Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/csje20

Renegotiation of subject content – interpretations of new art education policy

Hanna Ahrenby

To cite this article: Hanna Ahrenby (11 Feb 2025): Renegotiation of subject content – interpretations of new art education policy, Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2025.2459904

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2025.2459904

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 11 Feb 2025.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 88

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=csje20

SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2025.2459904

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Renegotiation of subject content – interpretations of new art education policy

Hanna Ahrenby

Department of Creative Studies, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Subject matter development in education is a highly complex process. Previous studies indicate that time limitations, diversity of subject matter, and goal-oriented management of schools can exacerbate difficulties in selecting content in compulsory school-level education. This study addresses aspects that have received less attention: the formation of subject content (through renegotiation and interpretation of changing policies) in an illustrative school subject (Art) that is not aligned with a specific academic discipline. For this purpose, I have analyzed policy documents and expressions of interviewed art teachers and officials using Bernstein's pedagogical device theory. The results indicate that absence of an affiliation with an academic discipline facilitates changes in subject content. Furthermore, the renegotiation of policy (and hence subject content) are strongly influenced by societal changes and ideologies in the official recontextualization field, while the strong internal classification of the Art subject significantly influences content selection in the pedagogical recontextualization field.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 18 June 2024
Accepted 26 November 2024

KEYWORDS
Policy; art education; subject content; recontexualization; ideology

Introduction

Diverse aspects of the development of subject content for education have been addressed, from preschool pedagogical practice levels to doctoral curricular levels. Findings have shown that the formation and selection of subject content are highly complex processes that are influenced by myriads of interacting contextual factors (socio-economic, political, cultural and material) as well as purely "academic" or pragmatic considerations (Bernstein, 2000; Deng & Luke, 2008; Ball et al., 2012; Deng, 2020; Krogh et al., 2023). However, despite the insights provided by the cited studies, and others, the processes involved have not been completely elucidated, or even completely problematized, in previous research. One source of complexity is that while the content of some school subjects is drawn from a single academic discipline, the content of others is drawn from multiple disciplines, and often non-academic milieu. One such subject is Art. Its content is drawn from diverse environments in which images are produced and/or analyzed, such as numerous settings associated with media studies, visual culture, history, politics and natural sciences as well as art *per se*. Moreover, art teacher education may be rooted largely in teacher education or education in fine arts, with substantial variation in foci. Partly for these reasons both the subject content and foci of Art education vary both among and within countries, spatially and temporally (cf. Lindström, 2011; Wikberg, 2014; Gulliksen & Hjardemaal, 2016; Oltedal et al., 2016; Freedman, 2019; Marklund, 2019). Previous studies have also show that time limitations, diversity of subject matter,

CONTACT Hanna Ahrenby hanna.ahrenby@umu.se Department of Creative Studies, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

and goal-oriented management of schools can exacerbate difficulties in selecting content in compulsory school-level Art education.

However, partly due to the lack of an equivalent academic discipline for the school subject Art, research on the relevant subject matter is sparse (Allison & Hausman, 1998), as recognized in official Swedish reports:

> There is a lack of research on which areas of knowledge are relevant in the different subjects in compulsory school. One consequence of this is that instead of describing the content of subject knowledge, the descriptions in the curricula have been characterised by a description of general competencies, desirable processes, and changes in attitude. SOU, 2007, p. 28, p. 206

The documented paucity of research (Bamford, 2006; Gulliksen & Hjardemaal, 2016), relevant theory, and a clearly delimited field from which to draw content for Art syllabi facilitates the incorporation of new theories and subject content from various fields. This may provide beneficial flexibility. However, it is also potentially problematic as it could lead to substantial differences in interpretations of relevant content between policy-makers, curriculum and syllabi developers, individual teachers and other stakeholders, in complex renegotiation and recontextualization processes (Bernstein, 2000; Ball et al., 2012).

A further complication is that in the past twenty years there have been major, multi-level changes in schools' practices in many countries due to global trends to increase accountability and measurability (Telhaug et al., 2004; Ball et al., 2012; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018). These have profoundly affected teachers' roles (Ball, 2003; Maaranen & Afdal, 2022; Ahrenby, 2023). Among other changes, in Sweden and elsewhere, there has been a strong shift from rule-based to goal-oriented management of schools, closely linked to the rapid development of the "knowledge economy", rise of individualism, and increasing dominance of steering regimes like New Public Management (NPM) with strong reliance on performance measurements and comparisons (Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012).

Previous research indicates that Art syllabi have been adapted to recent societal changes, but Art education does not yet reflect the syllabi, at least in Sweden. This may be partly because Swedish art teachers' subject conceptions have not historically been aligned with current policy (Åsén, 2006). However, recent research suggests that school contexts may play a significant role (Ball et al., 2012; Ahrenby, 2021, 2023). Therefore, Swedish Art education at compulsory school[1] provides a potentially illuminating case for exploring the complex processes involved in the renegotiation and interpretation of new educational policy, and its effects on subject matter formation and selection. For this purpose, I have analyzed Swedish policy texts and views expressed by interviewed art teachers and Swedish National Agency for Education (NAfE) officials, using pedagogical device theory expounded by Bernstein (2000). The results provide insights into, and new perspectives on, how subject content is recontextualized at different policy levels, thereby extending understanding of challenges teachers face when interpreting and enacting syllabus content.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this article is to explore how subject content expressed in policy documents of a school subject that is not rooted in a single academic subject is renegotiated and recontextualized when teachers enact syllabi in their teaching. Art education in Sweden is used as an illustrative case, and the analysis is based on a study guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the role of ideology in the selection and recontextualization of knowledge and practices in the school subject Art?

