An individualistic turn: citizenship in Swedish history and social studies syllabi, 1970–2017

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An individualistic turn: citizenship in Swedish history and social studies syllabi, 1970–2017

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**ABSTRACT**
This article explores representations of problems regarding citizenship in changes to the syllabi of social studies and history in Swedish secondary schools between 1970 and 2017. Previous research has shown that the general educational discourse changed from an emphasis on the societal needs of committed citizens to an emphasis on the individual’s ability to cope in a rapidly changing society in the end of the twentieth century. This study contributes to this research by exploring the impact of these discursive changes on individual school subjects. The study shows that changes in social studies and history syllabi even preceded changes previously seen in overall educational discourse regarding individualisation. While changes to the social studies syllabi have developed very closely to the overarching educational discourse in changing socialisation to be more suitable for an individualised society, changes to the history syllabi appear to have been more geared towards subjectification.

**Introduction**
This study connects with international research regarding changes to the educational discourse over the last 50 years. According to previous research from different parts of the Western world, general parts of curricula have drifted away from a description of a school in which society was the focal point, and where students were supposed to feel involved in society as a whole, towards a school in which the individual is the focal point and where the collective element is the individual’s part of a ‘community of values’. Much of this research points in the direction of a gradual shift during these 50 years towards an individually based cultivation of children where they are supposed to feel responsible primarily for themselves, becoming flexible and, in some ways, self-centred.¹ In the Swedish case these changes have primarily been identified as taking

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place during the 1990s. Some research has also pointed to antecedents to these changes and a palpable continuity in ideas forwarded in the 1980s and 90s dating back to the 1970s and even earlier.

I intend to investigate how these changes – and suggested continuities – translate into policies for two specific school subjects and thereby contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between school subjects, the general educational discourse and societal changes, adding a comparative perspective to previous research. In particular, I will analyse how the individual’s relationship to different collectives has been conceptualised in policies for Swedish history and social studies education for secondary schooling (years 7–12 for students aged approx. 13–18 years), from the beginning of the 1970s to the 2010s. I intend to analyse how the syllabi for these two subjects have depicted the teaching of the individual’s relationship to society and to different groups within society. My analytical focus is on the problems these policy documents construct regarding citizenship, in their description of the subjects and in their deployment of the subjects within the educational system. History and social studies have been chosen as subjects to study because they deal with society – and the relationship between the individual and collectives – in different ways. The questions I intend to answer are: (1) How are individuals related to different collectives and to society in the Swedish history and social studies syllabi between 1970 and 2017? (2) What societal problems are implicitly addressed in changes to the syllabi? (3) Are there any differences between the subjects of social studies and history in this regard?

The social studies syllabi will mainly be analysed with regard to the knowledge the students are deemed to need concerning their own relationship to society and different types of groups, for example, ethnic, economic or social groups. The history syllabi will mainly be analysed regarding how they portray individuals and groups in history and how they relate to the affiliation between individual students and the past.

**Theoretical and methodological considerations**

On a general level, this study draws on the work of Michel Foucault and particularly on the concept of governmentality. How citizens are (re)produced in order to be fully prepared to meet – and function within – a society that the state maintains must be considered a fundamental issue when any transformation of education is studied. The shaping of attitudes is fundamental to governmentality, and changes to school policy can

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therefore be understood as being an expression of the need for a new type of citizenship. During the almost 50-year period studied here, 1970–2017, the Western world has experienced what could be considered to be a post-material turn in values and policy, where non-material goals (self-expression and equality for example) are given greater importance. This could be assumed to be one of the logics for a new kind of governmentality in connection with a new social order, which – in the Swedish case – rested less on the idea of a (welfare-)society to which citizens contribute and more on the idea of individual self-interest. Consequently, this study also links to governmentality research that particularly focuses on neoliberal education policies in the Western world.

More closely linked to schooling, this study builds on the categorisation of functions of education developed by Gert Biesta: socialisation, qualification and subjectification and how these functions, in a given situation, are configured in rhetoric describing education in the subjects of history and social studies. Biesta’s main contribution has been to theorise about the last of these concepts: subjectification, the function of education that allows students to see themselves as subjects in the world. While discussions on education have always been about finding the right balance between socialising students into society (socialisation) and making sure they possess the required skill set to do certain things within that society (qualification), less attention has been devoted to how schooling can also have a function of subjectification, that connects to a deliberative view of democracy.

The subjectification function might perhaps best be understood as the opposite of the socialization function. It is precisely not about the insertion of ‘newcomers’ into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders.

What each of these concepts, socialisation, qualification and subjectification, contain in a given moment can also be expected to change over time, and for different subjects. Socialisation in the mainstream discourse of a collectively inclined production society might not be the same as in the discourse of an individualised, post-material, consumption society. For example, education geared towards the right of the individual and individual uniqueness might have a subjectification function in a society primarily based on collective rights and obligations, while such education might have a socialising function in the educational discourse of a society primarily based on individual rights and obligations. The difference might be seen in how individuals and collectives are dennominated in relation to each other, or what other concepts are related to terms such as ‘individual’. This also points in the direction of the overlaps between the functions, as all

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10 Ibid., 40.
education geared towards, for example, qualification will automatically have some impact on socialisation and subjectification. Therefore, there are considerable limits in the analytical reach of Biesta’s categories stemming from this overlap. However, the categories should be seen as highlighting tensions between different educational functions. All education might be about all of these functions, but there are interesting tensions between them that can be brought to the fore. Since both history and social studies are general subjects, not geared towards qualification for a specific future profession, the qualification aspect might be about how to cope in society and is therefore even more connected to the socialisation function.

