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**HISTORY TEACHING AND IDENTITY  
IN THE SWEDISH MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY**

**ENSEÑANZA DE LA HISTORIA E IDENTIDAD EN LA SOCIEDAD  
MULTICULTURAL SUECA**

**ENSINO DE HISTÓRIA E A IDENTIDADE NA SOCIEDADE  
MULTICULTURAL SUECA**

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### Abstract

Over the past two decades deteriorated equivalence in Swedish schools has led to teachers have faced growing differences regarding students' potential, motivation and school results. However, within Swedish research concerning the role of school in the multicultural society, focus has not been on teachers' experiences, but rather problem-oriented studies on teaching materials, students' opinions and school policies. The objective of the article is to first, on the basis of Anglo-Saxon research and theories, present an analytical tool consisting of four possible strategies for teaching in a multicultural society. The analytical tool will be used to, through the results from semi-structured interviews, compare and discuss seven upper secondary school teachers' experiences from teaching history in the Swedish multicultural society. To justify the relevance of such a discussion in a Swedish context, a brief presentation of Swedish research in the field are given. The teachers interviewed have primarily been chosen from their reputation of being talented, ambitious, and that they believe they have found workable models in their teaching. The comparison and discussion of the seven teachers' experiences showed examples of similarities, but no clear pattern in relation to the four strategies as apparent from the analysis tool. It rather seems as it is foremost the teachers own background, values and educational context that affects what strategies they choose in their teaching. The result can be interpreted as if the space of interpretations regarding the school's intentions is (too) great, which may be an expression of lack of clarity in objectives and guidelines from the current school politics.

**Keywords:** History teaching, identity, multicultural society, school policy, equal education.

### Resumen

En las últimas dos décadas el deterioro de la equidad en las escuelas suecas ha llevado a los docentes a enfrentarse a crecientes diferencias respecto al potencial de los estudiantes, la motivación y los resultados escolares. Sin embargo, el foco en la investigación sueca sobre el papel de la escuela en la sociedad multicultural no ha estado centrado en las experiencias docentes, sino más bien en las cuestiones relacionadas con los materiales didácticos, las opiniones de los estudiantes y las políticas escolares. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar una herramienta analítica que consta de cuatro posibles estrategias para la enseñanza de la historia en una sociedad multicultural. La herramienta de análisis se utilizará para, a través de los resultados de una serie de entrevistas semi-estructuradas, comparar y discutir las experiencias de siete docentes de enseñanza secundaria superior respecto a la enseñanza de la historia en la sociedad multicultural sueca. Para justificar la importancia de este debate en un contexto sueco, se aporta una breve presentación de la investigación sueca en este campo. Los profesores y profesoras entrevistados han sido escogidos principalmente por su reputación como talentosos, ambiciosos, y que han encontrado modelos viables para la enseñanza de la historia. La comparación y discusión de las experiencias de los siete docentes muestra ejemplos de similitudes, pero no un patrón claro en relación con las cuatro estrategias que se desprenden de la herramienta de análisis. Más bien lo que aparece como más importante es el propio bagaje cultural de los profesores, sus valores y el contexto educativo en el que trabajan, lo que afecta a las estrategias que eligen para su docencia. Los resultados muestran que el espacio de las interpretaciones realizadas sobre las intenciones de la escuela es muy amplio, lo cual puede ser una expresión de la falta de claridad en los objetivos y directrices de las políticas escolares actuales.

**Palabras clave:** Enseñanza de la historia, identidad, sociedad multicultural, política de la escuela, educación igualitaria.