[1]Compulsory school includes primary and lower secondary school.

2. How are hierarchical relations of different parts of the subject content formed?
3. How does the lack of rooting in a single academic field influence the subject content?

Background and literature review

Recent socio-economic changes have led to a global shift towards a knowledge-based economy and individualism from a previous more collective understanding of a democratic society, with associated changes in policy (Telhaug et al., 2004; Maaranen & Afdal, 2022; Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012). In Sweden and Norway, Social Democrats had long periods of power from the 1940s (Telhaug et al., 2004), partly due to a strong desire after World War II to develop a democratic, equal society, with a cradle-to-grave welfare system enabled by economic growth. Schooling was viewed as a means to accomplish associated national goals to foster the development of well-educated democratic citizens with strong community spirit who contributed to both the economy and welfare system. Schools were regulated and, particularly in Sweden, nine-year compulsory schooling was supposed to provide objective knowledge and enable students from diverse backgrounds to collaborate. This view of a democratic society and school was challenged in the 1970s, and in the 1980s neo-liberal ideology became increasingly dominant, and the term *knowledge-economy* was introduced in the educational discourse (Telhaug et al., 2004). This raised teachers' accountability for pupils' achievement of specific goals with corresponding pressure to deliver results (Ball, 2003; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018).

General increases in accountability have reduced teachers' professional space, according to Maaranen and Afdal (2022), but associated policies have varied among countries. In addition, teachers of marginalized subjects, like Art, are generally under less pressure to enact curricula in a prescribed manner than most teachers, as pupils´ knowledge of Art is checked less rigorously (Ball et al., 2011; Maguire et al., 2015; Oltedal et al., 2016; Chapman et al., 2018). For example, in Norway and Sweden, the students' goal achievement and knowledge in some subjects, but not Art, are closely monitored in national tests. Therefore, teachers of marginalized subjects may seem to have more freedom. However, Swedish art teachers have adapted to the prevailing system and expressed desires for more guidance and directives rather than using their professional freedom to design teaching as they see fit (Ahrenby, 2023). Nevertheless, art teachers do use their professional freedom in the recontextualization process. As there is limited time to cover the syllabus they must select content to teach (Ahrenby, 2021), and their selection is strongly based (unsurprisingly) on their understanding of the subject and their competencies (Oltedal et al., 2016). Partly, at least, for this reason art education in practice (in the reproduction field) differs from the syllabus.

Developmental trends in the Art subject in Sweden have been similar to those in many other countries, but there have been differences in foci between countries (Gulliksen & Hjardemaal, 2016; Lindström, 2011). For example, according to Lindström (2011) the content centered on art *per se* in Finland, but visual culture was a key element in Denmark, while, art and craft were combined, and design was a key conceptual element, in Norway. Due to international variations in art education, there have been corresponding variations in the foci of relevant research, and results should be interpreted accordingly, but there are some general features. Notably, image production is always a major component of Art education, regardless of the focus on Art, Design, Visual Communication or Visual Culture. However, as clearly shown by international comparisons, the types of images produced, and purposes of their production, may vary substantially (cf. Bamford, 2006; Lindström, 2011).

In Sweden, Art syllabi have evolved with societal trends (Åsén, 2006). It has been a separate school subject since the mid-nineteenth century. Initially, it was called *Teckning* (Drawing), and there was an emphasis on middle-class boys learning important drawing skills for industry and fostering the accuracy and diligence of lower/working-class pupils (Wikberg, 2014). At the beginning

of the twentieth century new progressive ideas emerged, and in the mid-twentieth century the focus on Art education shifted with influence from Richard Rothe, Herbert Read and Viktor Lowenfeld towards encouraging pupils' personal development and free creative expression (Wikberg, 2014). In the 1960s, new media changed the range of images in society, and (together with the new Swedish compulsory school's prioritization of fostering democratic citizens) raised pressures to update Art education. This led to increasing promotion of critical analysis and understanding of images in the syllabus, in alignment with the social democratic ideology and values that Scandinavian school systems were built upon (Telhaug et al., 2004; Prøitz & Nordin, 2020). In 1980 the Art subject was renamed *Bild* (Image/Picture).

The importance of visual communication is recognized in the Swedish art syllabus of 1969, but its prominence has risen in subsequent syllabi, and the latest art syllabus from 2022 (hereafter Lgr 22) highlights the importance of analyzing images, including the norms and values they convey. This follows the inclusion of a norm-critical perspective in Swedish school policy, partly as a means of "vaccination" against discrimination and harassment in schools (Hill, 2021).

The Lgr 22 Art syllabus strongly emphasizes the importance of pupils understanding key aspects of visual communication through development of abilities to critically analyze elements of visual culture. This aligns with the notion that Art includes essential knowledge and competencies for citizens in democratic societies (Lilliedahl, 2022), and hence ideology that prevailed in the Nordic countries until the 1990s. Marklund (2019) also found that Swedish Art education in schools was still influenced by earlier traditions and values (embraced by both teachers and pupils), such as those associated with art psychology.

