

Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education
The Voice of History and the Message of the National Curriculum: Recontextualising
History to a Pedagogic Discourse for Upper Secondary VET
Kristina Ledman
Nordidactica 2014:2
ISSN 2000-9879
The online version of this paper can be found at: www.kau.se/nordidactica

Nordidactica
- Journal of Humanities and Social
Science Education

2014:2

The Voice of History and the Message of the National Curriculum: Recontextualising History to a Pedagogic Discourse for Upper Secondary VET

Kristina Ledman

Department of historical, philosophical and religious studies, Umeå University

Abstract: In the reform by the liberal-conservative government of Swedish upper secondary education in 2011, history was recognized as an important part of citizenship education and was introduced into the curriculum for vocational education and training (VET) tracks. Through the concepts of classification and framing, this article explores the process of constructing the history syllabus for VET. The data consist of archived material from the working group responsible for the history curriculum under the Swedish National Agency for Education. The analysis shows that there are competing discourses concerning the relative emphasis on competencies and skills and concerning the emphasis on contemporary and modern history. Although historians, history teachers and other agents are invited to respond to the content of the curriculum, the respondents have no influence on the knowledge structure of the curriculum, which is controlled by agents of the dominant educational ideology. From a critical perspective, this article suggests that the curriculum reflects the instrumental and neoconservative message of the reform through strong classification and framing and through the emphasis on general abilities and a contemporary history that has a more direct explanatory value to contemporary society.

KEYWORDS: HISTORY EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION, CURRICULUM, CURRICULUM REFORM

About the author: Kristina Ledman is a doctoral candidate within the research group of history and education at Umeå University, SE-90187 Umeå, Sweden; Email: kristina.ledman@umu.se. In her thesis she investigates the 2011 history curriculum for Swedish upper secondary vocational tracks by examining the background to the introduction of history in vocational education and training, the content and structure of the history syllabus and by exploring how students and teachers experience history education.

Introduction

What knowledge, competencies, and skills should be transferred to the next generation? This is an unavoidable question and a perennial issue for all societies regardless of their location in time and space (Lundgren, 1979). For a society to endure over generations, productive knowledge is needed as well as reproductive knowledge that reproduces material, social, and cultural structures (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2005, p. 13). Democratic societies need to educate for democratic citizenship in one way or another (e.g., Spanget Christensen, 2011), and history education has been ascribed a central function in citizenship education in the latest reforms of Swedish primary, secondary, and upper secondary education. When history was proposed as a compulsory subject in the liberal-conservative government bill for the 2011 reform of upper secondary school, the subject's function in citizenship education was stressed with reference to a multicultural society and globalisation. Learning history would contribute to the students' enhanced understanding of past and present society and prepare them for active and critical citizenship.

History is introduced as a compulsory subject. It is vital, not the least in our multicultural society of today, to understand how society, cultures, and ideologies have evolved and how influence on the development of society can be exerted nationally and globally. The subject increases the students' ability to understand developments in present time and in the world of today and thereby the ability to participate in civil society and contemporary debate. (Gov. Bill 2008/09:199)

The reform was implemented in 2011, and history was made compulsory in upper secondary education, both for students in academic tracks and for students in vocational education and training (VET). The history course for VET tracks is especially interesting because it not only is an example of the new history curriculum and the increased importance ascribed to teaching history, but it also provides an empirical example of the lowest common denominator of a history course in upper secondary school.

This study focuses on the history course for VET and explores what becomes visible in the process of constructing the formal document. The aim is to problematize the content and the structure of the history syllabus developed for VET students. I examine what historical knowledge is reconstructed to the pedagogic discourse of the syllabus and how the history syllabus is designed with consideration for the educational context of VET. Furthermore, I discuss the content and structure of the history syllabus in relation to the ideological framework of the 2011 reform.

The content matter and learning goals of history have become controversial in several educational systems in the so-called history wars (e.g., Clark, 2009; Taylor, 2010). The question of what counts as legitimate knowledge in the history curriculum becomes an argument between agents from different ideological positions. When history education is discussed publicly, the focus is usually on the content knowledge, which in different national contexts has engaged both historians and politicians in

fierce debates (Taylor, 2010; Parkes, 2009; Nash, Crabtree & Dunn, 1998; Crawford, 1995).

The reform process of Swedish primary and lower secondary schools preceded the reform of upper secondary schools. Each subject curriculum for upper secondary school was to be constructed so that it constituted a progression from compulsory school. When drafted in early 2010, the new history curriculum for compulsory school was heavily criticised for the choice of emphasising contemporary and modern history at the expense of the study of the Middle Ages and the classical era. Among the critics were thirteen scholars of pre-modernity who published a petition arguing for a longer time horizon in the history syllabus. They argued that without knowledge of pre-modernity and ancient history the pupils would be deprived of the opportunity to critically examine mythic narratives of the distant past in contemporary society (Norlin & Lindmark, forthcoming). The Minister of Education, Jan Björklund, reassured the critics and the general public that the government would not approve the suggested history curriculum.

Antiquity is the cradle of Western civilization. The Middle Ages is a central period in the process of Sweden's formation. Cities were built, the country was Christianized, trade expanded, and a monetary system was established. To me it is unimaginable that this would be excluded from history teaching in schools. (Svenska Dagbladet 20100217)

The working group behind the curriculum, with historian and history educator Per Eliasson as its coordinator, had organised the content in the curriculum with the development of the pupil's historical consciousness and understanding of contemporary society as the central focus. They now had to compromise, and antiquity, as well as other pre-modern aspects of history, was eventually included in the final version of the curriculum.