The method for this study is based on the poststructurally influenced concept ‘What is the Problem (Represented to be)?’ (WPR), primarily associated with policy researcher Carol Bacchi. The starting point for this concept is that all policy, for example, government proposals, or – as in this case – changes in the syllabi, is based on an explicit or, in most cases, implicit diagnosis of a ‘problem’. The premise for the concept is that policy is not a rational approach to objectively observable problems, but that policy is discursively producing the problems that are addressed, by implicitly representing a ‘problem’. What a policy suggests should be done will contain the representation of a problem that needs to be fixed. This means that through the proposed measures (in the case of this study: changes in the syllabus for a certain school subject), a problem is ‘created’. It is, however, also important to remember that there might be tensions between representations of different problems within the same policy.

By utilising WPR, my intention is to delve deeper by focusing the analysis on (1) the underlying undebated ‘truths’, assumptions and prerequisites, that is, the basis of ‘problem’ constructions, (2) the history of these constructions, and (3) how these influence the relationship between the functions of socialisation, qualification and subjectification. In this study, this means that the policy documents are analysed in order to reach these underlying assumptions. What is assumed to be a ‘problem’ regarding citizenship in future society given the changes to mandated education that are described in the syllabi for Swedish history and social studies education from 1970–2017? What discourses do these assumed problems produce? To what kind of governmentality might they contribute? Given that my primary interest is linked to continuity and change in the discourses produced, I am less interested in the agents behind educational reform.

The source material for the study is Swedish curricula and syllabi for history and social studies for secondary schools, which were in effect between 1970 and 2017. Since 1962, secondary schooling in Sweden (school years 7–12) has been divided between two different forms of school: the latter part of compulsory school (grundskola, years 7–9) and the non-compulsory gymnasieskola (upper secondary school, years 10–12). This means that there are different curricula as well as different syllabi for the two different forms of school. Thus, the source material studied is: curricula for grundskola (with attached syllabi for all subjects, including history and social studies), issued in 1969, 1980,

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14Bacchi, Women, Policy and Politics, 4.
15Since 1994 all Swedish upper secondary school programmes entail a recommended study time of three years. Between 1970 and 1994 the programmes entailed a recommended study time of two, three or four years.
Apart from the already mentioned research on changes to the educational discourse over the last 50 years, some educational research – both in Sweden and internationally – has also focused on the relationship and divergence between individuals and collectives, a relationship that is particularly prominent in school subjects that are geared towards society and the students’ place in it.\textsuperscript{16} Utilising Biesta’s categories, it is possible to view this relationship as a collision between subjectification and socialisation in education within social science subjects, that is, a collision between cultivating students as free-thinking, emancipated and deliberative individuals versus cultivating students who are to become integral parts of society with its norms, interests and values. However, a collision between socialisation and qualification (for social studies and history that is often a collision between the perceived needs of making sure students become part of society, on the one hand, and giving them the ability – or qualification – to critically question society, on the other) have also been shown,\textsuperscript{17} as well as more educational emphasis placed on the individual, linked to an increasing interest in global issues, partly at the cost of a national focus.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Sara Carlbaum, the last 50 years can be divided into three different parts in which the overall Swedish educational discourse, as it is expressed in government inquiries and proposals, was centred around different themes. Between 1970 and 1989, the discourse firmly established a view of the school as ‘a school for all’; between 1990 and 2005 it was directed towards ‘lifelong learning’; and since 2005, ‘employability’ has been the focal point of the educational discourse.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item[See e.g. Johan Sandahl, \textit{Medborgarbildning i gymnasiet: Ämneskunnande och medborgarbildning i gymnasieskolans} samhälls- och historieundervisning} (Stockholms: Stockholms universitet, 2015); Fredrik Alvéen, \textit{Tänka rätt och tycka lämpligt: Historierämmet i skärningspunkten mellan att föstra kulturbärare och förbereda kulturbyggare} (Malmö: Malmö högskola, 2017).

Regarding the Swedish curricular context, it is important to acknowledge a specific change that took place during the period under study regarding the way curricula approached values. All Swedish general curricula issued since 1980 have stated that school should not be value-neutral when societal issues associated with the fundamental values of school are discussed, while earlier curricula were based on the idea that values should be formed by the students on the basis of objective scientific scrutiny.\(^{20}\) Tomas Englund has pointed out that this constitutes a return to a school that openly commits to fostering students towards specific values, which was also found in all curricula issued before World War II. The values themselves have shifted when comparing the democratic values in curricula from the 1980s–2010s to the nationalistic values in curricula of the inter-war period.\(^{21}\) The government inquiry that laid the foundation for the new curriculum for both compulsory schools and upper secondary schools in 1994 pointed out what was missing from the idea of objective teaching in the 1960s and 1970s: that fostering cannot be separated from knowledge mediation since ‘all education constitutes fostering in some sense’.\(^{22}\) This is an argument close to Biesta’s, regarding the overlaps between the functions of education: all qualification will automatically constitute a degree of socialisation and subjectification. Nevertheless, there was a definite change in the description of schools’ approach to values and fostering that began in 1980.

**The welfare state and ‘collectiveness’ in previous research**

Swedish research regarding the conceptualisation of the welfare state in educational media has stated that the period between 1950 and 1990 was characterised by a paternalistic description of the welfare state in Swedish social studies and history textbooks, and that the attention given to social equality in these textbooks tended to give the impression of passive citizens.\(^{23}\) Several researchers have observed that ‘democracy’ still had a distinct collective connotation at the end of the 1980s. In government inquiries and proposals from this time, democracy was assigned a meaning that emphasised its collective nature. During the 1990s and particularly during the 2000s, this view of democracy changed towards a more individualised concept, in which freedom of choice was regarded to be a more fundamental aspect of democracy. This change was accompanied by a shift away from student participation, influence and creating citizens who could help democracy evolve, towards ideas of entrepreneurship and employability.\(^{24}\) This can be seen as a kind of

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23 See e.g. Agneta Bronäis, Demokratins ansikte: En jämförande studie av demokratibilder iryska och svenska samhällskunskapsböcker för gymnasiet (Stockholm: HLS förlag, 2001); Maria Olson, Från nationsbyggar till global marknads- nomad: Om medborgarskap i svensk utbildningspolitik under 1990-talet (Linköping: Linköpings universitet, 2008); Ingemar Danielsson & Malin Malmros, Det var en gång ett land … Berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar (Höör: Agerings, 2012).

individualisation of school, while at the same time education becomes more of a tool for socialisation and qualification, than a tool for subjectification.

