an additional interview session with the same informant was important. I arranged the second interview session with three of my informants respectively, besides the occasional casual conversations to quickly clarify some points. In general, the informants were more relaxed and opened in the second session.

Data analysis

In my study, I used narrative analysis in a broad sense, as an analysis of narrative. Phonix, Smith, and Sparkes (2010) described narrative analysis as “a technique that seeks to interpret the ways in which

people perceive reality, make sense of their worlds, and perform social actions” (p. 3). Although the method is commonly used in life history and narrative research, some researchers agree that there is no single recipe for how to operate narrative analysis (Bold, 2012; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Phonix et al., 2010). In life history research, as in the other qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 99). As an instrument of analysis, a life history researcher has to employ the creative and reflective processes of struggling with narrative data, until the interpretation of data makes sense and key ideas and themes appear from it (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Since the analytical process is mostly based on the researchers’ interpretation of what was said (Bold, 2012), the most important thing is to develop the quality of “the instrument”. Cole and Knowles (2011) stated:

Indeed, one of the standards of “good” qualitative research is the visibility and acknowledged presence of the researcher in a research account. This presence is commonly referred to as “researcher subjectivity”; acknowledging and “monitoring” one’s subjectivity throughout a research process is an extension of reflexivity. (p. 89)

In qualitative research, the researcher’s subjectivity is one of the strengths rather than the weakness that enables to understand the complex reality. What was important and tricky sometimes was to check and monitor the accuracy of my own subjectivity. As Cole and Knowles (2011) suggested, I recorded my thoughts and feelings as field-notes. This helped me to look at them from a certain distance. Similarly, I repeatedly read the transcripts to check my interpretation and tried to look them from different angles. Knowledge and theories from previous research were also referred to and applied as frameworks for the analysis.

Ethical considerations and limitations of the study

Since a life history interview requires disclosure of self, there is always a risk of violating the privacy of an informant (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Sikes, 2010). In the beginning of each interview, all of the informants were informed of the purpose of the study and it was explained that they did not have to answer any of the questions and that they were free to withdraw at any point of the interview. Although preserving informants’ anonymity is the primal responsibility of all researchers, it is especially important in biographical studies where “there is considerable potential for the fallout following from identification to have serious consequences” (Sikes, 2010, p. 17). I also agree with the notion that using fiction should be acceptable to protect the identity of informants when the stories they told were especially sensitive (Sikes, 2010, p. 18). In my study, all the proper nouns used in the interview were replaced by non-identifiable words and the informants’ names used in the text are fictional. In addition,

some details of their stories were changed to insure anonymity while barely changing the meaning in the context.

Although external confidentiality is likely to be preserved, it is very difficult to ensure internal confidentiality, as when a very close friend or family member of the informants read the story (Sikes, 2010; Tolich, 2004). Therefore, it is remarkably significant that I treat the stories with full of respect and pay special attention on the language use and avoid the negative connotation. With this perspective, I carefully phrased the stories and for the same reason the language mistakes in the interview were corrected when I quoted them.

The process of analyzing life stories and writing a life history offers the researchers an enormous power to interpret and locate the stories by inevitable selections of information (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Although the second interview session and additional conversations took place in order to check and confirm my interpretation, it is not possible to completely exclude misunderstanding. In addition, there is also a limitation that the languages used in the interviews were not the mother tongue for both the interviewer and most of the interviewees.

Results

The results of the interviews are represented here as five life histories. For the basic information of the informants, see the table below (Table 1).

Table 1
Information about the five informants

Informant	Age	Gender	Work experience	Upper secondary school
Adam	40+	M	Yes	Dropped out in the 3 rd year
Bob	30+	M	Yes	Graduated without English 5
Carina	40+	F	Yes	Graduated from a two-year program
Diana	20+	F	Yes	Graduated upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities
Erik	20+	M	Yes	Dropped out in the 3 rd year

The stories are structured to cover the research questions: 1) why and how the students participated in Komvux, and 2) their experiences of the participation barriers and how they overcame them. After each life history, I briefly analyze the stories applying the Bounded Agency Model and describe the circumstances behind not having the grade of English 5 and the reasons for the participation in Komvux.

By doing so, I aim to understand the influences of the social context on their “choices”; in other words, how their agency is bounded in the social structure. This part specially corresponds to my first research question that why and how adults participate in Komvux.

Adam

Adam is in his forties. He was born and raised in Enstad. After compulsory school, he went to an economics program in upper secondary school. However, he felt it was very difficult for him and he had to study during the summers to retake some courses. Adam recalled that even though he was good at English, he did not pass the course. He thought the teachers were not always fair to him. When he started his third year in upper secondary school, he decided to repeat the second year because his grades were quite low. But after one month, he was burned out because he studied the whole summer and did not have a proper break. He decided to take one year off from studying. After he left the school, he got a job through a friend who knew the owner of a company. It was in the early 1990s when Sweden was under severe recession. He thought, “What’s the point going back to school and be there for a year, and be unemployed” and therefore did not go back to upper secondary school.

Although he had lived in several countries and been involved with different jobs, his main background was in shipping. He had worked on several ships for many years until the late 2000s when he thought he was done with this work. He quit the job and came back to Sweden without knowing what he was going to do. He applied for all different kinds of jobs and one day he got a phone call from an investment bank. He thought it was a mistake because he did not have any experience working in finance. But after a two-hour interview, he got the job. He liked the job very much. The only problem was the dishonest in the finance industry. He found that finance industry did not always tell the truth to their clients. He described that being honest was one of the most important values for him and he could not stay with the company for this reason.

It was the early 2010s, and again the world economy was shrinking. Jobs in finance were difficult to find. Therefore he returned to one of the ships and worked there for a few years. During that time he got injured and had to leave the ship. He came back to Sweden and tried to figure out what he wanted to do. One day, he saw an advertisement about a business course offered by an adult school and he felt this was what he was looking for. After he quit the investment bank, he had been thinking to start his own business because “then I make up the rules . . . and I decide what I convey to my customers”.