Until the 2011 reform, the status of history in the national curriculum was gradually deteriorating in the post-war period (Larsson, 2001). However, during the second half of the nineties, a renewed interest in history arose as a discussion of a perceived lack of historical knowledge and awareness among youth surfaced, a discussion similar to the uproars about children not knowing history in other national contexts at the time (e.g., Clark, 2009). The perception in Sweden's case was based on an inquiry that led to assumptions about a lack of awareness of the Holocaust among young people. The government's response was to initiate a campaign that was institutionalised into governmental agency, "The Living History Forum" (Hellstenius, 2011). This development served to legitimise the arguments made by the proponents of history education, and by 2004 there was a political consensus concerning the introduction of history as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum (Hellstenius & Elgström, 2011).

The reform of Swedish upper secondary schools in 2011 increased the division between educational tracks preparing for future studies and the tracks preparing for work. The process of reforming upper secondary education had been on-going for nearly a decade. The implementation process started by the social democratic

government (Govern. Bill 2003/04:140) was called off by the new liberal-conservative government after the general election in 2006. The 2011 reform was constructed in response to the perceived problems of too general educational tracks and an “over theorisation” of VET, which caused students to drop out (Nylund, 2013, pp. 33–38). As a part of the reform, the overall time allocated to general subjects was decreased in favour of more VET. The gradual increase of general subjects since the unification of post-compulsory education in 1971 was thereby broken (Govern. Bill 1968:140). Time for history, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction, and the subject was made compulsory.¹

The educational function of the history subject varies among different national contexts and times, and thus the content matter and structure of the knowledge differ. Over the past hundred years, history as a school subject in the Swedish educational context has moved from an early 20th century patriotic nationalist history subject to the inquiry-based multi-voiced history subject of the early 21th century (c.f. Sørdring Jensen, 1978; Zander, 1997; Larsson, 2001). History teaching can serve to contribute to national and social cohesion or to emancipate and empower groups that are marginalised (e.g., Seixas, 2000). Within the same educational context, there are parallel ideals of the purpose of history teaching among teachers, pupils, and other agents (c.f. Berg, 2010, Lozic, 2010, Nygren, 2009). In addition, the relationship between history as a discipline and history as a school subject and the potential conflict between existential and scientific uses and functions in history teaching are recurring issues (c.f. Eskelund Knudsen, 2014).

Since 2011, history has been a school subject in the Swedish national curriculum with an explicit function to prepare young people for the future (Sandahl, 2014). This focus on the present and the future in history as a pedagogic discourse is a consequence of the development of the growing field of history didactics, which focuses on the production, transmission, and acquisition of history in the educational system and in society. Historical consciousness, historical culture, and the use of history are central concepts in the theoretical body of history didactics, not the least in Sweden.² These three concepts were central in the selection and organisation of

¹ In 1991, civics, religion, and general science – but not history – were made compulsory in upper secondary education, including the three-year VET tracks (Govern. Bill 1990/91:85). The gradual increase of general subjects in VET was partly based on the idea of a knowledge economy. However, the introduction of history in 2011 was made solely with arguments about citizenship education, and history was presumed to contribute to social cohesion and critical thinking proficiency (Ledman, 2014).

² Historical consciousness can be defined as the individual’s experience of the interconnection between the interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspectives of the future. History is then a meaningful narrative of the past that helps the individual to understand the present and to orientate their thoughts on the future. (Rüsen 2004, pp. 104–105; Jensen, 2003; Karlsson, 2009, p. 49). Historical consciousness is constructed in historical culture(s), that is, a society’s (culture’s, nation’s) use of history (a narration of the past) as a way of understanding itself and its future (Karlsson, 2009, pp. 37ff.). Historical culture is

content in the construction of the history subject in the reform of primary and lower secondary schools that preceded the reform of upper secondary schools.

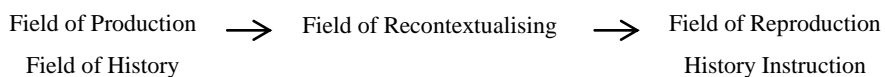
Recent contributions that have focused on the new history curriculum via teachers' transformation and interpretation of the syllabus include Berg (2014) for academic tracks and Ledman (forthcoming) for vocational tracks. However, general subjects within VET have so far received little interest in educational research and there has been no research on the content of the actual process of making a course syllabus as part of the education reform. The focus of this study lies in the intersection between didactical research and policy studies, and it focuses on the relation between macro-educational structures and knowledge structures in a specific area.

An important dimension of this study is the consideration of the context of the reform in the construction of the history syllabus for VET. The reform of 2011 has been characterised as a move towards instrumentality and conservatism in upper secondary education. Nylund (2013) focused on the social and political consequences of the content and organisation of knowledge in VET. One conclusion is that the content of education is constructed in relation to external interests, and the latest reform has been dominated by a discourse of employability. Furthermore, the reform is characterised as a deviation from a longer trend of integration between academic and VET tracks and an increased proportion of common core subjects (e.g., Lundahl et al., 2010). The educational goal of upper secondary school to educate for democracy was downplayed, and a more conservative conception became dominant (Arneback & Berg, 2010; Bergström & Wahlström, 2008). Carlbaum (2012) concluded that the concept of citizenship became directed towards the labour market and the goal of educating employable citizens. Berggren (2012) explicitly focused on the common core subjects and showed that the division of common core subjects between academic and vocational tracks was preceded by a discourse of adapting content to either higher education or work life. These studies concerned the macro level of curriculum reform and educational policy. Micro-level studies of the reform, such as the inquiry presented here, are still rare.

manifested in uses of history. It is an analytical typology that has influenced research and history as a school subject and directs attention to how that history is used for different purposes on different levels in society, for example, the existential use of individuals, the moral and ideological use of different groups and interests, and the scholarly-scientific use of academic traditions (Karlsson, 2009, pp. 56ff.). Historical consciousness and historical culture were first developed in a German history theoretical tradition, and the concepts have influenced the development of a Swedish field of history didactics that is often mediated by Danish didacticians (Lindmark & Rönqvist, 2011, p. 295). The theory of historical consciousness and historical culture have, since the turn of the century, attracted interest from history and social studies educators in the UK, the US, and Canada with a more empirically and cognitively rooted approach to history education (e.g., *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Seixas (ed.), 2004). In recent years, Swedish history didactics has become informed by empirical behavioural research that focuses on the study of teaching and learning history, such as e.g. Wineburg 2001 (cf. Lindmark & Rönqvist, 2011, p. 295).