Previous research has shown that a collectively based political narrative about Swedish society in the textbooks of the 1970s was replaced by a more individualised narrative at the beginning of the 2000s. Studies have also shown that social studies textbooks at the beginning of the 1980s had a collectivistic character in concurrence with the curriculum of the time, where political influence was given a collective meaning that focused on working life.

However, it is important to distinguish between different kinds of developments. On the one hand there was a distinct conceptual development throughout much of the twentieth century towards more democratic teaching methods, starting with a new curriculum for primary schools (folkskola) in 1919 and continuing in the 1948 report from the Governmental School Commission established in 1946. According to previous research, this line of development ended some time during the late 1980s, when a ‘counter development’ towards more discipline and more teacher control was initiated in discussions about schools. This ‘counter development’ accelerated and led to practical consequences in the 2000s. On the other hand, ever since the dawn of Swedish mass education in the latter part of the nineteenth century, there has been a very clear theme of collectiveness in the teaching content. The aim of education, regardless of the teaching methods, has been to produce national citizens who took responsibility for the nation, even if this was achieved through education about individuals (e.g. heroic kings in Swedish history). This collectiveness also continued after 1945 with the shift towards educating democratic citizens, in a discourse on citizenship that focused on the collective features of democracy. This discourse on democracy and citizenship included obvious collectivistic elements. For example, history teaching focused on the importance of various popular movements to the prosperity of society. The conceptualisation of individuals and society in discussions on Swedish school policy has also been explored through an ideological lens, where ‘classical social democracy’ has been contrasted with neoliberalism.

Several studies have been conducted over the last couple of years trying to answer questions about what social studies and history could contribute regarding the fostering aspects of school, but often without any interest in the history of the subjects. These

26Tomas Englund, Om samhörighet och konflikt: En temagranskning av politiksynen i läromedel i samhällskunskap samt några didaktiska antekningar om skolans medborgerliga och politiska fostran (Stockholm: SIL, 1984).
28See e.g. Englund, Läroplanens och skolkunskapens; Olson, Från nationsbyggar till global marknadsnomad; Kristina Ledman, Historia på yrkesprogrammen: Innehåll och betydelse i policy och praktik (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2015).
30Båth, Kvalifikation och medborgarfostran, chapter 3.
History and social studies in Swedish secondary schools before 1970 – a brief history

A longitudinal approach to the specific arguments for the establishment of ‘civics’ (medborgarkunskap) for the general population in the Swedish ‘continuation school’ (fortsättningskola) early in the twentieth century reveals that this subject was believed to be capable of strengthening a sense of community and responsibility towards others. ‘The family’ was the starting point for the teaching of the subject, with ever-widening circles around the family, starting with the municipality and the (church) parish, and then the state and the state church; a line of argument with its roots in the citizenship cultivation of the nineteenth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, the subject particularly explored the relationship between the family, religion and society, based in the representation of the problem that citizens lacked sufficient knowledge of different societal functions; that they lacked the competence to intervene in societal affairs in conjunction with the introduction of general and equal voting rights.

The final report of the Government School Commission of 1946 – published in 1948 – laid the foundation for most reforms regarding education in Sweden until the 1980s. This report contained the representation of a new problem regarding schooling for citizenship and a new and broader subject, samhällskunskap, was eventually introduced, commonly translated as ‘civics’ or ‘social studies’. The broadening of the subject apparently derived from a sense that there was a great deal of urgently needed subject matter that lacked obvious association with any existing school subject. The School Commission also predicted that even more of this kind of subject matter would be necessary in future education. The overarching problem was represented as the inability of existing school subjects to touch upon and educate students regarding what were called ‘the difficulties of life’.

The depiction of a gap that social studies could fill appears to indicate a perceived need to educate the students within areas that touched upon life itself, areas that did not have

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31For the Swedish case see e.g. Sandahl, Medborgarbildning i gymnasiets; Alvén, Tänka rätt och tycka lämpligt.
32Medborgare in medborgarkunskap translates to ‘citizen’.
34Bromsjö, Samhällskunskap som skolämne, 66.
35Samhälle in samhällskunskap translates to ‘society’.
36According to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), ‘Social studies’ is the preferred translation for the contemporary subject in upper secondary schools and ‘civics’ is the preferred translation of the subject in compulsory schools, even though they are both called samhällskunskap in Swedish. This could be because there is a group of subjects commonly taught together in compulsory schools called samhällssorienterande ämnen, with the preferred translation ‘social study subjects’, including civics, religion, history and geography. To indicate that the Swedish name is the same in both compulsory and upper secondary schools, I will consistently refer to the subject as ‘social studies’.
an obvious connection to existing school subjects. Issues regarding the difficulties of life had previously been touched upon in a religious manner within the subject of Christianity. Changes in religion’s role in society resulting from secularisation were perceived to have left subject matter dealing with what it meant to be a human being without clear association to any existing school subject. The arguments regarding the establishment of the new subject of social studies (samhällskunskap) not only implies a shift from socialisation to subjectification, but also a continuation of the socialisation of students on how to live life ‘correctly’. Another problem that was represented in this conceptualisation of the ‘difficulties of life’ was the lack of morality in young persons. Given this study’s starting point in WPR, the question of what kind of morality is implied by this construction of the problem comes to the fore. It appears that it was primarily the different aspects of how to treat your fellow human beings that lay at the root of this morality, given the subject’s orientation towards society as a community.38 Granted the previous close connection between this subject matter and the subject of Christianity, a religious morality regarding different desired virtues may be assumed to also be embedded in the construction of this problem. In the first half of the twentieth century, the focal point of civics (medborgarkunskap) had been on the function of society (the government, the municipality, the market, and ‘public interest’). During the post-war era, the subject’s content gained a more apparent political direction focusing more on political discussions regarding, for example, where to draw the line between the public and the private spheres.39