After taking this one year business course, he was supposed to start his own business but the plan collapsed due to some problems with importing products. Then he thought, “Well, I’m in school now and so I’m just gonna continue”. He decided to study upper secondary level courses so that he would qualify for higher education.

Adam said that although he had been thinking to take a diploma and study economics in university, he used to think he was too old to do that and the studies would take too much time. When he applied for the business course, he did not consider it to be going back to school because the course was business oriented. But once he started being in school, he realized that there were a lot of older students and most of them were aiming to continue to higher education. This helped him to feel that he was “not the only one”. Adam also thought that having completed the intensive business course was an encouragement to continue studying. At the same time, he felt that he was stuck in his career. In any case, it took him some years to get promoted in the finance industry. He thought that if he used the same time to study and go to university he would have more options and autonomy in his later life.

Although he had been in upper secondary school for two years, the grade he got from the school was too old to transfer to the new grading system. He went to the adult education office and asked them what he needed to study. They explained to him that he did not need to take all the credits for diploma because he could combine the credits with his work experience. He found out it would take only one year and that also made it easier for him to start studying upper secondary level courses in Komvux.

Compensative choice

First of all, Adam did not have the grade of English 5 due to the fact that he dropped out of upper secondary school and did not have a diploma. He dropped out of school firstly because he had a difficulty with his studies and he needed a break, and secondly because he got a job during the recession and he did not want to lose it. He was not sure if school education would be able to provide him with a job.

The important steps brought Adam to participate in Komvux were the business course and the failure of his own business plan. When he took the course he had not considered to study upper secondary level courses yet. After this course, the business that he was about to start fell through and that was the final factor leading to his participation in Komvux. As he described “it kind of didn’t give me a choice”, for Adam it was a compensative choice rather than the first choice, though he was motivated to study.

Bob

Bob is in his thirties. He migrated to Sweden in the 1990s with his parents. He was 10 years old and started to go Swedish compulsory school. Since he did not speak Swedish at that time, he studied Swedish instead of studying English. After compulsory schooling, he went to a business and administration program in upper secondary school. He described himself as a person who understood very much in the classroom. Although the pace of study in the upper secondary school was much faster,

he had no problem with keeping up. He graduated upper secondary school with very good grades but without a credit of English 5 because he studied English for years 7-9 in upper secondary school.

Immediately after graduating from the upper secondary school, he started working in a grocery store where he did an internship. He thought it was a good job for a person who had just finished upper secondary school. But after more than 10 years he felt tired. He did not want to work in this store his entire life because he felt there were limits to what he could learn there that would help him with further self-development.

He sometimes thought about studying English 5. He had applied for English 5 twice though he did not go to the class at that time because he did not know what he was going to do afterwards. Bob remembered that he did not think so much about studying and changing his career before he got married. But he started to think about it more seriously after getting married to a woman who also worked in the same store. He thought about having a baby in the future and he wanted to be able to provide a good home. At the store, he and his wife worked various shifts and their working days and hours were inconsistent. They wanted jobs that with regular hours, from Monday to Friday from 8 to 4 o'clock. Therefore he decided to study to be an accountant.

When he applied for English 5 this time, he already had made plans to be an accountant and had located a particular vocational school where he wanted to study after taking English 5. His wife's brother, who studied in university, told him that he did not have to study in university and informed him about this vocational school. He was glad to hear this because he thought the study would take too long if he had to go to university.

Matured mindset

Bob did not have the grade of English 5 due to his immigrant background and that he studied Swedish instead of English in compulsory school. Therefore he had a diploma from upper secondary school without the grade of English 5. What pushed him to participate in Komvux were the thoughts about family and his career. He did not want to work on evenings and weekends so that he could spend a time with his future children. Bob explained that his mindset changed as his life situation changed. Bob said:

You know if you are child, you don't think clear. Sometimes you think what's school school school, I don't need this. And you think I'll work. If you are 15, 16 years and if you have someone pay you 1000 [crowns], you think I'll work, why I'm going to school. But when you are 25, or 30, maybe you think clear and you think I don't want to work like that, like me. (Bob)

When he was younger, he had a different mindset and needs. Bob recognized that his needs changed as he became older, more mature, and had a family.

Carina

Carina is in her forties. She was raised in the middle of Sweden and went to compulsory school there. She described her compulsory school as chaotic and said it did not have a good learning environment. When she entered upper secondary school, she moved to a town in the southwest Sweden. She picked a program to prepare for office work because this program was easy to get in. This program was a two-year program, which does not exist anymore. She expected it to be something better than her compulsory school but she felt that it was as chaotic as her compulsory school was. While studying in upper secondary school, Carina started to work in a restaurant that her brother had. After graduated from the upper secondary school, she worked at an office, but found that it was boring. Therefore, she started a career in the restaurant instead.

Ten years ago, when she was in her thirties, Carina thought of changing her career and she took some upper secondary level courses in Komvux. But after one semester, she went back to full time work in the restaurant because she thought studying upper secondary level courses was not easy or fun. Although she had been thinking that she could not work in restaurant for the whole of her life, she felt it was mostly acceptable to continue with it at that time.

As time passed, she got a boyfriend and then a child, and she said that these developments made her want to change her life. She did not want to work on weekends and evenings. Also, she also mentioned that working in a restaurant was very tough work. She felt her body would not adjust to it as she aged. In addition, she felt that there was nothing to learn and no opportunity for self-development.