The shifts in curricular foci, from technical drawing to visual communication and critical image analysis, have resulted in an expansion of content, rather than full replacement of older content with new content (cf. Åsén, 2006). The resulting "crowded" syllabus, with layers of older subject conceptions, has forced Swedish Art teachers to be selective (Ahrenby, 2023; Oltedal et al., 2016). According to Gulliksen and Hjardemaal (2016), Norwegian art teacher educators also find the subject too broad, and that both content selection and how it is enacted depend on the teachers' position and understanding of the subject.

In summary, there have been major recent changes in the Swedish educational steering system based on neo-liberal ideology, and the subject content of Art education in Swedish schools has substantially expanded. Thus, it is highly suitable for examining how selection of content for a subject that is not rooted in an academic subject is renegotiated and formed, both in policy documents and when teachers recontextualize the syllabus into teaching. Such analysis may also provide valuable insights into wider effects of governance changes and general aspects of subject content formation.

Pedagogical device theory

According to Bernstein (2000), school subjects are formed by recontextualizing real discourses, such as those prevailing in the fields of physics or carpentry, into the school subjects of physics and woodwork, respectively. Art differs from some other school subjects as it is formed by recontextualization of real discourses in many fields or disciplines rather than just one.

The real discourses are recontextualized through what Bernstein (2000) calls the *pedagogic device*, which encompasses four fields. New knowledge, like academic disciplines and associated real discourses, are created in *the field of production*. The real discourses are recontextualized, through *pedagogic discourse*, in the *official recontextualization field* (ORF) and *pedagogic recontextualization field* (PRF). In the ORF official agencies create curricula and other policy documents, and in the PRF teachers, principals, specialists and various authors incorporate interpretations of the official policies and documents in textbooks, lesson plans, and other educational materials. In the final (*reproduction*) field teachers and students transform and apply these materials in actual classroom-level teaching and learning.

The degree of teacher autonomy depends on power relations between the ORF and PRF. If agents within the ORF exert strong control there is little or no authority in the PRF and if the ORF is weak there is greater autonomy for actors in the PRF.

The discourses are adapted to specific school contexts through the recontextualization of real discourses in school subjects. This involves the selection, organization, and reordering of content. There are also ideological factors, because as a "discourse moves, it is ideologically transformed; it is not the same discourse any longer" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33). As school subjects are created through pedagogic discourse they are organized, re-organized and their boundaries with other school subjects are set or re-adjusted. The borders with other subjects can have widely varying classification strength (Bernstein, 2000). When classification is strong, the borders with other subjects are strong, the subjects are highly specialized and there is little or no overlap, flow, or exchange of content between them. If classification is weak, the subject's identity is poorly established by the organizational structure, and its content is less specialized, substantially overlapping with parts of other subjects. Classification can have both external and internal elements. The external elements are relations between subjects, while internal classification "refers to the arrangement of the space and the objects in it" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 14), such as dedicated art classrooms equipped for image-making.

School subjects can have widely varying knowledge structures. Art education can be described as having what Bernstein (2000) calls a horizontal knowledge structure. This means that knowledge of the subject consists of a series of specialized "languages" (theories or areas of expertise), and progression does not consist of increased abstraction but of learning "new languages", which can bring new and other perspectives. As a school subject is constructed through pedagogic discourse, content is selected, and the different languages are given different meanings or weights. In a horizontal knowledge structure, languages can have varying strength of grammar. Strong grammar in this context refers to " … an explicit conceptual syntax capable of relatively precise empirical descriptions and of generating formal modelling of empirical relations" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 163). These concepts are applied here in analysis of the recontextualization in the ORF and PRF that occurs in the renegotiation and formation of subject content in a school subject (Art) that is not rooted in an academic discipline. The methodology applied is described in the following section.

Methods

Empirically this article is based on material collected over ten months, from 3 February to 11 November 2022, before the implementation of a new national curriculum. Some of the material was used in a previously published analysis, focusing on visual arts teachers' professional freedom in policy enactment (Ahrenby, 2023). As this article focuses on the renegotiation and formation of subject content in the recontextualization process in the ORF and the PRF, the methodology applied slightly differs. It includes analysis of official policy documents, such as the syllabi from the three latest curricula[2] and implementation materials. Analyzed information was also obtained from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten Art teachers in Swedish nine-year compulsory schools, and one interview with two NAfE officials in the fall of 2022.

The interviewed teachers were all employed in state-run schools and had teacher training, but taught different grades and had varying teaching experience. Seven also taught other subjects such as sloyd (craft), English, Swedish, Mathematics, and special education, or worked in leisure-time centers. All teachers were interviewed at least once, and some two or three times to gather more information about relevant topics. Three interviews were conducted in person, and the rest via Zoom. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using the NVivo software package, which was also used in the data analysis. Schools, teachers, and NAFE officials were all given pseudonyms. NAFE officials were given the pseudonyms Nina and Nadia. Pseudonyms

[2]Läroplaner för det obligatoriska skolväsendet och de frivilliga skolformerna 1994 (Lpo 94), Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011 (Lgr 11), and Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2022 (Lgr 22).

Table 1. Pseudonyms of the teachers and their schools, grades they taught and numbers of times they were interviewed.