As can be seen from this brief history of social studies in Swedish schools, it was taught to solve different problems in different times. A development can be seen from a subject geared towards understanding the governance of a democratic state, in which a large part of its citizens (who did not have easy access to state grammar schools) lacked knowledge about the government. After World War II, other problems were represented, more associated with life itself, as well as with a perceived need for democratic morality based on social values.

Historically, the subject of history has been very much centred around specific individuals. The primary school (folkskola) subject had a clear national leaning during the nineteenth century and even if the progressive curriculum of 1919 at least touched upon the problems with history education firmly based in nationalism, this aspect of the subject appears to have survived for a long time, at least well into the post-war era. The nationalism that was fostered has been described as popular, but through historical individuals that it focused on, there were also elements of virtues associated with loyalty towards the authorities in general, and the monarch in particular.40

In state grammar schools – which in the first half of the twentieth century were still distinctly characterised by the training of civil servants (officers, priests and other government officials) – history was also taught with a national leaning based on the achievements of individuals. However, during the nineteenth century and the first half of

39 See Bjessmo, Elevens samhällsbild, 11.
the twentieth century, this national leaning was probably more towards a conservative state nationalism, as opposed to the more popular nationalism being taught in primary schools.\footnote{Göran Andolf, Historien på gymnasiet: Undervisning och läroböcker 1820–1965 (Stockholm: Esselte studium, 1972), 92–4.}

After World War II, the subject of history was renegotiated and the ‘problem’ it had addressed in supporting loyalty towards the nation and authority was no longer considered a problem. Instead, a new problem was represented in the renegotiation of the subject: citizens were not critical enough of authority and knowledge was lacking regarding the emergence of a democratic society and the conditions of that society. This lack of knowledge could potentially weaken citizens’ ability to defend democracy. In conjunction with the development of social studies, history also developed towards teaching more about democratic values.\footnote{See e.g. SOU 1948:27, 4–5. See also Niklas Ammert, Historia som kunskap: Innehåll, mening och värden i möten med historia (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2013), 25–40; Åström Elmersjö, En av staten godkänd historia, passim, especially 54–9, 263–73.} In addition to the realities of World War II, the Cold War and a fear of communism might also have been factors in changes to the conceptualisation of democratic needs.

**Collectivistic citizenship for a known future, 1970–1980**

During the 1970s the history and social studies syllabi associated with the curriculum for compulsory schools from 1969 and the curriculum for upper secondary schools from 1970 were in effect. For upper secondary schools, however, the syllabi of both subjects in the curriculum of 1970 were almost exact replicas of the syllabi associated with the previous curriculum from 1965.\footnote{Cf. Lgy70: Syllabi (Supplement 3- och 4-åriga linjer), 287–99; 305–318; Swedish Upper Secondary School Curriculum 1965 (Lgy65), the ‘general part’ and syllabi (Läroplan för gymnasiet), 177–96; 226–48.} In the social studies syllabus for lower secondary schools (years 7–9 in compulsory schools) it was deemed important when teaching social studies ‘to discuss how the involvement of citizens [in societal matters] is configured, and how the individual citizen’s efforts are claimed and utilised in communal tasks’.\footnote{Lgr69: Syllabi (Orienteringsövningar, högstadiet), 16. My translation.}

Social studies in upper secondary schools were described as focused on society at large and very little was said about the individual student’s opportunities or prerequisites for participating in public life. The subject was supposed to provide students with knowledge necessary to engage in analysis, and discussions about society.\footnote{Lgy70: Syllabi, 305–18.} Neither the aims nor the list of elements and subject matter associated with social studies mentioned anything about individuals or individual rights and obligations. For example, the element of ‘working life’ was supposed to be studied ‘from a functional point of view’ and touch upon ‘the regrouping process, social strata and social mobility’\footnote{Ibid., 305. My translation.} – clearly a collective take on the subject matter. Overall, there was a distinct focus on qualification in the syllabus for upper secondary schools from 1970; the student should be qualified to understand and analyse society, rather than being adept to participate in society, or find her own place in it.

The individual’s role in society in this conception is clearly directed towards efforts for the ‘common good’, and the student was supposed to learn that individual citizens must take responsibility for society at large. The description of the core content made it

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\[\text{Footnotes}\]

42. See e.g. SOU 1948:27, 4–5. See also Niklas Ammert, Historia som kunskap: Innehåll, mening och värden i möten med historia (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2013), 25–40; Åström Elmersjö, En av staten godkänd historia, passim, especially 54–9, 263–73.
45. Lgy70: Syllabi, 305–18.
46. Ibid., 305. My translation.
obvious that people were generally seen as acting collectively, and the aim of social studies to instil collective responsibility for society in students was clearly defined. The problem that was represented in these 1970s’ syllabi could be interpreted as being related to the balance between individual freedom and the societal requirement for individual dedication to communal matters. The creation of governable citizens seems to have been hinged on the citizens’ understanding of society and their dedication to communal tasks. This conceptual take on citizenship, also seems to be geared towards a future where the fabric and role of society is understood to be known. The students were taught to fit into a society of tomorrow which seems to have been assumed to be a certain way.