She remembered that she was nervous about being an adult student because it had been a long time since last time she was a student. In addition, the contents of education and the grading system had changed and that made her nervous as well. She thought that the contents had become much harder compared to her upper secondary school time. Although she still was not very confident about studying in upper secondary level courses, she was motivated this time and felt that she had to do it. She said she regretted that she did not start studying earlier because she felt she was old. But at the same time, she understood it was a natural consequence of becoming a partner and mother relatively late in her life. Her goal for now is to be qualified for higher education in the current system and then continue to vocational school to gain higher skills for work in an office or a bank.

Physical problems and having a family

Carina did not have the grade of English 5 due to the Swedish school system and educational reforms. Because of these changes, graduation from the two-year upper secondary program she had attended was no longer qualified as an upper secondary diploma. Family and the physical burdens of working in restaurant were Carina's main reasons for the participation. Firstly, as she became older she felt that it was physically impossible to continue working in restaurant until the retirement. Secondly, she did not want to work evenings and weekends because she wanted spend time with her family. Both of the reasons are related to transitions in life. Carina stated that "I wish I started [the study in Komvux] earlier. But I have a child . . . I got a child very late, and house and...boyfriend, so that's why. Everything takes time". Her statement clearly indicated that the transitions in her life meant a lot for her decision to participate in adult education.

Diana

Diana is in her twenties. She had a health problem up until late teen years. It was hard for her to focus on her studies because of this disease. After attending regular compulsory school, she went to upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities. Her disease disappeared a few years after she entered this school. At that time she started to work in transportation.

When she graduated from school, her parents were getting a divorce. She remembered that there was a lot of noise and people at her house. She wanted to move out and live by herself. She had been registered with a housing service website for a long time and one day she got an offer. Since she had saved some money, she decided to buy a place of her own. She explained that this was the reason why she did not consider further study after graduating special school. Instead, she started working in the transportation sector, where she remained for four years.

Diana remembered that when she was with her friends who went to university, she did not like to talk about mathematics and history with them because she did not understand what they were talking about. She felt "it is only me behind" and "I have not done anything in my life". She felt that she had not been to a "real" upper secondary school like the other people. She knew that it was written on the official paper that she had been to a special school. Although she had been thinking about taking a diploma, she was very nervous because she used to have a learning difficulty. She wondered, "Could I do this? Is it too hard for me?" But because of the passage of time, she felt smarter and "ready to study". In addition to this, she was tired of working in transportation and did not want to work in that area all of her life. She also mentioned that she had started to be nervous about her age. She felt she was already getting old and had to do something for her future career.

It was in this frame of mind that Diana happened to see advertisements for an adult school at the bus stops and on the trams. She searched for the school on the internet and found a vocational program in

upper secondary level. She read about the requirements and found her grades from compulsory school were sufficient. She thought the program was great because after only one and half years she would have more than half of the necessary upper secondary credits. She thought it was “the safe card to leave the job and begin to study”.

Before she applied for the program, she visited the school’s councillor to talk about her past health problem. The counsellor supported her and explained about the program and courses she would study. Although she came to have less interest in the vocation itself, she took all the courses because she wanted to have a diploma. After one and half years, she got 1500 credits and felt more confident about her ability to study. She continued to study some courses in Komvux to acquire all the credits for a diploma. Her plan on completion of Komvux is to go to a police school.

Feelings of deficit and feelings of “I’m ready to study”

Diana did not have the grade of English 5 due to her health problem that caused a learning difficulty. Due to this problem, she attended an upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities, meaning she did not have a diploma from a regular upper secondary school. The main reason for participation in Komvux was her negative feelings that “I have never been to real upper secondary school”, as well as positive feelings of being “ready to study”. First of all, not having been to regular upper secondary school was felt as a deficit. She knew that it was stated on an official document. Diana said:

I have no diploma. I have only from my last school and that was that special school. That is not real, because, on the paper it says like...we have not studied Swedish English and everything like that. (Diana)

Her friendship played a role as well. When she was with her friends who went to university, she felt “it is only me behind” (Diana). On the other hand, she gradually felt herself smarter and ready to study. Her age was interpreted as old enough to do something for her future career. Thus, these feelings, friends, and her age pushed her toward the decision of participation in Komvux.

Erik

Erik is in his twenties. He lives in Enstad with his brother and father.

He said that he was a naughty child and never really liked to study. He thought compulsory school was very easy, even though he did not study at all. He decided to go to a biochemical program because he liked biology and chemistry, especially experiments. However on the first day of upper secondary

school, he realised that he would have to study for a few more years in university on completion school and he did not want to do that. He quit the program immediately after the first meeting and took a break from school for one year. During that year, he sometimes visited his sister's in the middle of Sweden and helped with to renovate their house. He did welding as well which he thought was fun. That was the reason he decided to study an industry program in upper secondary school the following year. However, the program was not what he thought it would be. He lost his motivation and failed a number of courses. He did not like the teachers in his school, he felt that most of the teachers did not care if he passed the courses or not. When the third year came, he decided to drop out.

Erik's father used to work with residential property and that was how he found a job as a cleaner, but he did not like the job. After a half year, he quit. He went to the employment office and registered. He wanted to work in office but he did not receive any job offers for office work. He described that the only jobs that were suggested to him were "tough work" that he did not want to do. He thought waiting for a job he actually wanted to do was waste of time. He realized that education was important for any kind of job. He wanted to do something more in his life and he realized that he would need a diploma to achieve that. He thought it would be better to start studying now than to do it when he becomes 30 years old. In addition, his father told him that he had to either find a job or go to school. He had thought about going to school for a few months. Then a friend who also went to Komvux told him that he had to apply now. So he applied for courses at Komvux on the last day of the application period.

His plan was to be qualified for higher education and then go to vocational school to be a construction engineer. His motivation was much higher than when he attended the upper secondary school, as he has now realised that he needed advanced education to do the job he wanted to do.

