



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# Bilder som berättar

## Om kunskap, makt och traditioner i grundskolans bildundervisning

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för  
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Pictures that tell stories: Knowledge, power and traditions in art education in compulsory school.

**Abstract**

This study revolves around visual storytelling and focuses on art education in lower secondary school, where visual storytelling is meant to give pupils the opportunity to express their experiences and opinions. The aim of the thesis is to acquire knowledge concerning norms and values that are constructed and reproduced while making storytelling pictures in art education in compulsory school, and how this creates conditions for pupils' visual storytelling. The study uses an ethnographic method. Two art teachers and 65 pupils in grades 8 and 9 at two different schools participate in the study, and art lessons were observed during the 2016/2017 school year following the work with four art assignments where pupils produced storytelling pictures. A total of 36 lessons were observed. The empirical material consists of observation notes, sound recordings, documents and photographs from the observed lessons, four interviews with teachers, 15 interviews with pupils and 65 pictures produced by the pupils. Using Bernstein's (2000) theories of the school as a site for reproduction of societal values and pedagogic discourse as a principle that relocates and recontextualises other discourses into school subjects, this study examines the norms and values that underpin the educational practice when working with storytelling in art education. Terms and concepts from pictorial semiotics and narratology are also used for analysing the pictures.

The analysis reveals a progressive and invisible pedagogy in the subject. Art is considered to be fun, free, and creative and is positioned as being different compared to so-called theoretical school subjects. Both teachers and pupils reproduce traditional values in the subject, for example, the importance of technical skills and that art can promote personal development and personal expression. These ideas mainly derive from a technical/artisan tradition and art-psychology. Traditional techniques and materials are emphasised, which promotes two-dimensional and handcrafted pictures, as well as a Western art canon. Due to a neoliberal discourse in schools, pupils tend to focus on concrete and measurable learning goals rather than process-oriented or communicative goals which they find more abstract. As for the teachers, the emphasis on traditional techniques, materials and slow processes can be understood as a resistance towards a perceived pressure from the outside and as a way to protect what they believe to be the core of the subject. Picture production is also seen as a prerequisite for personal development. These traditions and values favours aspects of picture production rather than aspects of storytelling. The results show that pupils can refer to a wide range of topics in their pictures. They primarily express experiences on the content level through what is said in the picture rather than how it is told. An emphasis on traditional techniques makes it difficult for pupils to express their experiences of, for example, digital media. Some pupils also have a different understanding than the teachers of what constitutes an experience. They perceive it as something concrete, an everyday event that they have personally experienced, while teachers have a more complex understanding. The teachers regard experiences from visual culture, for example, fiction, to be as valid as real-life experiences. This calls for further problematization of the term. In conclusion, the results are discussed in relation to the structuring of pedagogic discourse at different educational levels, thus deepening our understanding of how classroom practice relates to an overarching ideology concerning education and school.

**Keywords**

Art education, storytelling, pedagogic discourse, values, traditions, power, pictures, picture analysis, pictorial semiotics

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