During the 1970s, the history syllabus for lower secondary schools, within compulsory schools, also maintained a collectivistic view of society by giving individual historical agents a very diminished role within the course of history. Even if ‘milieu and personalities’ were mentioned in the syllabus, this was very sweeping. The short passages that mentioned individuals in history should be contrasted with the huge emphasis placed on the structural level and to specific collectivistic movements such as national movements, the labour movement, as well as different kinds of liberation movements. This further clarified the conceptualisation of history which maintains that significant contributions to historical developments are made by people who are acting together, and the connection to the collectively-based political narrative of Swedish society in the 1970s.

In a very detailed description of core content and thematic studies, the syllabus for upper secondary schools only mentioned three historical individuals: Gustav III of Sweden, Muhammed and Nasser. However, they were not mentioned for their personal achievements or involvement in historical developments, but instead served as markers of time periods. Symptomatically, in the case of Muhammed and Nasser, the individuals served as the starting point and endpoint in the thematic study of the history of an ethnic group (i.e. ‘The history of the Arabs, from Muhammed to Nasser’). Among the comments on teaching methods, ‘ample personal characteristics’ were, however, mentioned as being an important part of the enlightening details in history education. Still, the focal point of teaching was on collective agents, both ‘real’ collective agents – that can actually make common decisions, for example, organisations within the labour market – and ‘imagined’ collective agents – that are unable to make common decisions, for example, the working class and national minorities. In the comments on teaching methods, more individuals were also mentioned, but only as representatives of different ideas or different styles of art within cultural history, including Locke, Voltaire, Hogarth, Dalin and Bellman (among others). However, no individuals associated with developments in social or political history were mentioned. Within the comments on teaching methods, the collective alignment of history education was also represented in comments on ‘life in the village community’, ‘problems for national minorities’ and ‘Swedish popular movements’.

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47LGr69: Syllabi, 18.
49See e.g. Lgy70: Syllabi, 297.
A new curriculum for compulsory schools was launched in 1980, and in accordance with the general ideas described in the general parts in this curriculum, much greater emphasis was placed on fostering democratic citizens in all syllabi associated with this new curriculum. Social studies and history also ceased to exist as individual subjects in compulsory schools and were now included as different perspectives within the ‘social study subjects’ (samhällsorienterande ämnen): ‘the societal perspective’ and ‘the time perspective’. There were more add-ons of subjectification in relation to the earlier syllabus: studying (all) social study subjects was now supposed to give students expanded knowledge of themselves, and others. Social study subjects were also described as being the educational basis for providing the students with ‘skills that are important to them as individuals and citizens’. The aim of this syllabus was clearly to educate individuals as part of different collectives. Popular movements and organisations, the labour market and its parties (unions and employer organisations), as well as community planning and allocation of resources, are examples of elements mentioned in the syllabus. The subject matter was emphasising the relationship between different groups, such as women and men, the living conditions of different groups, power relations in society, as well as struggles for freedom and democracy. The possibility of influencing through participation in different groups (i.e. unions) and the need for education that contributed to an increased understanding of other people as ‘a foundation for the students’ commitment to equality and solidarity’ was also highlighted. According to the syllabus, the students were supposed to also ‘be offered opportunities to produce and mediate knowledge on their own’, as well as develop personal opinions, which could be considered features of subjectification, directly associated with a specific kind of qualification. Nevertheless, it was assumed in the syllabus that people act as parts of collectives and the features of socialisation mainly focused on solidarity and the individual’s contribution to society at large.

The description of history teaching in the new syllabus for upper secondary schools from 1981 also retained much of the collectivistically inclined subject matter. The syllabus referred to discussions regarding the role of individuals and collectives in history as important elements, and the teacher’s presentation of the subject matter in a nonlinear, thematic fashion was described as a gateway to

reasoning regarding the individual’s, the group’s, and the collective’s role in history. Another way could be to contemplate the agents of history within different categories: men–women, producers–consumers, employers–employees, migrants–non-migrants, majorities–minorities (racial, linguistic, religious, ethnic), great powers–small states.

This way of highlighting dichotomies between groups, which implicitly drove developments in history forward, could be considered a clear indication of the importance attached to collective action in history. The syllabus also contained formulations regarding the alleged homogeneity of (ethnic) groups, which was particularly noticeable concerning immigrant students and how ‘Swedish students could conceivably increase their understanding of immigrant groups’:

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52Lgr80, 121. My translation.
53Ibid., 124–5.
54Ibid., 120–1 (all direct quotes on page 121), 125–6. My translation.
The educational programme [in history] should contribute to giving students of immigrant background the possibility of preserving and strengthening their ethnic identity, which could, for example, be achieved through some form of specialisation in the history of their native land. … Swedish students’ understanding of the immigrants’ situation could be enhanced through studies of Swedish migration to the USA and Canada, from the perspective of the recipient countries as well as from the perspective of the ethnic group and the individual.56

This construction of groups and individuals and their relation to history was a kind of balancing act. While history was being described as important to the identity of an individual, this identity was distinctly linked to an (ethnic) group. Furthermore, the distinction between ‘Swedish’ students and students of immigrant background was clearly marked and ‘Swedish’ students were assumed to be able to better understand other groups (presumably the immigrants to Sweden) if they were taught the history of similar experiences of their own (ethnic) group. This indicates the belief that historical empathy is harder to achieve when discussing the history of (ethnic) groups other than the students’ own.