To start a serious career

Erik did not have the grade of English 5 due to the fact that he dropped out of upper secondary school and did not have a diploma. When he was in upper secondary school, he was not motivated to study because he did not like the school and did not feel education meant something important to him. However, when he was unemployed and searching for a job, it was difficult to find work without a diploma from upper secondary school. He realized that education was important for any kind of job and especially for jobs that is not physically strenuous. His reason for participation in Komvux was the opportunity to start a serious career and to change his life in long run. He thought a diploma was necessary to do so and he did not want to delay study until he was older. In addition, his father had some influence on his decision to study, and a friend played a practical role in making him apply.

Concluding remarks

First of all, the life histories of informants revealed the circumstances behind not having the grade of English 5. The reasons were as followed:

- Study fatigue
- Recession
- Immigrant background
- School system and reform
- Health problems
- Not placing value on education

A variety of the reasons listed here go beyond the informants' individual decisions and intentions. They generally lacked the grade of English 5 as a result of wider context, rather than individual choices to not take English 5.

The reasons for and important stages in their participation to take courses in Komvux are listed below.

- Compensation for another activity
- Having a family
- Advice from friends and family
- Aging and physical problems
- Desire for a new career
- Feeling of deficit
- Matured mindset

Some informants were in situation of not being able or not wanting to continue working in the jobs they had. As Assarsson and Sipos-Zackrisson's study also found (2006), participants expected that the study in Komvux would lead to a new job. Indeed, the informants decided to study in Komvux because was the gateway to further education in vocational school or university. Thus, the informants had a long term perspective which they might not have had before. Different situations and transitions in life gave them opportunities to think about their future. As the Bounded Agency Model shows, participants' conditions of values and perspectives on opportunity structure changed and affected their final decision of participation in Komvux.

Comprehensive Analysis

In this chapter, I first analyse the life histories of the informants thematically focusing on the participation barriers and how they overcame them. This part corresponds to my second research question that whether adult students experience any barriers and how they overcome them. The latter half of this chapter is devoted to theoretical analyses that are built on the capability approach (Sen, 1999) and the Bonded Agency Model (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

Barriers and overcoming barriers

In the following section, I identify four participation barriers that appear in the interviews. These are 1) age, 2) lack of self-confidence, 3) time span, and 4) no clear purpose of study. I then describe the events and experiences that motivated the respondents to develop strategies to overcome the barriers.

Age

As also found in previous research (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2010), age was one of the biggest concerns for my informants when they considered returning to school to participate in adult education. For example, in my interview with Adam, the age factor was clearly mentioned as a perceived barrier. However, once he started to take a business course which was vocationally oriented and which he therefore did not conceive of as “school”, he met a lot of other older adult students who were studying for higher education. Adam’s former belief that being in one’s forty is too old to go to school was changed into “today it’s becoming more and more common that . . . in older age, you still go back to school”. This was the result of encountering other adult learners.

At the same time, I observed among my informants that the age factor can also promote participation in Komvux. For example, when my informant Diana applied for upper secondary education in Komvux, she was in her twenties and she felt that she had to do something for her future career. Similarly, Erik also thought that he would regret having to study beyond age 30. For the other informant, Carina, who worked in a restaurant, age was the reason to consider a new career. These findings imply that advancing age is a spur to think about one’s career plan and consider adult education.

Lack of self-confidence

Low self-confidence and concerns about ability to succeed were identified by informants as potential barriers. This was observed clearly in Diana’s life history. Before Diana applying to Komvux, she worried that she wouldn’t be able to manage the upper secondary level courses, as she used to have a learning difficulty. She said:

“I had the thought [about studying for a diploma] all the time, I had the thought all the time but I was really nervous. I thought..., I had this disease . . . and I felt, could I do this? Is it too hard for me?” (Diana).

After a few years the health problem was gone, and she gradually became confident and felt, “I’m ready to study” (Diana). In Diana’s case, it was her disease and previous experience of schooling that made

her worry about studying. It took some years for her to cultivate enough self-confidence to participate in Komvux. In addition, she wanted to try and catch up with friends who were at university.

The other informant Carina studied in Komvux 10 years ago, and then went back to her full-time job after one study term. She described the situation at that time:

I want to study, but it's not easy for me, I don't think it's easy. For me it's very difficult. English, I don't know how to manage. That's why, otherwise I maybe have studied more but. (Carina)

Although she wanted to study to have a diploma, she did not continue because she was not sure if she could manage. This time, she was nervous to be an adult student because it was a long time since she was a student, and she thought "everything has changed". Carina knew that "it's harder and they do different". It was "confusing". Although she still was not very confident to study, she overcame this barrier, due to her desire to change her career for her family's benefit and to have better working conditions. In Carina's case, this barrier was entwined with the barrier of "no clear purpose of study" which is presented later.

Time span

Related to the first barrier, the time span of education was considered as a barrier to participation. Especially for those who had already worked for a long time, spending some years in education was conceived of as a major obstacle. This barrier was overcome by being in a different situation that they felt there was no other option, and also by getting appropriate information about education, which revealed that the course was shorter than they thought.

Adam's life history described how he evaluated his situation and eventually came to feel that studying in Komvux was the best option he could choose. Adam felt stuck in his career and thought if he spent some years to study and go to university, he would have more options to choose later in his life. In addition, by getting the correct information, Adam learned that the study would not take as long as he thought and that made him feel that it was doable. Similarly, it was also suggested Bob's life history that the time span barrier can be overcome by getting information about a vocational school instead of university, which turned out to be more appropriate for his life plan.

Clearly, to reach the point of seeking for proper and detailed information, a person has to have already started to consider to study. The interviews suggested that the time span barrier, which is understood as an institutional and dispositional barrier (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2010), appears in the process of consideration of participation. Once a person starts to consider to study, more information about possible educational options might increase one's capability to participate in adult education.

No clear purpose of study

Lacking a clear purpose or vision for study might hinder participation in Komvux even if prospective students were aware of its value. In my interview results, Bob's case was remarkable in this regard. Bob had applied for English 5 twice before but did not go to the class because he did not have a concrete plan of what he was going to do afterwards.