Teacher	School name	School grades taught	No. of interviews
T1 Anders	Alder	F–6	2
T2 Beatrice	Birch	7–9	3
T3 Berit	Birch	7–9	3
T4 Charlotte	Carnation	F–9	1
T5 Dalia	Daisy	7–9	1
T6 Eva	Elm	F–9	1
T7 Fiona	Fern	F–6	2
T8 Greta	Garden	F–6	1
T9 Helen	Hawthorn	F–9	2
T10 Iris	Ivy	F–9	1

given to the teachers and their schools, grades they taught, and numbers of times they were interviewed, are shown in Table 1.

In a first analytical step relevant information in policy documents and interview transcripts were identified and marked. In order to answer the research questions, the data were organized into themes and subjected to further hermeneutic interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017), using pedagogic device theory (Bernstein, 2000).

Researcher positionality

In efforts to minimize subjective bias and maximize the validity of both the collection and interpretation of data I have striven to maintain a reflexive stance throughout the study. However, my background as a former Art teacher, currently serving as a teacher educator and researcher at Umeå University, has inevitably influenced my approach to interviewing informants and the analysis.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process, I have followed the ethical guidelines for good research practice published by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). Accordingly, all participants were informed about the study and gave written or oral consent to participate. Pseudonyms have also been assigned to participants and schools to safeguard their anonymity and preserve their integrity. The research does not involve sensitive personal data, so it does not fall under the purview of the Swedish Ethical Review Act (2003, 460), obviating the need for an ethical review. Recordings of the interviews are securely stored in accordance with the data storage plan design for this study and Umeå University's regulations.

Results

The first part of this section presents findings of the study regarding the ORF drawn from the analysis of policy documents, such as the three latest Art syllabi (from 2000, 2011 and 2023), and interviews with NAfE officials. A second part then presents findings regarding the PRF, based on the analysis of interviewed teachers' expressions.

The official recontextualization field

The three most recent Swedish Art syllabi for compulsory school clearly show that elements of connected fields can easily permeate the Art subject in the ORF, so it is weakly classified (Bernstein, 2000). The content and focus on visual communication implemented in 1969 have persisted, but new theoretical elements have been added. The 2000 syllabus includes explicit

references to theories concerning both visual perception and multimodality, such as the following passages:

> Pictures are closely connected to our visual senses, to how we perceive and how we are perceived. (Skolverket, 2000, p. 8)

> Pictures interact with other forms of expression, such as speech, text, and music, within the framework of an expanded concept of text. Communication today essentially takes place through combinations of different media, which impose demands on inter-disciplinary work. (Skolverket, 2000, p. 9)

The multimodality concept introduced in the previous syllabus is much less prominent in the 2011 syllabus, but it mentions a new concept, *visual culture*, as follows:

> Through teaching, pupils should gain experience of visual cultures comprising film, photos, design, art, architecture and various environments. (Skolverket, 2011, p. 22)

A major difference between the 2000 and 2011 syllabi is structural, as the 2011 syllabi were updated to comply with new school regulations, including changes from rule-oriented to goal-oriented management. The changes include new ways of structuring and describing the goals and knowledge requirements. The 2011 Art syllabus also contains less text describing the subject, its aims, and content, with a shift in focus from free artistic expression to visual communication

The 2022 Art syllabus and NAfE's associated Commentary materials emphasize the importance of image-making. However, also emphasizesing the importance of exploitative image-making, and encouraging students to develop visual communication skills and analytical knowledge to make deliberate choices. Although image-making and analysis are described under different headlines, the Commentary material clarifies that analysis and image-making should not be seen as separate activities. Reflection, making experiences, and understanding visual communication are also described as important in the Commentary material but not as clearly in the syllabus.

There are only moderate changes between the 2011 and 2022 Art syllabi, but they include further reduction in the amount of text, and explicit inclusion (four times) of the visual culture concept in the content. In the Commentary material, the concept of visual culture is explained and stressed, especially in relation to the Aim for the subject:

> The concept of visual culture is based on the traditional idea of image but extends it to encompass an increasing number of different forms of visual expression. The intention is to express a view of what is included in the school subject of art. In the rest of the syllabus, however, for practical reasons and to follow established usage, the word image (Bild) is used throughout. (Skolverket 2022b, p. 6)

This shows how content from the academic research field of visual culture has become part of, and changed, the Art subject content in policy documents.

The impact of visual culture on our norms and values has also contributed to recognition of the importance of abilities to analyze visual culture. Therefore, its analysis is important to avoid acceptance of norms and values conveyed by images without reflection. Accordingly, the prominence of art *per se* is further reduced in favor of a general concept of images.

The 2022 version also highlights the importance of the image-making process, and introduces a new concept in the Art syllabus: *norms*. For example, pupils in schoolyears one through three are expected to analyze: "Images from pupils' visual cultures that convey norms and stereotypes" (Skolverket 2022a, p. 30). In this manner, norm-critical perspectives were explicitly introduced into the Art subject. Moreover, the concept of norm-critical pedagogy was coined and became established in the field of education in Sweden partly through text produced by the NAfE (Hill, 2021).