**Individualistic citizenship for an unknown future – an early turn in syllabi?**

Even if there were obvious collectivistic inclinations in the curriculum launched for compulsory schools in 1980, the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s could still be considered a time of change regarding the problem represented in history, and especially social studies syllabi. In the 1978 social studies syllabus for upper secondary schools the concepts of ‘change’ and ‘globalisation’ had been more distinctly elaborated upon, perhaps suggesting a shift towards education for an unknown future. Among the aims of the subject, it was stated that the students should ‘become … prepared for the Swedish and international society of tomorrow’.57 This could be considered a representation of the problem that students were lacking knowledge deemed important in order to adapt to what was now considered a rapidly changing society. In the political discourse of the late 1970s, there seems to have been less certainty – compared to earlier in the 1970s – regarding in what direction the future society would develop.58 Individual responsibility to cope with new conditions in an everchanging society were key features of a new educational discourse within social studies and was a *leitmotiv* that ran through all social studies syllabi following the one from 1978, especially for upper secondary schools.59

The syllabus of 1978 also pointed in the direction of another change in the educational discourse in which greater importance was attached to societal criticism, also corresponding to a shift in political narratives about society, questioning the social democratic welfare state.60 An incipient criticism of welfare society’s interference in individual liberty can be discerned through the recognition of such criticism: ‘disadvantages for individuals [may be] contrasted with societal demands for service, for

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56Ibid., 11–12. My translation.
60See e.g. Lgy70: Syllabus social studies 1978, 5.
example, in regard to health care, communications and security.\textsuperscript{61} The syllabus also played down concepts such as ‘social groups’ and instead made several notes on ‘groups with common interests’ and ‘pressure groups’.\textsuperscript{62} This suggests an education that was less oriented towards structures and more oriented towards the interests of individual agents in societal processes, further establishing a shift in the narrative of society and educational discourse.

The shift away from a known future where society ‘claimed’ individual efforts, towards individual responsibility and societal criticism was further established in the new syllabus for social studies in upper secondary schools from 1988 and the rapidly changing society was now related to information technology, which was seen as a catalyst for even more rapid change in the future. For example, it was stated that individuals needed to be able to swiftly adjust to a future information-based society and that education had a major role to play in providing this ability.\textsuperscript{63} The social studies subject was now also supposed to deal with global relations rather than provide students with isolated knowledge about the economy and policy of individual countries.

The 1980 syllabus for compulsory schools, even with the collectivistic inclinations we have seen, had a more individualistic general approach compared to the previous syllabus. For example, it was stated that teaching should ‘help the students put themselves in larger and larger contexts in time and space’ and that the students should be given the opportunity to ‘assess how their own experiences and observations respond to the needs of themselves and others – individuals or groups’.\textsuperscript{64} The individual was of course still seen as having a relationship with society, but more on the terms of the individual than on the terms of society, compared to the earlier syllabus. This change could be interpreted as a shift from socialisation towards subjectification. However, it could also be regarded as an emerging change towards a different socialisation associated with social studies: a change in the direction of socialisation for a more individualistic society, corresponding to the changes made to the social studies syllabus for upper secondary schools of 1978.

In the syllabus for ‘the social study subjects’ from 1980, the ‘time perspective’ of human activity was linked to the role of history in understanding future problems in a new way: ‘By analysing current conditions from a historical perspective, the students should become aware of the fact that the future is dependent on actions and decisions taken in the society of yesterday and today.’\textsuperscript{65} This perspective on the future was also more clearly accentuated in the new history syllabus in upper secondary schools from 1981,\textsuperscript{66} making the (unknown) future a more integral part of history education.

As was the case for the previous syllabus for upper secondary history teaching from 1965, the history syllabus from 1981 also listed a few individuals who could be considered in the teaching of history, although they were mainly philosophers and artists. However, the new syllabus also mentioned a few characters associated with political history. The

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 7, 8, 11. My translation.
\textsuperscript{63}Lgy 70: Syllabus social studies 1988, 21.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 120–4 (direct quotes on page 120 and 121). My translation.
\textsuperscript{65}Lgr 80, 120. My translation.
comments on teaching methods were less collectively inclined and only the thematic study of ‘women’s struggle for equality’ was clearly focused on collective agents.\textsuperscript{67}

Additionally, it was stated that the students should ‘be given the opportunity to experience knowledge and skills acquired in the subject [of history] as personally important’, which was an entirely new formulation compared to the previous syllabus from 1965.\textsuperscript{68} This change underlines the potential for subjectification within the subject of history. In a way, this change constructed a new way of conceptualising the subject and represented a new problem: the students did not have sufficient understanding of themselves and their place in the world. The focal point of the problem representation had shifted, at least to some extent, from emphasising a lack of understanding of democratic society to emphasising a lack of understanding of oneself.\textsuperscript{69}

In the new curriculum for compulsory schools from 1994, social studies and history were again their own subjects and many of the changes made in both this curriculum and the new curriculum for upper secondary schools pointed in the direction of a need for individual responsibility in the face of rapid change.\textsuperscript{70} One way this was expressed was through the aims of the social studies subject stating that the students should ‘develop their ability to argue and independently express their positions, thereby trusting their own ability to exercise influence on societal developments as citizens.’\textsuperscript{71}

The students’ affinity with different groups was not as much implied in the social studies syllabus in compulsory schools as it had been in the syllabus of 1980. Teaching was expressly geared towards personal responsibility.\textsuperscript{72} In other words, in the 1980s and 1990s, socialisation changed. The students were to be socialised into a society based on individual thinking rather than a society based on collective belonging, solidarity, and collective responsibility. In making students trust themselves, there was also a more clearly distinguishable subjectification present in the new syllabi of the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1994, ‘historical consciousness’, rooted in the concept of orientation in time and connected to the processual connection between the past, the present and the future, was established as the theoretical foundation of the history subject in both compulsory and upper secondary schools.\textsuperscript{73} By making each student’s individual ‘historical consciousness’ the foundational concept for history education, a deeper connection between the subject and the individual student was also forwarded, as well as an even more clearly established orientation regarding the future. Similar to the syllabus from the 1980s, the point of departure was taken more closely to the individual student than had been the case in the syllabus in effect in the 1970s. In the 1990s the history subject was supposed to

