



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# Lärartillvaro och historieundervisning

*Innebörder av ett nytt uppdrag  
i de mätbara resultatens tid*

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## Akademisk avhandling

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History teaching in the Age of performativity: Swedish upper primary school teachers' experiences of a new curriculum

**Abstract**

Swedish compulsory school has recently been subjected to a number of political reforms. Between 2011 and 2014, for example, earlier grades, more national tests and a new curriculum plan (Lgr 11) were to be implemented. This thesis aims to examine those changes as they were experienced by teachers who teach history in Swedish upper primary schools. The theoretical framework is inspired by existential philosophy, primarily as formulated in the works of Martin Heidegger and Hanna Arendt. In this way, the study highlights the teachers' lived experience by making use of the concepts yearning, appearance, acting and mood.

The study comprises of 36 interviews with 26 informants. The interviews were carried out and transcribed during 2014. The questions focus on both the existential being of the teachers' lives as well as the ideological function of the history subject. This highly renders in the issue of how lived experiences of a specific school reform corresponded to the teachers' own perception of a meaningful history education. Both the yearnings that were expressed by the participants and their descriptions of what they have experienced, have been related to the overall educational ideological functions stated by Gert Biesta (socialisation, subjectification and qualification) and Jonas Aspelin (existentialisation).

Although the teachers' narratives were greatly varied in some aspects, their interpretations of the new assignment seemed to be quite homogenous. Most of the teachers portrayed a situation characterised by performativity. Measurable knowledge and more frequent documentation seemed to be prioritised. Some of them stressed that they experienced less autonomy. In terms of history, the new curriculum was associated with more content knowledge, cognitive skills and procedural abilities. From the teachers' perspective, pure qualification, rather than subjectification and socialisation, characterised the new curriculum.

Still, the teachers' feelings towards the curricular changes showed a great deal of divergence. Some of them embraced most of the new aspects. They claimed that clearly formulated requirements in the history curricula provided them with security. They declared that their history teaching to some extent became more professional. In line with such beliefs, some teachers asserted that the strengthened focus on analytical skills improved their teaching. Particularly those who expressed that they preferred such analytic procedural approaches described their experience in terms of confirmation and approval. Others appeared to struggle with the changes. While a few teachers even tried to resist the curricular changes, some found themselves forced to endure what appeared to be a totally new situation. They expressed disbelief, frustration and pain. Notably it was those most devoted to the existentialisational function of history teaching that usually seemed to express such alienation. As argued, they appeared to long for a lost possibility to engage their pupils, to bring history alive and to make meaning of the past.

**Keywords**

History, History teacher, History didactics, Existential philosophy, Primary school, Lived experience, Martin Heidegger, Hanna Arendt, Curriculum change, Performativity

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