The introduction of norm-critical perspectives aligns with the long-established idea of critical analysis of images as part of the Art subject, and critical study of visual culture, which may partially explain why it has so quickly become part of the subject in the ORF. It also confirms the subject's permeability to content from other areas and fields of production, and its weak external classification (Bernstein, 2000). The critical analysis of norms conveyed in images may also be part of

the content in some other school subjects, like Social Studies and Swedish. For example, in social studies students should acquire the "ability to analyse social issues from different perspectives and critically examine how they are presented in different sources" (Skolverket, 2022a). The current syllabus for the subject Swedish states that:

> Pupils should also be stimulated to express themselves through different aesthetic forms of expression. Furthermore, teaching should help pupils develop knowledge of how to search for and critically evaluate information from different sources. (Skolverket, 2022a, p. 224)

The norm-critical content, as exemplified by this quotation, is intended to impart knowledge and skills deemed essential for citizens in a democratic society. It is also more strongly associated with the social-liberal democracy ideological stream that long dominated Nordic education (cf. Telhaug et al., 2004; Prøitz & Nordin, 2020) than the neoliberal ideology underpinning the current school governance system and NPM. Nevertheless, the three latest art syllabi reflect the changes in governance of the school towards goal-oriented management, as they include more clearly defined goals for students to achieve. For example, the 2011 syllabus includes new and stricter directives for applying the criteria for specific grades' goals. In Bernsteinian terms this is a manifestation of the state increasing its control in the ORF, which should reduce the power of actors in the PRF. However, there is room for interpretation in the two latest art syllabi, and the newest syllabus provides teachers in the PRF more professional freedom, enabling them to interpret the criteria for different grades and decide which criteria should take precedence in grading. Accordingly, the interviewed NAfE representatives expressed a desire "not to control too much" (Nina, NAfE representative). They also stated that the NAfE only governs some things, and teachers are responsible for translating the content into teaching as they see best. Together, this shows that the NAfE aims to give actors in the PRF some control.

In summary, level of control from the ORF increased with the two syllabi preceding the current version, but decreased again with the latest syllabus. This was confirmed in the interviews with the NAfE representatives:

> Now, we should be accurate and say that implementation or getting work started on a new syllabus or curriculum is a continuous process. It starts in earnest when teachers start teaching. It is one thing to go through the syllabus and think about "How are we going to work with this?" / … /Then, the work of implementing a curriculum goes on for quite a long time. (Nadina, NAfE official)

In conclusion, elements of the Visual Culture field have permeated the Art subject's representation in the ORF, with corresponding weakening of the focus on Art *per se*. In the Art syllabus from 2000, the subject had strong external classification as it strongly focused on Art, which was not included in any other subjects' content descriptions. In the last two syllabi image-making remained the dominant feature of the subject, but with new foci. Before 2011, the focus was on developing artistic expression, knowledge of Art, and the ability to analyze images. The last two syllabi have more strongly emphasized visual communication and visual culture. This has weakened the subject's external classification, due to the inclusion of communicating, decoding and problematizing elements of visual culture in other school subjects, such as Social studies and Swedish, in recognition of their importance as civic skills for citizens in a democratic society.

Power relations associated with the last three syllabi have also varied. In 2000, there was weak control from the ORF, affording actors in the PRF, such as Art teachers, strong control over the selection of content, pupils' grading and hence power to decide what counts as valid knowledge of the subject. In stark contrast, the 2011 curriculum introduced a new structure in line with NPM and goal-oriented management of schools, influenced by neo-liberal ideology. The state aimed to exert stronger control in the PRF with new criteria formulations and grading instructions. However, with Lgr 22 the pendulum swung back slightly, enabling agents to exert more control in the PRF, and giving teachers more power to decide which criteria for grading students are in line with aims of the subject and therefor given greater wight.

The pedagogic recontextualization field

Vague subject core complicates interpretation of the new Art syllabus according to all the interviewed teachers, especially those who also taught other subjects and thus could compare it with other syllabi. One, who taught both Art and Swedish said:

> Swedish has more Central Content, but the core of the art subject is "fluffier" and requires more interpretation to understand what it means. You need to turn to the Central Content to a larger extent (Iris)

Moreover, teachers of other subjects felt that they already understood their core matter, and both the knowledge and skills pupils were expected to develop, as exemplified by Fiona, who taught Art and English:

> In Art the subject core is looser. When you teach a second language, you know that listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the foundations. (Fiona)

The teachers´ uncertainties regarding the Art subject's core matter reflect ambiguities in both the content's articulation in the syllabus and evolving foci in the field of production (Bernstein, 2000), as illustrated by the following quotation:

> All questions connected to art, especially contemporary art – to answer what art is – it's like holding a wet, slippery bar of soap. (Helen)

Helen's statement reflects the influence of the recontextualized art discourse on the school subject of Art, where the variations in artistic processes, methods, teams, and artefacts make it hard to define.

Helen also said that content had been added over time, and understood the introduction of visual culture as an extension of the visual communication content. According to her, and other interviewed teachers, this had significantly expanded the subject and obliged them to choose what to teach, as there was not enough time to cover everything. However, they also expressed uncertainties about what images to use during Art classes, especially for fostering critical analysis and addressing norms conveyed in images, partly because when they interpreted norms they inevitably attached subjective meanings:

> It's something I find difficult to teach. Such concepts, so it doesn't become (short pause) like a new truth for them. Because I don't know how they are … maybe they don't care about that kind of thing, maybe they didn't grow up with pink toys for girls or blue toys for boys. How can I then come and say that this is how society sees this and that it constantly … … creates some kind of new truth for them. / … /Yes, it feels a bit scary. (Fiona)

As exemplified by this quotation, the interviewed teachers tended to interpret norms narrowly, as gender norms, and found discussing them with young pupils challenging. Greta and Charlotte, who taught lower grades and Eva, who had discussed this with art teachers who taught lower grades, expressed similar views. Charlotte said:

> You have a lot – well, the Swedish Media Council has a lot for secondary school about stereotypes, about norms … But just primary school … Because – you want them to be able to be children at the same time. (Charlotte).

