Professor Gunilla Dahlberg: Difference as potential for learning

In today’s world we live with an ethical and political rhetoric that emphasizes difference, diversity, autonomy and decentralization at the same time as procedures such as tests, standards and criteria are becoming more and more prevalent. Hence, the respect, responsibility and trust, but also innovation, that this new rhetoric is supposed to give seems to be taken away through a highly intensive regime of control and predetermined outcomes.

This featured speech will problematize these new regimes of control that has got a tendency to suppresses diversity and difference and make the other into the same. By understanding identity and learning as a relational place and by introducing the notions of difference and thought put forward by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1994) new ways of thinking – towards a more rhizomatic form of thinking – can be opened up. Thought, according to Deleuze, is neither innate nor stirred by the reassuring familiarity of encounters with the known. It is an involuntary activity that takes place when the mind is provoked by an encounter with the unknown and the unpredictable. This thinking calls for a willingness to experiment and to explore creative processes and productions. It also calls for a pedagogy of welcoming and listening – a pedagogy that can go beyond representing and recognizing the other. Pedagogical documentation and networking have proved to be important procedures for constructing such pedagogy and for ‘liberating’ difference as a potential for learning.