For the other informant, Carina, a combination of a lack of confidence and a lack of a clear purpose of study kept her from coming back to Komvux for 10 years. Although she wanted to change her career, studying was not easy for her and she thought it was acceptable to continue with the job she had at that time. Carina was eventually motivated to return to school by strong feelings that she had to change her career for her family life and to get better working condition.

These informants' experiences imply that if there is no clear purpose for study, the perceived cost for participation exceeds the perceived benefit (Becker, 1964). The attitude toward adult education changes when "trigger event[s]" are encountered (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, as cited in Cross 1981, p. 144), such as getting married or having children. Although family can be a situational barrier that hinders the participation in adult education (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2010), family factors were experienced by my informants as an important opportunity to consider adult education as a way to change their lifestyle. The new needs associated with transitions in life drove the informants to make concrete plans to envision what they were going to do after Komvux.

Summary

As described above, 1) age, 2) lack of self-confidence, 3) time span and 4) lack of clear purpose of study were experienced as the participation barriers. Participation finally occurred when events and experiences such as those listed below changed the situation or their perception of the situation, and helped them overcome the barriers to participate in adult education.

- Encounters with new people and new values
- Transitions and events in life that create new needs
- Having proper information about education
- Cultivation of self-confidence

Limited capability for work and Komvux as social mobility

In this section, I analyse my informants' life histories by using the capability approach. First, all of my informants had some kind of working experience before they applied for Komvux. Although their life experiences and background varied, one of the main reasons for participation was to change their career.

Some of my informants were not satisfied with their working conditions as they got older and their situations changed. They had long and irregular working hours (Bob, Carina), physically hard work (Carina, Erik), and little self-fulfilment after doing the same thing for many years (Bob, Carina). They did not want to continue these jobs all of their lives and education in Komvux was seen as the path toward another career. As Bob said, “If I want to change my work, what I will change it to, with another shop? It’s the same thing. So I must study something” (Bob).

The desire to change one’s career does not merely mean being able to pick a new job randomly. The students expected that their studies would lead to a job where they could have more autonomy. For some informants it meant a job that with a standard working day and hours (Bob, Carina), a job that is not physically strenuous (Carina, Erik), and a job that did not require behaviour that is against what one values (Adam). All of these issues were matters of capability for work, which is “the real freedom to choose the job one has reason to value” (Bonvin, 2012, p. 13). For a worker, not only wages but also the issues such as timetable, work content, possibilities for self-fulfilment, health, safety, quality of job, and balance between work and family life have a great importance (Bonvin, 2012, p.13). Applying the capability approach, it allows me to conclude that the informants had a limited capability for work and therefore they decided to study to change their career path.

However, it does not mean that the informants had the capability to participate in education from the beginning. Some informants had been thinking of study for a long time but did not participate until a certain point due to different barriers. Some informants were not sure how Komvux should be used to realize things that matters to them (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). As it was represented in the previous section, what made them overcome the barriers and increased their capability to participate in education were certain events and transitions in life that changed the situation and perception of the situation. Consequently, to study in Komvux was recognized by some informants as a second chance for social mobility.

Implication for the Bounded Agency Model

As the last remark in this comprehensive analysis, I analyse the results of my study in relation to the Bounded Agency Model (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009).

First of all, the influence of the Swedish welfare state regime (Esping-Anderson, 1990) that values and supports adult education seems to have played a major role in weakening the participation barriers, as some researchers pointed out (Boeren et al., 2012; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). Although family and job related factors have been described as the most commonly found barriers to participation (Cross, 1981; Rubenson, 2010), my informants, conversely, experienced them as reasons to participate. This implies that the Swedish welfare state regime, including the flexible labour market, has removed many

of the situational barriers and increased adults' capability to participate in education (Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009). It is also important that adult education is generally valued positively in society. My informants eventually recognized the function of Komvux as a second chance education and a possibility for social mobility within Swedish society.

Secondly, although the original Bounded Agency Model does not cover it, the initial circumstances determining why adult students did not take "the first chance" and needed the second chance were also bounded by the social context. In the cases I studied, the reasons why my informants did not have the grade of English 5 were more often the consequences of wider context and system, than individual choice. Most of the factors were something the students could have little influence over. If so, it might not be correct to label the education in Komvux as second chance for it could be actually the first chance for them. Therefore, it was especially important that study in the Komvux appeared to them as a possible and doable option.

Finally, the perceptions and values regarding participation in adult education are continuously renewed and revised by reflecting on experiences that correspond to life stage and changes in the social environment. It was shown that some informants who used to place less value to education realized its value. Some informants who had not previously cared about their careers came to be serious about them. Some other informants who were not confident about their ability to study gradually cultivated confidence. In this sense, bounded agency should be understood as a characteristic of dynamic, reflective, and changing individuals that evaluate the situation and take action based on that evaluation. The empirical knowledge of dynamic bounded agency described in my life history research contributes to an understanding of the Bounded Agency Model as a continuous and dynamic process of deciding to participate.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore and describe how and why adults who have not fulfilled the current upper secondary education level become adult students in Komvux. Under this aim, there were two research questions: 1) why and how adults decide to study in Komvux and 2) if they experience any barriers to participate in Komvux, how they overcome them.

Analyzing the five life histories, I first distinguished the reasons why informants did not have the grade of English 5 and the reasons and important steps leading to their participation in Komvux. The reasons for not having the grade were more or less the consequences of wider context rather than individual choices. As a main reason for participation, it was expected by the students that studying in Komvux

would lead a new job. The informants took a long term perspective that led to changes in their career and lifestyle. Different situations and transitions in life gave them opportunities to think about their future. The participation barriers experienced by my informants were 1) age, 2) lack of self-confidence, 3) time span, and 4) no clear purpose of study. These barriers were weakened through 1) encounter with new people and new values, 2) transitions in life that create new needs, 3) having proper information about education, and 4) cultivating self-confidence.