Theory

The formal curriculum as a text is a dense representation of knowledge and procedures selected to fulfil the ambitions of educating the next generation. The making of a curriculum can be regarded as a process going from the formulation of ideas behind the policy to the enactment and realisation of the curriculum in practice. Separate fields, or arenas, are defined as analytical concepts for the study of curriculum (such as formal, realisation, enacted, or experiential concepts) (e.g., Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2005; Nygren, 2011; Goodlad, 1979). This study is based on educational sociologist and curriculum theorist Basil Bernstein's (2000) model for production, recontextualisation, and reproduction of knowledge in a society: the pedagogic device.



In Bernstein's model, power and control are active in the transformation of knowledge from a field of knowledge production (e.g., the discipline of history) to a field of reproduction (e.g., history instruction).

The pedagogic device serves to analyse how official knowledge is produced, distributed, and reproduced and how this is related to power relations in society. In the process, knowledge from the field of production is recontextualised to a specific pedagogic discourse. In the construction of school knowledge (Bernstein uses physics as an example, which here is replaced by history), Bernstein claims that we must distinguish between history as "activities in the field of production of a discourse" and history as a "pedagogic discourse" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 34). The object of inquiry here is a process in the recontextualising field. The agents in the recontextualising field select from all the practices known as history in the field of production of history. The complexity of the model has been decreased in this study by not distinguishing between an official and a pedagogic recontextualising field. (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 34, 35). The content of education and how that knowledge is structured is analysed through the theoretical concepts of classification and framing, and these are the concepts deployed in the analysis presented here.

Classification describes how strongly a category is separated from other categories. A category's strength is upheld by power, and this becomes visible when the category's boundaries to other categories are challenged. The school subject of mathematics provides an example of a strongly classified school subject. This subject has a unique character with a language of its own and strong boundaries between it and most other school subjects. The school subject of social studies, on the other hand, provides an example of a weakly classified school subject. Its identity is ambiguous, and it is based on knowledge from several different academic disciplines with weak boundaries to other school subjects such as sociology, religion, media, and history. Classification can be studied in different contexts, for example, how boundaries are

constructed and upheld between knowledge areas and between social groups such as age groups or socioeconomic classes. Classification is the answer to the question of “what”, and the strength of classification is related to the degree of insulation between the category and other categories (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 5–11).

Framing describes how relations are regulated within a specific context, who controls what in the process, what relations are present, and how communication is regulated. In the process of education, this might concern sequencing, pace, evaluation, and assessment of knowledge. Strong framing means that the transmitter of knowledge controls the process, whereas weak framing gives the acquirer of knowledge larger control (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 11, 12). The strength of control in framing can be internal or external. Formal curricula and syllabi can thus be defined as external control in the educational practice of the classroom. The strength of framing varies with the level of detail in the definitions of content, mode, pace of instruction, and assessment criteria in the syllabi and in how much is left for the students and/or the teacher to define. The reform of Swedish upper secondary school saw an increase in framing, for example, through more detailed regulations concerning the central content of the different course syllabi, and the framing was further increased with the expansion of the practice of national tests.

Bernstein makes a distinction between esoteric and mundane knowledge discourses and argues that the distribution of abstract and theoretical knowledge is a precondition for democracy (Bernstein, 2000; Wheelahan, 2010). The mundane knowledge provides answers to questions of “how it is”. Everyday or “common sense” knowledge entails a set of strategies which are local, segmentally organised, context specific and dependent (Bernstein, 2000, p. 157). Because such mundane knowledge is situated in a context, it cannot easily be transferred to other contexts. However, esoteric (abstract and theoretical) knowledge can more easily be transferred between different practices and contexts. The abstract knowledge provides access to “the unthinkable”, to power, and to society’s conversation about society (Wheelahan, 2010). Classification and framing of history knowledge in the form of a history course syllabus thus provide the students in VET with access to specific knowledge, and this knowledge has social consequences.

Material and method

The Swedish National Agency for Education (NAE) – with detailed instruction from the government – constructed the new “*gymnasium*” by defining the content and educational goals of different tracks and the curricula for different subjects. The formal assignment was given to the agency in October 2009 (U2009/2114/G, U2009/5688/G). Before that, the NAE had developed a template for subject curricula and course syllabi that organised knowledge content and structured the reform (U2009/2114/G). This study is based on material preserved in the archive of the NAE from the working group responsible for the history subject in the 2011 reform. In addition to the history curriculum, the group constructed the curricula for civics,

religion, and geography. This analysis also includes material from the working group that coordinated the construction of the common core subjects (*gymnasiegemensamma ämnen*). Each of the working groups in the reform process included a responsible NAE director of education, a writer, and subject experts. The subject experts in history were a historian involved in research in history didactics, Per Eliasson, and a teacher educator and history text book author, Weronica Ader. Per Eliasson was coordinator in the construction of the history curriculum in the reform of compulsory school. In the instructions for the reform, the government directed NAE to construct the curricula for each of the different subjects as coherent progressions from primary and lower secondary school to upper secondary school. Therefore, the history curriculum constructed in the reform of primary and lower secondary school was a frame of reference and a point of departure in the work with the history curriculum.