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., 8. My translation.
\textsuperscript{69}Cf. Lgy70: Syllabi, 293–5.
\textsuperscript{70}Lpo94: Syllabi, 41–3; Lpf94: Syllabi, 67–8.
\textsuperscript{71}Lpo94: Syllabi, 41. My translation.
\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 43.
enable students to realise that ‘they themselves, together with their family, their home and their country, have a history’. They were also supposed to be given the opportunity to ‘develop a deeper cultural identity’. Also, many collectives explicitly mentioned in the syllabus of 1994 – ‘women’, ‘men’, ‘children’, ‘minorities’, ‘the Sámi’ and ‘the immigrants’ – were not as clearly linked to social movements, but to the identity of individuals. Thus, the subject of history was supposed to give the students a common frame of reference, while also helping them become critical and autonomous individuals, developing their own cultural identity.

In 2011 another new set of curricula for both compulsory school and upper secondary school was adopted and the already established educational discourse prevailed, with an emphasis on the individual’s responsibility towards both the self and others by ‘helping the pupils to develop knowledge about how the individual and society influence each other’.

One change regarding history in upper secondary schools that was not visible in the syllabus, but was still very important to the change in the overall aim of schooling in the educational discourse, was the fact that history became a compulsory subject for all students in upper secondary school programmes (a status social studies had been given in 1994), not only for students in college preparatory programmes, but also for vocational education. One of the reasons given for this change, in discussions preceding it, was the students’ perceived need of assistance in becoming autonomous and critical individuals with a specific understanding of their own process of identity; abilities that were obviously seen as associated with the teaching of history. This way of arguing for the necessity of the subject further highlights the shift in educational discourse and political narrative; away from the history of society – leading to a better understanding of society – and towards a history revolving around individual identity and autonomy.

The revised curriculum from 2017 had one interesting addition regarding social studies, further emphasising the overall educational discourse: ‘The educational programme should also give pupils opportunities to develop their understanding of what it means to be an active, responsible citizen in a rapidly changing society’. This responsibility (on behalf of the student) was also represented in the social studies syllabus for upper secondary schools from 2011. Regarding the content of the different social studies courses in upper secondary schools, the identities of groups and individuals were mentioned, as well as the concept of utanförskap, a concept that could be roughly translated as ‘alienation’ or ‘outsideness’, but which was given a new meaning that was highly debated during the Swedish parliamentary election campaign of 2006. In this new meaning, the concept was associated with the alleged failure of the traditional welfare state to provide solutions to societal problems. Hence, the syllabus further established its connection to a political narrative that was critical towards a welfare state that was characterised as paternalistic.

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76Lgr11, 199. Official translation made by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket).
79Lgy11, 143.
Retaining collective elements in history education

Generally, the discursive changes in the social studies syllabi appear to have started as early as the late 1970s and early 1980s and these changes then accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s. The late 1970s, and particularly the years around 1980, saw changes in the representation of the problems that social studies addressed. The earlier expectation that the young people of Sweden would not be able to take sufficient responsibility for society was replaced by the expectation that young people lacked the ability to take sufficient responsibility for themselves, and to prepare for an unknown future.

Even if some changes in this direction were also made for the history subject at the same time, the structural perspective in history syllabi was somewhat retained for the entirety of the period under study here. It was for example expressly noted that the students should be given a common historical frame of reference. Furthermore, the description of the structure and nature of the subject stated that ‘special attention should be paid to the Swedish and Nordic culture, including Sámi culture, and what has formed a personal and collective historical identity’, hinting at a middle ground between the personal and the collective, perhaps representing two problems at once.

The diverse perspectives of different groups in history was also emphasised in the history syllabus for upper secondary schools of 1994. Specific groups mentioned were men and women, different generations and different social classes. In the somewhat modified version of the syllabus issued in 2000, the history of national minorities was proposed as being particularly important to study. Preparedness for the future and an intercultural perspective remained important aims and were complemented by expressions about a confident and democratic identity, and the idea that the subject of history was to give ‘context and background to individuals and society’. Overall, the syllabi from 1994 and 2000 were very brief and conceptual, with little or no examples of mandatory core content.

The history syllabi of 2011 took some steps in a new direction, but compared to social studies, much of the collective approach to the subject matter was still retained. Groups explicitly mentioned were the same as in the syllabi from 1994. Oppression against groups was mentioned in relation to imperialism, and the collective struggle for democracy in Sweden was exemplified by the women’s movement and other popular movements. ‘Uses of history’ was introduced as part of the significantly increased amount of core content. Regarding uses of history, the way it can strengthen communities was particularly highlighted. Explicitly, the communities of family, associations, organisations and corporations were mentioned, excluding social groups.

From 1970–2017, the subject of history experienced a significant transition from socialisation to subjectification and qualification when the syllabi increasingly underlined student abilities – for example, preparedness for the future linked to the concept of historical consciousness – as the aim of the subject. Understanding one’s own individual development with history as a backdrop came to replace understanding societal developments as the

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81 Lpo94: Syllabi, 42. My translation.
82 Lpf94: Syllabi, 38.
83 Jews, Roma, Sámi, Swedish Finns and Torne Valley Finns were recognised as national minorities by the Swedish Parliament, Riksdag in 2000.
84 Gy2000: Syllabi (Samhällsvetenskapsprogrammet: Programmål, kursplaner, betygskriterier och kommentarer), 66.
85 Lgr11, 177; Lgy11, 66.
overarching aim of the subject. As with social studies, this change came about around 1980 and accelerated during the 1990s and 2000s. However, the shift in the representation of the problem that schooling was supposed to address – from students’ perceived difficulty in taking responsibility for society to their perceived difficulty in taking responsibility for themselves – was not as palpable within the subject of history as within social studies. The individualisation of history represented more of a shift towards subjectification, than a shift in the direction of socialisation for a new society.