The capability approach and the Bounded Agency Model were used for the further analysis of the life histories. I found that the informants had limited capability for work and therefore they decided to study to change their career path. Although their capability to participate in education was restricted by participation barriers in the beginning, eventually the function of Komvux was recognized as a possibility to realize the lifestyle that they have a reason to value.

As implications for the Bounded Agency Model, I argued three points. Firstly, the influence of the Swedish welfare state regime (Esping-Anderson, 1990) seems to have played a great role in weakening participation barriers. Secondly, the original reasons why adult students did not take “the first chance” and needed the second chance were also bounded in the social context. Thirdly, perceptions and values regarding participation in adult education were continuously renewed and revised by reflecting on experiences corresponding to life stage and new environment.

Limitations and recommendations for further research

One of the limitations of my study is that it did not take into account second chance education for adults with immigrant backgrounds. The proportion of non-Swedish born students in Komvux has drastically increased compared to the late 1990s (Hydén, 2013). Although some students with non-Swedish background kindly offered to take part in my study, their interview data was not used in my main analysis. However, I want to write some minor notes here on the implications of my findings for adult students of non-Swedish background. Three interviews with non-Swedish backgrounds students suggested that education had a special meaning for them: it was one of the few tools available to them to engineer integration into Swedish society. Some of the students with non-Swedish background had been to university in their home country but had to study upper secondary level courses in Komvux because the degree from their country was not officially recognized by the Swedish system. Similarly, it was implied that the meaning of school certification was greater for the adults with non-Swedish background. It helped them to compensate for their disadvantages in employability in the labour market. The students with non-Swedish background I interviewed were quite motivated to study because they thought it was difficult to get a good job without a certification from Swedish educational institution. Thus, further research is recommended about Komvux’s function as a second chance for adult students with non-Swedish backgrounds.

In addition, the focus of the present study was on participation in Komvux and therefore it has little to say about whether adult students complete the course or drop out for some reasons. The completion of study in Komvux is also an important issue because the participation in Komvux is the very first step of the second chance and there are more steps to go. Therefore, additional life history research on adult students who dropped out from Komvux is likely to have important implications for second chance education in Sweden. Finally, life history research on participation in adult education from a comparative perspective is recommended, both in welfare state regimes such as those found in Scandinavian countries and also in countries under different welfare state regimes.

References

- Andersson, E., & Wärvik, G-B. (2012). Swedish adult education in transition? Implications of the work first principle. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 18(1), 20-103.
- Assarsson, L., & Sipos-Zackrisson, K. (2005). *Iscensättande av identiteter i vuxenstudier*. Linköpings universitet, Filosofiska fakulteten, & Institutionen för beteendevetenskap och lärande.
- Assarsson, L., & Sipos-Zackrisson, K. (2006). Att delta i vuxenstudier. In Larsson S., & Olsson, L. E. (Eds.), *Om vuxnas studier* (pp. 93-108). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Beach, D., & Carlson, M. (2004). Adult education goes to market: An ethnographic case study of the restructuring and reculturing of adult education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 3(3), 673-691.
- Becker, G. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*. New York: Columbia University.
- Beder, H. (1990). Reasons for nonparticipation in adult basic education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 40(4), 207-218. DOI: 10.1177/0001848190040004003
- Belzer, A. (2004). "It's not like normal school": The role of prior learning contexts in adult learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55(1), 41-59. DOI: 10.1177/0741713604268893
- Bold, C. (2012). *Using narrative in research*. London: SAGE.
- Bonvin, J-M. (2012). Individual working lives and collective action. An introduction to capability for work and capability for voice. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 18(9): 9-18. DOI: 10.1177/1024258911431046
- Boeren, E., Holford, J., Nicaise, I., & Baert, H. (2012). Why do adults learn? Developing a motivational typology across 12 European countries. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 10(2), 247-269.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University.
- Bäckman, O., Jakobson, V., Lorentzen, T., Österbacka, E., & Dahlmed, E. (2011). Dropping out in Scandinavia – social exclusion and labour market attachment among upper secondary school dropouts in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Stockholm: Institutet för Framtidsstudier.
- Cole, A. L., & Knowles, J. G. (Eds.). (2001). *Lives in contexts: The art of life history research*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira.
- Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adult as learners: Increasing participations and facilitating learning*. California: Jossey-Bass.
- Davis, C. A. (2014). Unraveled, untold stories: An ethnodrama. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 64(3), 240-259. DOI: 10.1177/0741713614531067
- Desjardins, R., & Rubenson, K. (2013). Participation patterns in adult education: The role of institutions and public policy frameworks in resolving coordination problems. *European Journal of*