The archived material consists of terms of reference, drafts, minutes, and responses from reference schools and individual teachers. There are also responses from universities, authorities, and organisations. I accessed the full archive in person and scanned all documents concerning the history curriculum and the different history course syllabi. This material allowed for an analysis of the different drafts of the history curriculum and the responses and critiques communicated from external agents. It was also possible to examine the considerations and discussions going on within the working group through minutes and internal memos.

The analysis was made in two stages. First, all material concerning the history syllabus for VET was excerpted. In the second stage, the materials produced in the reform process were analysed to determine the strength of classification and framing. The results are presented in two main sections, discourses concerning classification of the content and discourses concerning framing. When reporting this part of the analysis, I comment on whether the discourse is voiced mainly by historians, teachers and practitioners, or agents in official positions. However, relating discourses to different categories of agents, or to define groups of agents, is not a main focus in this study. To the extent categorisations of agents appear, they should be understood as a consequence of generalisations. Finally, I discuss the implications of the results in relation to the questions regarding the content and structure of the knowledge of the history syllabus for VET and comment on whether the syllabus is tailored to the VET context and how the syllabus reflects the general discourse of the reform.

Classification of history as a pedagogic discourse

Struggles over the boundaries of history as a pedagogic discourse became visible in the analysis of different reactions towards the proposal of knowledge content of the course for VET. Foremost, these struggles concerned whether the content should be bound to a vocational context, how contemporary the time period studied should be, the importance of developing competencies and tools, the importance of learning the past, and to what degree the use of history should have a place in history teaching for VET.

The existence of a category presupposes boundaries with other categories. In the case of the history subject, the boundaries of history as a unique category were – according to the reactions in the curriculum-making process – challenged by the subject of civics. There were several reactions from individual teachers (e.g., Dnr 2009:537, 80:210), groups of history teachers at schools (e.g., Dnr 2009:537, 80:209), and university history departments (e.g., Dnr 2009:537, 80:252) that called for a clearer distinction between history and social science. The reactions were mainly in response to a proposal about the central content that stipulated the study of:

Swedish labour market and working life during the 20th century, changes in the labour force with attention to perspectives of diversity issues, gender equality, and migration, and changes in organisation and content of labour. The meaning of those changes today for different groups of professional identities. Sweden and the world in the post-war era. Sweden and European cooperation, policy of neutrality, migration, and work for sustainable development. (Dnr 2009:537, 50)

The idea of context-bound knowledge connecting parts of the content to vocational identities and the labour market was formulated as a suggestion to specialise knowledge of history to the respective vocational education pathways of different tracks. In the minutes from a meeting, the group discussed the content of the history course for VET:

One idea is to take off in the vocation, since it is vocational tracks: qualify the knowledge about the vocation, for example, the construction-working track. The compulsory general subjects must be qualified into their (students in VET) identity, vocational identity (diversity issues), [...] and history. (Dnr 2009:537, 20:12)

However, the proposed formulation was met with strong resistance – and great surprise – when it was made public in February 2010. According to the reactions, the proposal revealed a lack of confidence in history in its own right and a disbelief that students could actually find history interesting (2009:537,80:202; Dnr 2009:537, 80:228; Dnr 2009:537, 70:26; Dnr 2009:537, 80:202). Some reactions even articulated that the form of the history subject constructed in the proposal diluted the essence of history as a category.

The suggestion is an attempt to mutilate the history subject and to make it into yet another social science subject. [...] The current suggestion is a catastrophe. [What is missing?] Well, history! That is, the assignment to present the development in society in the last 100 years, with background in the 19th century – the essence of the history subject. (Dnr 2009:537, 80:225)

There were also concerns that the students were deprived of the opportunity to gain a more general knowledge of the past and a broader historical consciousness. The head of history in one school wrote, “Great risk of interpreting this as something rather dull, as for example, ‘carpenter history’, which would frighten most students” (Dnr 2009:537, 80:232). One of the university history departments perceived the proportion of course time given to the Swedish labour market and vocational identities as unmotivated (Dnr 2009:537, 80:252).

Classification of history as a pedagogic discourse was also dependent on the time span of the historical content in instruction, and the working group's proposal to focus on the last 200 years gained mostly positive responses. However, a counter discourse argued that longer time perspectives are essential to understand the present. This discourse is illuminated by the response from a history department.

We welcome that the proposed curriculum recognizes history not only as a "final" narrative but also as questions about how such narratives are constructed and used. [...] Nonetheless, we find that it is to go too far when use of history is made into the main content of the subject. There is a heavy emphasis in the curriculum on modern, especially contemporary, history – a priority that might be justified to a certain degree but is driven so far in the proposal that it becomes a myopic history, which deals with what we immediately here and now can relate to and see the "utility" of. (Dnr 2009:537, 80:252)

From another history department there was an agreement with the attempt to focus on the competencies and tools in history education. "At the same time, it might be slightly controversial that the only history content made compulsory is certain parts of Swedish 20th century history" (Dnr 2009:537, 80:259). If the idea is, the argument continued, that the course should provide the students with a national history within a social science context, then this should be clearly stated in the introductory paragraphs of the curriculum.