Conclusions

In line with the results of previous research, the shift in educational discourse is also evident in the syllabi for individual subjects in Swedish secondary schools. The educational discourse that focuses on collective issues – with the sights set on a predictable future – changes to a discourse that focuses on individual issues to prepare students for an unpredictable future where they will need to take care of themselves. However, this study has shown that there is some continuity embedded in what has been called a neoliberal turn in approaches to the creation of governable citizens, connecting to new – critical – political narratives of the welfare state.\(^\text{86}\)

The changes towards a new problem represented in the syllabi appear to have preceded the changes in the overall educational discourse – discussed in previous research as having taken place mainly in the 1990s and 2000s. In the syllabi for history and social studies, changes in the direction of problem representations for a post-material, individualised society appear to have taken place between 1978 and 1981.

Starting at the end of the 1970s, a partly new problem was conceptualised, particularly in changes to social studies syllabi, connecting to a partly new political narrative. By emphasising individual responsibility in adapting to the unknown society of tomorrow, the problem representation shifted away from young persons’ insufficient insights into their obligations towards other people and towards society. In its place, a new problem was constructed: young persons’ lack of ability to solve their own problems in the future. Within the description of this new focus, this change was described as having to do with the problem that school cannot educate citizens who take responsibility for society when society is constantly and rapidly changing. This then led to a projected need of future citizens who could take responsibility for themselves while also wanting to be committed to society. The balancing act between individual freedom and the needs of society was still there, although with an increasingly strong shift towards individual freedom and responsibility representing the problem that citizens had become dependent in a much too paternalistic society. In general, the curriculum of 1994 pointed mostly towards subjectification for this new society, while the curriculum of 2011 had more academic rationalism and a greater focus on qualification for a new society.\(^\text{87}\)

The history syllabi also went through changes that pointed in this direction, but not quite as obvious changes as for the social studies syllabi. In the conceptualisation of the subject of history it was more of an individualised education, with the outspoken aim of

\(^{86}\)Utilising other sources Tomas Wedin has also shown that there were antecedents that paved the way for more general educational reforms in the 1990s. Wedin, ‘In Praise of the Present’.

making students understand themselves, which was successively projected during this period. This change could be said to represent the same shift to a new problem for education to address. In particular, the addition of a new time dimension in history education – the future – which was first specifically mentioned in the history syllabi in 1980, and then further consolidated by the inception of ‘historical consciousness’ as the overarching concept of history teaching in 1994, points in this direction.

Shifts in the social studies syllabi could be regarded as changes in a direction away from socialisation and steered towards qualification and subjectification, through the increasing emphasis placed on the student’s future self-responsibility. However, it could also be regarded as changed socialisation (socialisation for a different society) and a changed subjectification (a different kind of subject). Qualification might also be said to have primarily changed from qualification based on knowledge about the very society to which the student was supposed to contribute, towards qualification based on a more generic knowledge which ensured that the student could face the unknown future without societal assistance.

To some extent, the same change also occurred within the subject of history, but with a retained focus on societal structures. The aim of the subject of history in the 1990s and 2000s was described more in terms of individual development in order to strengthen self-perception and the ability to orient oneself in time, including towards the unknown, everchanging future, although the subject matter still focused on societal structures. The subject of history also had a less obvious change towards qualification, at least before 2011, and the change was more clearly in the direction of subjectification. The noticeable overlaps between the different categories in Biesta’s conception of the functions of education, might be considered a problem for this analysis. However, the overlaps also highlight the tensions between different types of governance and the political idea of education in different political narratives. More subjectification also indicates a new kind of socialisation for a new society, where citizens need to be more autonomous, and self-sufficient.

The reason for the different school subjects’ different directions could perhaps also be found in their respective histories. History is an old subject, which had previously been directed towards the creation of nationally inclined, obedient subjects. After World War II, the subject was in a state of constant renegotiation, finding a place in a democratic, and perhaps less nationalistic, global society, turning towards critical thinking and intercultural understanding in order to gain a new raison d’être.88 Social studies, on the other hand, was a new subject that was more or less directly responsible for the socialisation of students into a democratic society from the 1960s and onwards. When representations of new problems regarding socialisation emerged, social studies had a stronger connection to societal issues, while history had stronger connections to humanities, and followed a path towards subjectification.

Connecting to the starting point in governmentality, the borderline between discipline and emancipation – between socialisation and subjectification – should be particularly highlighted in the changes to the history and social studies syllabi between 1970 and 2017. To be emancipated in a new way is also to be socialised into a new societal reality and become governable in that reality. In this way, a change in the conceptualisation of

citizens – largely based on a specific (neoliberal) idea of freedom – entails a balancing act between emancipation and discipline. New citizens needed to be free in a new way in order to become governable in a new society. Furthermore, the political narrative of society changed in the 1970s, away from a narrative about progress and modernity where the future was known, towards a narrative critical of modernity and especially fixated with the unknowns of the future.

This study has also shown that changes linked to the inner workings and developments of the school subjects themselves, were clearly intertwined with changes in the overall educational discourse. It may appear obvious that discussions about school subjects are influenced by the overall educational discourse. However, some of the changes within the subjects were perhaps more linked to scholarly discussions within academic subjects and within educational science, for example the introduction of the concept of 'historical consciousness'. However, even these changes – conceptualised within academia – came to fit very well into the ‘new’ educational discourse of the 1980s and 1990s, regardless of the intentions behind them.

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