- Education*, 48(2), 262-280.
- Drayton, B., & Prins, E. (2011). *African American men, identity, and participation in adult basic education and literacy programs*. University Park, PA: Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy.
- Esping-Anderson, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Fransson, A., & Larsson, S. (1989). Who takes the second chance? Implementing educational equality in adult basic education in a Swedish context. Gothenburg: Vasastaden bokbinderi.
- Goodson, I., & Sikes, P. (2001). *Life history research in educational settings: Learning from lives*. Buckingham: Open University.
- Hall, C. (2011). Förlängningen av yrkesutbildningarna på gymnasiet: Effekter på utbildnings-avhopp, utbildningsnivå och inkomster. *Søkelys på Arbetdslivet*, 28(1-2), 157-170.
- Hatch, J. A., & Newsom, S. K. (2010). Life history. In Penolope, P., Baker, E., & PlcGaw, B. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 430-435). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Hydén, J. (2013). Komvux - den glömda skolformen. *SKOLVÄRLDEN*, 1, 20-25.
- Höghielm, R. (2010). Adult basic education: A challenge for vocational based learning. In Penolope, P., Baker, E., & PlcGaw, B. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 102-106). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Illeris, K. (2006). Lifelong learning and the low-skilled. *Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25(1), 15-28.
- Henning Loeb, I. (2007). Development and change in Swedish municipal adult education: Occupational life history studies and four genealogies of context. *Policy Futures in Education*, 5(4): 468-477.
- Miller, H. L. (1967). *Participation of adults in education: A force-field analysis*. Boston: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults.
- Murray, Å. (2007). Genomströmningen i gymnasieskolan. Före och efter gymnasiereformen. In J. Olofsson (Ed.), *Utbildningsvägen – vart leder den? Om ungdomar, yrkesutbildning och försörjning* (pp. 143-157). Stockholm: SNS Förlag.
- Nordlund, M., Bonfanti, S., & Strandh, M. (2013). Second chance education matters! Income trajectories of poorly educated non-Nordics in Sweden. *Journal of Education and Work*. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2013.820262
- Nordlund, M., Stehlik, T., & Strandh, M. (2013). Investment in second-chance education for adults and income development in Sweden. *Journal of Education and Work*, 26(5), 514-538. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2012.664633
- Paldanius, S. (1997). Olika betydelser av kommunal vuxenutbildning för arbetslösa. Göteborg: Univ., Institutionen för pedagogik.
- Phonix, C., Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2010). Narrative analysis in aging studies: A typology for consideration. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 24, 1-11.
- Rubenson, K. (2007). *Determinants of formal and informal Canadian adult learning*. Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.
- Rubenson, K. (2010). Barriers to participation in adult education. In Penolope, P., Baker, E., &

- PlcGaw, B. (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 234-239). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Rubenson, K., & Desjardins, R. (2009). The impact of welfare state regimes on barriers to participation in adult education: A bounded agency model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(3): 187-207.
DOI: 10.1177/0741713609331548
- Sen, A. K. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Sikes, P. (2010). The ethics of writing life histories and narratives in educational research. In Bathmaker, A., & Harnett, P. (Eds.), *Exploring learning, identity and power through life history and narrative research* (pp. 11-24). Oxon: Routledge.
- Skolverket. (2007). *Varför hoppade du av?* Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved Feb 2, 2015, from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1791>
- Skolverket. (2008). *Studieavbrott och stödinsatser i gymnasieskolan*. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved February 2, 2015, from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2117>
- Skolverket. (2012a). *Läroplan för vuxenutbildningen 2012*. Stockholm: Fritzes. Retrieved November 12, 2014, from <http://www.skolverket.se/skolformer/nyhetsarkiv/nyheter-2013/laroplan-for-vuxenutbildningen-1.178318>
- Skolverket. (2012b). *Upper secondary school 2011*. Stockholm: Fritzes. Retrieved January 26, 2015, from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2801>
- Skolverket. (2012c). PM - Betyg och studieresultat i gymnasieskolan 2011/12. Retrieved November 3, 2014, from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2948>
- Skolverket (2013a). PM - Elever och studieresultat i Komvux 2012. Retrieved December 3, 2014, from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=3031>
- Skolverket. (2013b). Facts and figures 2012: Pre-school activities, schools and adult education in Sweden. Retrieved February 3, 2015, from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=3184>
- Statistics Sweden. (2014). Education Report 2014:3, Adult participation in education 2011/2012. Retrieved September 9, 2014, from http://www.scb.se/en_/Finding-statistics/Publishing-calendar/Show-detailed-information/?publobjid=21596
- Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting. (2012). Motverka studieavbrott: Gymnasieskolans utmaning att få alla elever att fullfölja sin utbildning. Retrieved November 3, 2014, from <http://webbutik.skil.se/sv/artiklar/motverka-studieavbrott-gymnasieskolans-utmaning-att-fa-alla-elever-att-fullfolja-sin-utbildning.html>
- Tolich, M. (2004). Internal confidentiality: When confidentiality assurances fail relational informants. *Qualitative Sociology*, 27(1): 101-106.

Appendix 1: A letter to the principal and teachers

Till

Hej!

Mitt namn är Yukiko Take och jag har tidigare haft kontakt med dig angående den studie som jag ska göra i mastersprogrammet IMER vid Göteborgs universitet. Du var positiv till att låta mig intervjua vuxenstuderande hos er, i syfte att få kunskap om deras orsaker att studera på komvux. I min studie är jag intresserad av vuxenstuderandes motivation och vad som möjliggör deras deltagande i studier på komvux. Jag tänker mig en livshistorisk ansats och genom det får man också information om hur studentens tidigare studier har varit, eventuella skäl till drop-out eller varför studierna inte fullföljdes tidigare.

Jag har nu diskuterat med min handledare (Ingrid Henning Loeb) och vi tror att det skulle vara ett bra upplägg om jag kunde börja med att intervjua studenter som läser kursen Engelska 5. Vi tror att det skulle vara ett bra avgränsat val av en kurs. Det är studenter med olika bakgrunder som läser Engelska 5.

Tror du att du skulle kunna hjälpa mig att få kontakt med lärare som undervisar denna kurs? Jag tror att det skulle vara bra om jag kunde få vara med på en eller två lektioner. Sedan skulle jag kunna berätta om mitt projekt och fråga elever om jag kan få intervjua dem. Om jag kan få kontakt med en engelsklärare som kan tänka sig att jag kan genomföra detta så skulle jag och denna lärare kunna diskutera vad han/hon tycker är en bra väg för att intervjua. Jag tänker att varje intervju tar ca 20-30 minuter. Jag kan göra intervjuerna efter engelsk-lektionen eller vid en tidpunkt som passar respektive student. Det vore bra med åtta-tio intervjuer.

Som du vet så talar jag engelska och svenska. Jag kan göra intervjuerna på både engelska och svenska eller blanda, beroende på vad respektive student tycker känns bäst.