The comment made about the focus on competencies and tools in history education was another aspect of the boundaries of history that came across as contested in the analysis. On the one hand, knowledge of history as knowledge of the past, and on the other hand, an understanding of the underlying principles of historical knowledge as narratives that are constructed and situated. Many questions were raised in response to concepts from the field of history didactics such as historical consciousness, use of history, and the general focus on historical thinking. One school response says that there is:

too little emphasis of historical knowledge as being able to comprehend "cause – consequence", to construct lines of change in history, to see and understand human living conditions [...] an overemphasis on history didactics. An incisive question is if the pupils are to study history didactics or history? The future is mentioned three times in the introduction. [...] Is it the intention of the agency of education to radically change the subject or does the agency take for granted that teachers read in a lot of aims and goals that are not outlined [in the text]? (2009:537, 80:253)

One conclusion that can be drawn from this and other similar statements made by individual teachers and groups of teachers is that in 2010 many were still very uncertain about the meaning of the concepts from the literature on history didactics. "Use of history" was especially met with wonder and requests for professional development (e.g., Dnr 2009:537, 80:315; Dnr 2009:537, 90:88). Still others called for more emphasis on knowledge of the past, arguing that this knowledge base was a necessity for teaching towards competencies (Dnr 2009:537, 90:32). In her remark, a

historian stated that there was too little emphasis on knowledge of the past and that the syllabi were on a far higher (scientific) level than the syllabi used in universities. “Who are they written for?” (Dnr 2009:537, 80:262). Another concept that was an object of struggle was “cultural heritage”. The Association of History Teachers requested a goal that would provide the students with the opportunity to “reflect on the cultural heritage’s meaning for the conception of our identity and of reality” (Dnr 2009:537, 80:345). In the final report to the government, NAE commented on this request and said that there was no need to specifically pinpoint cultural heritage, which could be covered within the general construct of the text (2010-09-23, Dnr 2009:520). However, in the final version, the Ministry of Education added “as well as the opportunity to reflect on the importance of cultural heritage in understanding identity and reality” (Govern. Protocol, 2010-12-02, U2010/854 /G, U2010/7356/G). Here the working-group’s recommendation was overruled by the Ministry.

In the argument for or against a certain content and orientation of history teaching in the curriculum, one strategy was to refer to the academic discipline of history. With such references, voices argued for more global history instead of a narrow focus on Sweden and Europe. Also, the argument for and against “use of history” was made with reference to the history discipline. In the web-based discussion forum, one teacher argued, “The concept ‘use of history’ is in multiple places [in the text]. Do not launch new concepts without an explanation of their scientific foundations.” She was met by the following remark: “You mean that use of history is not scientifically founded? Then I can tell you that there are several PhD dissertations in that area” (Dnr 2009:537, 90:44).

In the open process of making a curriculum, which invited responses from a wide range of agents, many different interests and perspectives were voiced. In addition to what has already been discussed, there were calls for perspectives concerning sustainable development, sexuality and gender equality, and shared experiences between the Nordic countries (Dnr 2009:537; 80:327; 80:335; 80:343). A more generally held view was that the proposals held a narrow national and European focus, which the respondents found to be out of touch with an increasingly multicultural society and globalised world (Dnr 2009:537, 80:326; 90:43).

The issues of debate concerning what content the history syllabus should cover can be summarised in three conflicts. First, whether the content should be bound to a vocational context and how contemporary the time period studied should be. The idea of a context-bound content was removed after heavy criticism, but the responses to the focus on contemporary and modern history, which remained in the final curriculum, were more ambiguous. Second, there were competing discourses concerning to what extent the curriculum should emphasise teaching competencies and tools (historical thinking) and how much emphasis there should be on learning the past. The general conclusion is that concepts from history didactics ordered the logic of the defined knowledge in the curriculum, and this put less emphasis on the knowledge of history than many of those in the field of history production as well as the teaching of history had wished for. Third, the introduction of the use of history as one of the three main

objectives of history teaching was controversial – more so than the ability to use history methods. Here the critical responses stressed the need to know history in order to make sense of analysing the use of history.

In general, the responses from history departments and individual historians tended to highlight what was perceived as a lack of emphasis on knowledge of the past and that the theoretical and methodological goals were too advanced. These responses also questioned the “presentness” of the construction of the history subject and the relative emphasis on teaching towards the use of history. There were different responses from teachers and schools. Among them, however, was a discourse similar to that from history departments when the teachers asked for more “history”, as in knowledge of the past, which commented on the emphasis on the structure of historical knowledge and questioned the meaning of the concept of the use of history. Agents and practicing teachers as well as others “in the know” of the theoretical background of history didactics – the concepts of historical consciousness, use of history, and the disciplinary orientation of history teaching – were more supportive of the proposed curriculum. One interpretation of the hesitance expressed by historians towards the proposed history syllabi could be a lack of a shared vocabulary between different history departments, and between history departments and upper secondary education, for the description of progress in the expansion of historical knowledge (cf. Nygren & Åstrand, 2012). Yet others, as expected, represented certain interests and perspectives and asked for recognition of representative content. The overruling by the liberal-conservative government of the working group proposition in the case of “the cultural heritage” in particular expressed that a curriculum is ultimately a political text. However, a curriculum not only consists of content but it also has a structure and a form that frames the knowledge.

Framing history in the structure of the national reform

There were two arguments related to the framing in the material. On the one side, the criticisms concerned the extent of the stipulated content and the learning goals, and questions were raised about whether it was possible to realise. On the other side – with the argument of equality – there were requests for more clearly defined, non-negotiable content and defined criteria for all grades. The framing increased during the process up until the final version of the curriculum was drafted. The formulations of the text became more and more dense, and the correlation between aims, goals, central content, and grading criteria became stronger. The syllabus became less and less open to alternative interpretations. This should not be interpreted only as a response to demands that were articulated in reaction to the drafts but also as a consequence of the process of constructing a final version of the curriculum in harmony with the classification and framing of the general reform.