As illustrated by these quotations, the teachers all reflected on difficulties in balancing aims to teach young pupils to analyze images to recognize representations of problematic norms and desires to avoid teaching norms that they may not yet have adopted. Charlotte said that she had already tried to work with images that challenge certain norms, e.g., images portraying strong masculine action heroes doing traditionally female household chores, like Batman baking. Although she had an idea of what images to use, she said:

> At the same time, you think: It's more difficult, and you'd really like to have teaching material for that. So, for primary school, for example, with images that we should discuss … (Charlotte)

Charlotte, and the other interviewed teachers, found it hard to choose appropriate material and images to use to cover this part of the syllabus's Central Content. They expressed uncertainties

about how to translate the syllabus into teaching, as they found it vague, which hindered their recontextualization of subject content in the PRF.

Equivalence

As teachers regarded the subject core as unclear and the syllabus to be vague and open to diverse interpretations, they found the recontextualization of the syllabus into teaching problematic in several ways. Helen connected the room for interpretation to art teachers' professional freedom but also to undesirable variation:

> And that freedom is, in a way, for me personally, really wonderful. Because I've had to design a lot according to my own thought. Now, as I said, it's not okay that you go to ten classrooms in Sweden and it looks like ten different subjects. (Helen)

She also said that the Swedish Art Teachers' National Association (ATNA) has voiced concerns about inequalities due to the openness of the syllabus. ATNA had invited the NAfE to discuss the new syllabus in a meeting that some interviewed teachers attended. Dalia said that the NAfE did not provide any answers at this meeting, but highlighted the benefits of professional freedom.

This shows that teachers are adapting to the ideology underpinning the new governance of schools, which thus influences the recontextualization in the PRF. The interviewed teachers expressed uncertainty about transforming the syllabus text into teaching. The considerable room for interpretation and space to design teaching as they see fit has provided great professional freedom, as there is little control from the ORF, but this has not been entirely welcomed due to the associated increase in responsibility, with little guidance or support.

Theory vs. practice

Image production is a major element of the Art subject in the PRF. The interviewed teachers stated that image production is the primary mode of working, and they had access to specialized classrooms, equipped for various forms of image production, showing strong internal classification (Bernstein, 2000). Many also appeared to have dichotomous views of practice and theory in Art education, in stark contrast to the complementary view expressed by the NAfE in the Commentary Material. Some teachers interpreted the expressed focus on the image production process as implying that attention to image analysis should be reduced in favor of image production, as exemplified by Berit: "We don't see many changes really, except for less writing – the analysis part". According to their perspective, analysis is linked with theory, interpreted as text-based activities such as writing.

Beatrice and Berit said that this shift toward less analysis and more focus on image production will benefit more artistic pupils, and saw this as a positive change. They argued that more verbal pupils previously benefited at the expense of more artistic pupils. However, some teachers expressed different opinions. Eva expressed resistance as follows:

> Eva: There was something about analysis … There was less emphasis on that part. Which I think is really crazy! Because it´s a great opportunity to focus on and learn different analysis methods. And to highlight … … and use different perspectives when analyzing.
> Hanna: What consequences do you think this will have?
> Eva: The Central Content contains a lot. Um, yes. Nothing has really changed in terms of content. In terms of techniques, material, and tools. While the knowledge requirements it feels like they're more focused on the actual production but also the work process. And … … it feels a bit like they've left this idea that the image is a language, that you can use images to communicate.

This quotation illustrates the teachers' dichotomized perceptions of theory and practice, with practice – specifically, image-making – taking precedence in the PRF. There has been a notable shift from emphasizing visual communication to prioritizing image production, when teachers

recontextualize subject content in the PRF, despite the heightened emphasis on visual culture in policy documents, closely linked to image analysis in the Commentary material.

The strong tradition of image-making persists in the Art subject, reflected in the specialized classrooms tailored for image production, which contribute to its strong internal classification (Bernstein, 2000). The analysis shows that the strong internal classification influences how the syllabus is interpreted and teaching is conducted. In this case, it results in a pronounced emphasis on image production. The strong internal classification, manifested in the classrooms' design, appears to significantly influence the teachers' understanding of the subject, and guide the recontextualization process in the PRF.

Comparison of the findings revealed clear differences between the ORF and PRF of the Art subject in Sweden in the focal period. In the ORF, there has been a growing preference for discourse with a horizontal knowledge structure and strong grammar (Bernstein, 2000), such as discourse associated with visual culture that has emerged in academia. The structure of knowledge based on the art discourse. In contrast, image production with content drawn from Art or similar discourses (with weaker grammar) is given greater weight in the PRF, as it aligns with the tradition of image-making and strong internal classification of the subject.

The results also show that ideology underpinning the importance of free expression and image production has played a role in the PRF. The influence of neo-liberal ideology, in line with the recent NPM-based school governance regime, can be detected in the teachers' uncertainties in the recontextualization of the syllabus that occurs in the PRF. Associated desires of teachers for directives and teaching material to guide them are relatively new, and have been accompanied by a reduction in professional freedom.