Jag hoppas att kunna få kontakt med en eller flera engelsklärare i slutet av vecka 6 eller under vecka 7 och att jag kan få följa lektioner i vecka 8. Tror du att det är möjligt? Jag är mycket tacksam om du kan höra av dig.

Ge gärna feedback på det här förslaget.

Här är mina kontaktuppgifter:

Jag hoppas att jag kan göra en studie som ger er kunskap om era vuxenstuderande!

Med vänlig hälsning,

Yukiko Take

Appendix 2: A letter to the students

Hej!

Jag heter Yukiko Take och jag 27 år och kommer från Japan. Jag studerar på ett internationellt program vid Göteborgs universitet och ämnet är utbildningsvetenskap. Mitt specialintresse är svensk vuxenutbildning som är lite unikt i världen. Jag är intresserad av deltagarnas perspektiv på sin utbildning och deras motivation att läsa in komvux. Jag gör just nu en intervjustudie för att skriva min mastersuppsats som ska vara klar i juni. Mina forskningsintresse är att få kunskap om vilka skäl och motiv som vuxenstuderande har att läsa in gymnasieämnen på komvux och få veta om olika orsaker varför man inte fick betyg under sin gymnasietid, eller varför man avbröt studierna.

Jag söker efter personer som kan delta i denna studie. Intervjuerna tar ca en halvtimme och vi kommer överens om en tid och plats som passar dig. Jag kommer att spela in intervjun för att få ett bra underlag men alla deltagare kommer att vara anonyma i rapporten. Det är bara jag som lyssnar på inspelningarna. Jag hoppas att du delta i denna studie. Det är mycket viktigt för forskningen att få underlag om deltagares perspektiv på sin utbildning. Detta ger möjlighet att utbildningsanordnare och lärare att skapa bättre förutsättningar för deltagarna.

Jag kommer från Japan men jag har läst SFI och SAS1. Intervjun kommer att vara på svenska men kanske också lite på engelska om jag har svårt med vissa ord eller uttryck.

Här är mina kontaktuppgifter:

Jag hoppas att du kan tänka dig att bli intervjuad.

Dina erfarenheter och tankar är viktiga!

Med vänlig hälsning,

Yukiko Take

Appendix 3: Interview guide in English

Demographic information and current situation

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Could you please tell me a little bit about	About family, work, study, living place, age,

yourself?	ethnic background, overall life course
-----------	--

Gymnasieskolan

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Could you please tell me about your experience in gymnasiet?	Which program did you go to? Why? Did you like it?
How would you describe the gymnasieskolan you went to?	Teachers, classmate, school environment?
How did you experience the difference between grundskola and gymnasiet?	Can you give me some examples?
Do you remember how many credits you had from the gymnasiet?	Can you tell me about the situation why you did not finish Engelska 5?

Grundskolan

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Could you please tell me your experience in grundskolan?	

After gymnasiet (if any)

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Could you tell me about your experience after gymnasiet?	What happened? What did you do? Where did you live? Who did you hang out with?
How would you describe this time?	Tough, boring, free, fun...?

Komvux

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Could you tell me the story why you began the study in komvux?	Was it your choice or did someone tell you to do? Can you recall a specific episode?
When you signed up for komvux, what was your feeling about being an adult student?	Did you have any concern? Money, family, job, self-confidence, identity?
How high is your motivation now?	Scale 0-10. What does it mean? How does your study motivation differ compared to gymnasiet time? Why?
Do you think you will receive diploma?	Could you please describe the vision after

	finishing komvux? Work, University, vocational education?
How do you describe the difference between gymnasiet and komvux?	Teachers, classmates, education, school environment?

Could you tell me more about that?

Can you recall a specific episode that stands out?

Can you give me an example?

How would you describe yourself during that period?

Appendix 4: Interview guide in Swedish

Demographic information and current situation

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Kan du berätta lite om dig själv?	Om familj, arbete, studier, boplats, ålder, etniska bakgrund

Gymnasieskolan

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Kan du berätta om dina erfarenheter i gymnasieskolan?	Vilken linje valde du? Varför? Gillade du det?
Hur skulle du beskriva din gymnasieskolan?	Lärare, klasskamrater, skolmiljö?
Hur upplevde du skillnaden mellan grundskolan och gymnasieskolan?	Kan du ge mig några exempel?
Kommer du igåg hur många poäng du hade från gymnasiet?	Kan du berätta om situationen varför du inte tag engelska 5 då?

Grundskolan

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Kan du berätta om dina erfarenheter i grundskolan?	

After gymnasiet (if any)

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Kan du berätta om dina erfarenheter efter gymnasiet?	Vad hände? Vad gjorde du? Var bodde du? Vem fick du umgås med?

Hur skulle du beskriva den tidpunkten?	tufft, tråkigt, fritt ...?
--	----------------------------

Komvux

Questions	Follow-up Questions
Kan du berätta om varför du började studera i komvux?	Vad det ditt val eller var det någon som sa att göra det? Kommer du ihåg några speciella historier?
När du ammalde dig på komvux, hur kände du dig att vara en vuxenstuderande?	Hade du några oro? Pengar, familj, arbete, självförtroende, identitet?
Hur högt motiveras du?	Skala 0-10. Vad betyder det? Hur skiljer din motivation jämför med din gymnasietiden? Varför?
Tror du att du kommer att få gymnasieexamen?	Kan du beskriva din plan äfter komvux? Jobb, universitet, yrkesutbildning?
Hur skulle du beskriva skillnaden mellan gymnasieskolan och komvux?	Lärare, klasskamrater, skolmiljö?

Kan du berätta mer om detta?

Kommer du ihåg speciella historier om detta?

Kan du ge mig några exempel?

Hur skulle du beskriva dig själv i den tidpunkten?