The use of different concepts in the general description of the subject, the learning goals, and the central content generated questions in relation to framing. “Historical consciousness” is the supreme concept of the new history curriculum, and one

response from a historian called attention to the elasticity of the concept. If it was to be used, it should be defined. If that was a too precarious and controversial issue, the curriculum should instead state explicitly what the student should “develop” (Dnr 2009:537, 80:301). There were calls for an explanation of the term “use of history” (2009:537, 90:43), and there were different requests for clarifications. The use of examples in the central content of the course raised questions about whether the teachers could make their own decisions (Dnr 2009:537, 80:301). With the argument of equality in the content taught among different history teaching classrooms and schools, the Association of History Teachers made a request for more mandatory topics in the central content (Dnr 2009:537, 80:345). One of the university departments asked for more detailed instructions about what should be included in the content from ancient up until modern history because they found that the last two hundred years had a more defined content (Dnr 2009:537, 80:347). There were questions about how much time should be spent on the goals and if there was a certain order of instruction (Dnr 2009:537, 80:209), and there were worries that it would be difficult to cover all of the content in the allocated time for the course (2009:537, 90:43). The level of detail in the stipulated content and in the goals of the syllabus affects the level of control in the teaching–learning process, and the evaluation rules in the field of practice become even more pronounced in the grading criteria.

The grading criteria for the framing of knowledge are important because they provide a ruler for the interpretation of the goals and central content and hence regulate the pedagogic practice. Instruction must be organised so that it provides the students the opportunity to learn and to show knowledge in relation to the criteria for grades E to A. Some reacted to what they perceived as very high demands for grade E, which in the responses was compared to “pass with special distinction”, the highest grade. “This we find remarkable since the course only constitutes 50 credits and is directed to vocational students” (2009:537, 80:221). Others called for more definitions of concepts and criteria for all grades (2009:537, 80:240). This would make the grading criteria more explicit to the students, and the teachers would not need to have as many discussions with the students about their grades (2009:537, 80:283). In opposition to an overwhelming majority of the responses, one respondent found the demands for grade E far too low, with no requirements on the students for thought or effort. Here there was a call for increased demands on the students, “even if it is for vocational tracks and students in the technician track that are to take the course” (2009:537, 80:290).

Most of the responses concerning the grading criteria referred to words signalling different levels of quality in the students’ knowledge and competencies. These were words and phrases such as “in basic terms”, “simple”, “with some certainty”, “in detail”, “well grounded”, “in detail and in a balanced way”, “well-grounded and balanced”, and “with certainty”. Some of the responses simply asked for the meaning of these words (2009:537, 90:43). Another response from a higher education institution came with a more detailed question.

Kristina Ledman

In terms of grading criteria, “in basic terms” on the lower levels are put up against “in detail” on the higher levels. The problem is that this suggests that it concerns quantity before quality. ... It would be beneficial if it could be made clear that “in detail” is not primarily a quantitative aspect in this context. (2009:537, 80:347)

In the responses to the proposals of a history curriculum and a syllabus for the history course for VET tracks, there were questions about clarifications of concepts, the meaning of words signalling progress between grades, requests for more specified and detailed content, and critiques of too much of the same. In comparison to the content of the history syllabus for VET, there are less obvious differences concerning framing between historians, teachers, and those familiar with history didactics.

Generally, the influence of historians, history teachers and other agents that made their voice heard is very limited when it comes to how the knowledge should be framed. The history curriculum and the syllabi for the courses were regulated by a template for definitions, an outline of learning goals, central content, and grading criteria that relayed the message of the reform (U2009/2114/G). In other words, the control of questions concerning the level of detail in the content, the structure, the logic, and the qualities defined to be measured in the grading criteria was mainly located outside the part of the process where the respondents had access and could exert influence. Instead, the control of the structure of knowledge and evaluation rules is held by representatives of a dominant ideology (or discourse) in a society at any given time. In the case of the 2011 reform, it was mainly representatives of the political parties in power who were in charge of initiating, deciding on, and implementing the reform.

Discussion

The content and the structure of the history syllabus developed for VET students were under debate concerning classification, but not so much concerning the framing of the knowledge in the syllabus. There was a struggle between the discourse of the reform and the discourse of history, and there was a struggle within the history discourse where aspects of history didactics were contested.

The discourse of history has a strong voice. It successfully defends its boundaries against other school subjects and formulates resistance to some aspects of the national reform, for example, against the proposition of context-bound knowledge. However, a more challenging struggle goes on within the discourse among voices advocating more focus on history as narratives of the past, on concepts and theoretical aspects of historical knowledge, or on the practices of the construction of historical knowledge. The relative emphasis on method and use of history and modern and contemporary narratives of the past is misplaced in the eyes of many respondents in the process. Yet others, seemingly more knowledgeable of the theoretical background of history didactics – historical consciousness, use of history, and the disciplinary orientation of history teaching – were supportive of the proposed curriculum and formulated their

suggestions for improvement in a collegial tone. Other representatives of authorities and organisations advocated the inclusion of specific issues and perspectives.

When the idea of formulating context-bound content in the curriculum is abandoned, then there is no specific knowledge in the history syllabus for VET that is not in the syllabus for academic tracks. The history syllabus for VET is a reduced form of the syllabus for academic tracks with less emphasis on the most theoretical and abstract learning goal: “The ability to use different historical theories and concepts to formulate, investigate, explain, and draw conclusions about historical issues from different perspectives.” The idea of context-bound knowledge, which was initiated in the general discourse of the reform, was met with great criticism as seen in the responses to the proposed reforms. In the final national curriculum, it is said that instruction in all subjects shall be adapted to the educational orientation of each track. However, a stipulated vocational content in the subject-specific syllabi does not reoccur.