Discussion

The results clearly show that ideology plays a role in the recontextualization process, but may differ substantially between the ORF and PRF. In the illustrative case of the Art subject in Swedish compulsory school, the influence of neo-liberal ideology in the ORF can be clearly discerned in the two latest syllabi. The structure and grading criteria of these syllabi are more compatible with subjects that have a vertical knowledge structure (Bernstein, 2000), rather than a horizontal knowledge structure. The strong recent influence of neo-liberal ideology on what counts as knowledge and the Nordic education systems have been established in previous studies (Telhaug et al., 2004; Maaranen & Afdal, 2022; Pøitz & Nordin, 2020), but its influence on subject content have received much less attention. This study shows that to adjust to the new ideology influencing the understanding of school and the value of school subjects knowledge with strong grammar (Bernstein, 2000) has been given preference. In this case, parts of the subject content from academic fields, with stronger emphasis on text-based knowledge, have been nudging out content connected to aesthetic expression and some non-verbal, tacit knowledge that is part of the field of art production. For example, the introduction of visual culture into Art education has changed the hierarchical relations of the included knowledge and further expanded subject content. The weak external classification has enabled this in the ORF.

As neo-liberal ideology has increasingly prevailed in governance regimes of both schools and society more broadly, it has strongly influenced subject formation and recontextualization processes in the ORF, particularly for subjects that lack strong core content. The resulting shifts in content and foci of the Art syllabi have engendered constant needs to redefine and reinterpret elements of the subject. However, lack of clear affiliation to an academic discipline may not be the only reason for this. The field of Art, *per se*, still plays an important role in the subject content, it is not easily defined, and some consists of tacit knowledge (cf. Ahrenby, 2021; Oltedal et al., 2016), which may also have contributed to the subject matter's fluidity. In conclusion, ideology plays an important role in the recontextualization process in the ORF and permeation of new content into the Art subject.

However, the ideological influence has been weaker in the PRF, and the art subjects' strong internal classification has strongly influenced the subject content, leading to image production

taking precedence (cf. Marklund, 2019). In some policy documents, the NAfE has promoted stronger focus on the image-making process. This has aligned with the emphasis on image-making in the PRF, but in the PRF it has fueled a dichotomization of theory and practice. Therefore, other discourses, apart from theoretical academic (text-based) discourses, affect recontextualization in the PRF. The ideological stream of social-liberal democracy, which dominated in the Nordic countries for a long time and prioritizes development of important knowledge and competencies for citizens in a democratic society (Telhaug et al., 2004; Prøitz & Nordin, 2020), continued to influence the recontextualization in the PRF strongly throughout the study period. Nevertheless, as teachers have adapted to goal management neo-liberal ideology has influenced the recontextualization in the PRF as teachers have striven for alignment (Ahrenby, 2023).

I argue that the recontextualization of subject content in the two recontextualization fields is influenced by sets of factors and processes that partially overlap, and may vary both spatially and temporally. In the OFR of Art in Swedish schools, ideology has played a major role, while in the PRF subject tradition and strong internal classification have been highly influential in the subject's continual renegotiation.

A subject with weak external classification is at risk of comprehensive change through alignment with ideology and adaptation to current situations. Thus, it may lose features that make it a subject in its own right and become more or less meaningless, as its content can just as easily be found in other subjects (cf. Bernstein, 2000). This risk may be greatest for marginalized subjects, as it is easiest to question their inclusion in schooling (cf. Lilliedahl, 2022). Teachers' willingness to relinquish some of their professional freedom (Ahrenby, 2023) may also reduce their resistance to such changes. However, the importance of subject traditions in the PRF of Art in Swedish schools might generate resistance to changes associated with recontextualization in the ORF.

In conclusion, the Art subject's constant expansion and change in Swedish education can be at least partly attributed to the lack of a strong connection to a specific discourse in the field of production. Together with a marginalized position, this enables easy alteration of its content by ideological influences in the ORF. Today, the dominant ideology influencing school is neo-liberal, favoring subjects with recognized importance for the knowledge economy, which further marginalizes Art, and encourages Art teachers to interpret the curriculum accordingly. However, as subject content is recontextualized in the PRF, the strong internal classification, together with subject traditions, raises resistance to such alignment, resulting in clear deviations between the subject content in the ORF and the PRF.

In this study document analysis and interviews have been used to examine the formation of subject content in the ORF and PRF I hope that it will provide foundations for future researchers to obtain deeper understanding of processes involved in the reproduction field, e.g., through observation studies focusing on the formation of subject content as teachers enact the syllabus together with students.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Hanna Ahrenby http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0772-5157

References

Ahrenby. (2021). Värdegrundsarbete i bildundervisning: en studie om iscensättning av policy i grundskolans senare år. [Teaching fundamental values in art education] [a study on policy enactment in secondary school]. Umeå universitet.

Ahrenby, H. (2023). "It will take time"–visual arts teachers' professional freedom in policy enactment. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2023.2291207. epub ahead of print.