The articulated educational goal of introducing history as a compulsory subject in upper secondary school, and thus in the upper secondary VET tracks, is democracy: history should contribute to a shared frame of reference, to the individual’s identity formation process, and to the process of becoming an autonomous and critically thinking individual. This is explicitly stated in the government’s proposition in 2009. History as a pedagogic discourse can be defined as having a strong classification in relation to other subjects and strong framing because of external control from the structure of the national reform. The general educational landscape is a context that is foremost neoconservative and instrumental, and both classification and framing are generally increased with the reform. This is evident in stronger classification and internal and external framing that includes sharper divisions between VET and academic tracks and between different subjects. There are increasing levels of grading criteria, more specific central content, and narrower learning goals as well as a general orientation of upper secondary education toward external interests such as higher education institutions and labour market actors.

In terms of citizenship education in democratic constitutions, Solhaug (2013) pointed out the interrelation between character of citizenship education and conception of democracy. In Englund’s (1986/2005) analysis of citizenship education in Sweden in the 20th century, he drew parallels between the dominant conceptions of citizenship education and the dominant ideology in society at a given time. The overruling by the liberal-conservative government of the working group proposition in the case of “the cultural heritage”, in particular, is one example in this case of the political nature of a curriculum text. As referred to previously, the dominant discourse of the citizen today is that of the consumer and employee (Carlbaum, 2012). A critical perspective of history in the shape of a pedagogical discourse for VET would be that the emphasis on critical thinking and knowledge of a not so distant past is a reflection of an instrumental view of knowledge. The contemporary pedagogic history discourse favours more general abilities and a knowledge of contemporary history that has a more direct explanatory value to contemporary society. With the newfound role of the

history subject as a core subject in citizenship education, there seems to be a move towards procedural knowledge, a focus on more general abilities of critical thinking, and a frame of reference in past and present society.

The nature of the knowledge that is included in a curriculum and made available to pupils and students is important, not the least from the point of view of citizenship education. Abstract and theoretical knowledge provides access to the conversation about what society is today and what it can and should be in the future and is, therefore, a precondition for questioning social orders. Because the construction of a school subject is always a consequence of selection and ordering of knowledge, there is a need for a constant critical examination of, and discussion about, how subjects central in citizenship education and education for democracy are constructed.

Conclusions

History is a compulsory subject in all Swedish upper secondary education and an important part of continued citizenship education for students in VET. The construction of the course syllabus for VET reveals struggles within the field of history over what knowledge should be included. The relative emphasis on method and use of history and modern and contemporary narratives of the past is misplaced in the eyes of many historians as well as history teachers, who articulated their reactions to the process. Concepts and knowledge structures from history didactics remain the ordering principle of the content in the new curriculum. The identity of history is defended through distinction from a suggestion of context-bound history teaching and from the subject of civics. When it comes to the knowledge structure of the curriculum, there are no means by which historians and history teachers can exert influence. The knowledge structure is controlled by agents of the dominant ideology. In summary, there is no specific discourse of history for VET students. However, the VET syllabus differs from the syllabus for academic tracks in the length of the course and in that it does not encompass the most abstract learning goals. A critical perspective on the construction of the history syllabus, which is an important part of citizenship education for VET, is that it communicates the instrumental and neoconservative message of the reform through strong classification and framing and through the emphasis on general abilities and a contemporary history that has a more direct explanatory value to contemporary society.

References

- Arneback, E. & Bergh, A. (2010). "Den paketerade valfriheten – Om Framtidsvägen för den svenska gymnasieskolan" *Nordisk Pedagogik* 30: 117—131.
- Berggren, J. (2012). "En gemensam resa eller skilda resor, talet om kärnämnen i gymnasieskolan 1990-2009" *Utbildning & Demokrati* 21: 39—57.
- Bergström, Y. & Wahlström, N. (2008). "En reformerad gymnasieskola - med vilka ambitioner?" *Utbildning & Demokrati* 17: 5—16.

THE VOICE OF HISTORY AND THE MESSAGE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM:
RECONTEXTUALISING HISTORY TO A PEDAGOGIC DISCOURSE FOR UPPER SECONDARY
VET.

Kristina Ledman

- Berg, M. (2010). *Historielärares historier: ämnesbiografi och ämnesförståelse hos gymnasielärare i historia*. Licentiatavhandling (sammanfattning) Karlstad: Karlstads universitet.
- Berg, M. (2014). *Historielärares ämnesförståelse: centrala begrepp i historielärares förståelse av skolämnet historia*. Diss. Karlstad: Karlstads universitet.
- Bernstein, B. (2000[1996]). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: theory, research, critique*. Rev. ed Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Carlbaum, S. (2012). *Blir du anställningsbar lille/a vän?: diskursiva konstruktioner av framtida medborgare i gymnasier reformer 1971-2011*. Diss. Umeå : Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, Umeå universitet. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-54360>
- Clark, A. (2009). "Teaching the nation's story: comparing public debates and classroom perspectives on history education in Australia and Canada" *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 41(6): 745–762.
- Crawford, K. (1995). "A History of the Right: The Battle for Control of National Curriculum History 1989–1994." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 43, no. 4: 433–56.
- Elgström, O. & Hellstenius, M. (2010) "How history became a core subject in Swedish upper secondary schools", *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 54 (6): 565–80.
- Englund, T. (2005). *Läroplanens och skolkunskapens politiska dimension*. Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Eskelund Knudsen, H. (2014). *Historiefaget mellem skole og videnskab – en fagdidaktisk udfordring*. Diss. Institut for Kulturvidenskaber, Syddansk Universitet.
- Goodlad, J. I., (ed.) (1979). *Curriculum Inquiry*, New York: Mc Graw-Hill.
- Government Bill (2008-09:199) Högre krav och kvalitet i den nya gymnasieskolan (Higher demands and Quality of New Upper Secondary School) Stockholm: Ministry of Education.
- Government Bill (1990-91:85) Växa med kunskaper-om gymnasieskolan och vuxenutbildningen (Growing With and By Knowledge - on upper secondary and adult education) Stockholm: Ministry of Education.
- Government Protocol, 2010-12-02, U2010/854 /G, U2010/7356/G
Accessed 2014-05-28 <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/15/81/12/977f9ca7.pdf>
- Hellstenius, M. (2011). *Kampen om kärnämnet: om argumentationen för, och synen på, historieundervisningen i gymnasieskolan*, Lund: Lunds universitet.
- Jensen, B. E. (2003). *Historie - livsverden og fag*. 1. udgave, 1. oplag. [Kbh.]: Gyldendal.