Allison, B., & Hausman, J. (1998). The limits of theory in art education. *Journal of Art & Design Education*, *17*(2), 121–127. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5949.00116

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2017). *Tolkning och reflektion: vetenskapsfilosofi och kvalitativ metod (3rd ed.). [Interpreation and reflection: philosophy of science and qualitative method]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Åsén, G. (2006). Varför bild i skolan? -en historisk tillbakablick på argument för ett marginaliserat skolämne [Why art in school? -a historical review of arguments for a marginalized school subject]. In Vetenskapsrådet & Lundgren U.P. (Eds.), *Uttryck, intryck, avtryck: lärande, estetiska uttrycksformer och forskning* (pp. 107–122). Vetenskapsrådet.

Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, *18*(2), 215–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How school do policy policy: policy enactment i secondary schools*. London and New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203153185

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Policy actors: Doing policy work in schools. *Discourse (Abingdon, England)*, *32*(4), 625–639. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.601565

Bamford, A. (2006). *The wow factor: Global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education*. Waxmann.

Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique* (Rev. ed). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Chapman, S., Wright, P., & Pascoe, R. (2018). Arts curriculum implementation: "Adopt and adapt" as policy translation. *Arts Education Policy Review*, *119*(1), 12–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2016.1201031

Deng, Z. (2020). *Knowledge, content, curriculum and Didaktik: beyond social realism*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Deng, Z., & Luke, A. (2008). Subject matter: Defining and theorizing school subjects. In *The SAGE handbook of curriculum and instruction* (pp. 66–87). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976572.n4

Freedman, K. (2019). Art education as social production: Culture, society, and politics on the formation of curriculum. In T. S. Popkewitz (Ed.), *The formation of school subjects: The struggle for creating an American institution* (pp. 63–84). Routledge.

Gulliksen, M. S., & Hjardemaal, F. R. (2016). Choosing content and methods: Focus group interviews with faculty teachers in Norwegian pre-service subject teacher education in design, art, and crafts. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *60*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2014.967809

Hill, H. (2021). "Normkritisk vaccination" – Normkritik och normkritisk pedagogik i Skolverkets rapporter och råd 2009–2014 ["Norm-critical vaccination" - Norm-criticism and norm-critical pedagogy in the National Agency for Education's reports and advice 2009–2014]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, *26*(2–3), 38–60. https://doi.org/10.15626/pfs26.0203.05

Krogh, E., Qvortrup, A., & Graf, S. T. (eds.). (2023). *Bildung, knowledge, and global challenges in education: Didaktik and curriculum in the anthropocene era*. Routledge.

Lilliedahl, J. (2022). Why the arts are not considered core knowledge in secondary education: A Bernsteinian analysis. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *54*(2), 165–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.192597

Lindström, L. (2011). The multiple faces of visual arts education. *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, *30*(1), 7–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2011.01688.x

Maaranen, K., & Afdal, H. W. (2022). Exploring teachers' professional space using the cases of Finland, Norway and the US. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *66*(1), 134–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1851760

Maguire, M., Braun, A., & Ball, S. (2015). Where you stand depends on where you sit": The social construction of policy enactments in the (English) secondary school. *Discourse (Abingdon, England)*, *36*(4), 485–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2014.977022

Marklund, F. (2019). *Bilder som berättar: om kunskap, makt och traditioner i grundskolans bildundervisning*. [Pictures that tell stories: Knowledge, power and traditions in art education in compulsory school]. Umeå universitet.

Oltedal, E., Gamlem, S. M., Kleivenes, O. M., Ryslett, K., & Vasset, T. (2016). Teachers' assessment experiences and perceptions in the practical-aesthetic subjects. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *60*(6), 649–662. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2015.1066431

Prøitz, T. S., & Nordin, A. (2020). Learning outcomes in Scandinavian education through the lens of Elliot Eisner. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *64*(5), 645–660. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2019.1595717

Skolverket. (2000). *Grundskolan: kursplaner och betygskriterier [Compulsory school: syllabi and grading criteria]* (1. uppl.).

Skolverket. (2011). Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011. [*Curriculum for the cumpulsory school, pre-school class and leisure-time centre 2011*].

Skolverket. (2022a). *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet. [Curriculum for the compulsory school, pre-school class and the leisure-time centre 2022]*.

Skolverket. (2022b). *Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i bild – grundskolan. [Commentary material for the Art syllabus- elementary school]*.

SOU 2007:28. (2007). *Tydliga mål och kunskapskrav i grundskolan: förslag till nytt mål- och uppföljningssystem: betänkande [Clear objectives and knowledge requirements in primary education: Proposal for a new system of objectives and monitoring: Report.]*. Fritze.

Sundberg, D., & Wahlström, N. (2012). Standards-based curricula in a denationalized conception of education: The case of Sweden. *European Educational Research Journal EERJ*, *11*(3), 342–356. https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2012.11.3.342

Telhaug, A. O., Mediås, O. A., & Aasen, P. (2004). From collectivism to individualism? Education as nation building in a Scandinavian perspective. *International Journal of Phytoremediation*, *48*(2), 141–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031383042000198558

Vetenskapsrådet. (2017). *God forskningssed [Good research practice]*. Vetenskapsrådet.

Wahlström, N., & Sundberg, D. (2018). Transnational curriculum standards, curriculum reforms and classroom practices – An introduction. In N. Wahlström & D. Sundberg (Eds.), *Transnational curriculum standards and classroom practices: the new measning of teaching* (pp. 1–14). London: Routledge.

Wikberg, S. (2014). Bland självporträtt och parafraser: om kön och skolans bildundervisning [Among soul portraits and paraphrases: On gender and the school Art education].Umeå universitet. Diss.