THE VOICE OF HISTORY AND THE MESSAGE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM:
RECONTEXTUALISING HISTORY TO A PEDAGOGIC DISCOURSE FOR UPPER SECONDARY
VET.

Kristina Ledman

Karlsson, K-G. (2009). "Historiedidaktik: begrepp, teori och analys" in Karlsson, K-G & Zander, U. (red.) (2009). *Historien är nu: en introduktion till historiedidaktiken*. 2., [uppdaterade och bearbetade] uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Larsson, H-A. (2001). *Barnet kastades ut med badvattnet*, Bromma: Historielärarnas förening.

Ledman, K. (2014). "Till nytta eller onytta: Argument rörande allmänna ämnen i ungas yrkesutbildning i efterkrigstidens Sverige," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 1, no. 1, 21–43. <http://ojs.ub.umu.se/index.php/njedh/article/view/3>

Ledman, K. (forthcoming). "Navigating historical thinking in a vocational setting. Teachers interpreting a history curriculum for students in vocational secondary education". *Journal of Curriculum Studies*.

Lindmark, D. & Rönnqvist, C. (2011). "History Teaching in Sweden", in Erdmann, E. & Hasberg, W. (ed.) (2011) *Facing – Mapping – Bridging Diversity: Foundation of a European Discourse on History Education*. Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag.

Lindmark, D. & Norlin, B. (forthcoming.) "Contemporary History Controversies: The Case of Sweden". In L. Cajani, S. Lässig & M. Repoussi (red.), *History Education under Fire: An International Handbook*, Göttingen: Eckert. The Book Series.

Lozic, V. (2010). *I historiekansons skugga: historieämne och identifikationsformering i 2000-talets mångkulturella samhälle*. Diss. Lund : Lunds universitet.

Lundahl, L., Erixon Arreman, I., Lundström, U. & Rönnerberg, L. (2010). "Setting things right? Swedish upper secondary school reform in a 40-year perspective", *European Journal of Education*, 45:1, 46—59.

Nash, G. B., Crabtree, C., & Dunn, R. E. (1997). *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*. New York: A.A. Knopf.

Nygren, T. (2009). *Erfarna lärares historiedidaktiska insikter och undervisningsstrategier*. Lic.-avh. Umeå : Univ.

Nygren, T. (2011). *History in the service of mankind: international guidelines and history education in upper secondary schools in Sweden, 1927-2002*. Diss. (sammanfattning) Umeå : Umeå universitet.

Nygren, T. & Åstrand, B. (2012). "En splittrad historia: Sambandet mellan kursplaner i historia för gymnasieskola och högre utbildning". *Nordidactica-Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* (2012:2), 1—30.

Nylund, M. (2013). *Yrkesutbildning, klass och kunskap: en studie om sociala och politiska implikationer av innehållets organisering i yrkesorienterad utbildning med fokus på 2011 års gymnasiereform*. Diss. Örebro: Örebro universitet.

Parkes, R. J. (2011). *Interrupting history: rethinking history curriculum after 'the end of history'*. New York: Peter Lang.

THE VOICE OF HISTORY AND THE MESSAGE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM:
RECONTEXTUALISING HISTORY TO A PEDAGOGIC DISCOURSE FOR UPPER SECONDARY
VET.

Kristina Ledman

Rüsen, J. (2004). *Berättande och förnuft: historieteoretiska texter*. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Sandahl, J. (2014). "Samhällskunskap och historia i svensk gymnasieskola: ämnenas roll och relation i diskurs och ämnesplaner". *Nordidactica-Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* (2014:1), 53—84.

Seixas, P. (2000). "Schweigen Die Kinder! Or do Post modern history have a place in School?" In Stearns, P.N., Seixas, P.C. & Wineburg, S.S. (ed.) (2000). *Knowing, teaching, and learning history: national and international perspectives*. New York: New York University Press.

Seixas, P. (red.) (2004). *Theorizing historical consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), Arkiv, Projekt: *Gymnasieskola i reformering* (Project: Upper secondary school under reform) Project Dnr 2009:520, Dnr 2009:537, Dnr 2009:539.

Solhaug, T. (2013). "Trends and dilemmas in citizenship education". *Nordidactica-Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education*, (2013:1), 180-200.

Spanget Christensen, T. (2011). "Educating citizens in late modern societies, comments to Joachim Detjen". In Schüllerqvist, B. (ed.) (2011). *Patterns of research in civics, history, geography and religious education*. Karlstad: Karlstad University Press.

Svenska Dagbladet 20100217

Sødring Jensen, S. (1978). *Historieundervisningsteori*, Köpenhamn, Oslo: Christian Ejlers' forlag.

Taylor, T. (2010), "Constructing the Australian school history curriculum: Ideology, High Politics and the History Wars in the Howard years", in Zajda, J. I. (red.) (2010). *Globalisation, ideology and education policy reforms*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Wineburg, S. (2001). *Historical thinking and other unnatural acts: charting the future of teaching the past*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Wheelahan, L. (2010). *Why knowledge matters in curriculum: a social realist argument*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge

Zander, U. (1997). "Från nationell till demokratisk overrideologi-eller berättelsen om samhällskunskapens uppgång och historieämnets fall", *Utbildning och demokrati* 6: 2