### Resumo

Nas últimas duas décadas o desgaste da igualdade nas escolas suecas levou os docentes a enfrentar crescentes diferenças a respeito dos resultados dos estudantes em potencial, a motivação e a escola. Porém, a pesquisa sueca sobre o papel da escola na sociedade multicultural, o enfoque não está em práticas docentes, senão em estudos orientados para os problemas de materiais didáticos, os estudantes opiniões e políticas da escola. O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar uma ferramenta analítica que consta de quatro possíveis estratégias para o ensino numa sociedade multicultural. A ferramenta de análise será utilizada para, através dos resultados das entrevistas semi-estructuradas, comparar e discutir as experiências de sete professores do ensino secundário superior «de ensino de história na sociedade multicultural sueca. Para justificar a importância deste debate num contexto sueco, aportamos uma breve apresentação da pesquisa sueca no campo. Os professores entrevistados foram escolhidos principalmente por sua reputação como talentosos, ambiciosos, e que encontraram modelos viáveis para realizarem sua prática educativa. A comparação e discussão das experiências dos sete professores mostraram exemplos de semelhanças, mas não um padrão claro em relação com as quatro estratégias, que se desprendem da ferramenta de análise. Parece que é mais importante no fundo os próprios professores, os valores e o contexto educativo que afeta as estratégias que escolhem em sua prática educativa. O resultado mostra que as interpretações sobre as intenções da escola são (muito) grandes, que pode ser uma expressão da falta de clareza nos objetivos e diretrizes da política escolar atual.

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino de história, identidade, sociedade multicultural, política da escola, educação igualitária.

## INTRODUCTION

The emerging multicultural society has brought new challenges for school tuition, which has given rise to multicultural research. This is a field of research in progress where much remains to be done; not least central for identity issues is studies about history teaching. In a Swedish context, over the last two decades, the multicultural society challenges have been clearly intertwined with widening gaps between the richest and poorest in Sweden. In Swedish school it is to a large extent the same students who have a foreign background and poor socio-economic conditions (Skolverket, 2004, 2012).

On July 1, 2011, an upper secondary school reform GY2011 (Skolverket, 2011) started to apply. One important change was that previously all upper secondary school programs offered a degree for further studies at the university, i.e. also the vocational programs. After the reform, students can get two types of degrees: a professional degree *or* a university preparatory degree. Another change is that the position of the school subject of history has been strengthened when it became compulsory for all programs. These ongoing changes affect the conditions for history teaching, which eventually will be evaluated. Pending for such an evaluation, it is interesting that on the basis of the circumstances for the reform reflect on the challenges the history teaching in Swedish school today are facing; especially the challenges that concerns students identity and conditions in a multicultural society with widening socio-economic gaps.

The objective of the article is to, on the basis of Anglo-Saxon research and theories, present an analytical tool consisting of four possible strategies for teaching in a multicultural society. In a next step, the analytical tool will be used to out from seven semi-structured interviews, compare and discuss upper secondary school teachers' experiences from teaching history in the Swedish multicultural society. By testing the relevance of the four suggested strategies, for teaching in a multicultural society (the analytical tool), for Swedish history teaching makes it possible to clarify some similarities and differences between established theories in the field and practical experiences of teaching. In a Swedish context, the analysis of successful teachers' experiences is a contribution to developing the area of research a step further from being primarily problem-oriented to also consider how to develop successful strategies.

A description of methodology and design for the interview study are given below and before the presentation of the results from the interviews. The article concludes with some reflections on the challenges of teaching history in the Swedish multicultural society.

To introduce the reader to the current state of Swedish school, the article begins with a brief account of the background to and purpose of the upper secondary school reform, GY2011, and the changes that Swedish school has undergone in the past two decades.

## 1. UNAPPROVED GRADES IN THE SWEDISH SCHOOL

The background to Swedish Government's decision on GY2011 (Skolverket, 2011) was that the upper secondary school was facing a number of major challenges:

- Too many students discontinued their studies or completed their studies without passing grades.
- In some cases, the principals used the local space of authority to lower standards
- Upper secondary school students were not prepared well enough for either further studies or for careers (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2009).

In 2003, the Government instructed the National Agency for Education to deepen the analysis of the reasons why students with foreign background have lower educational outcomes than Swedish students. In the Agency's final report the differences between native students and students with foreign background to the natives' advantages were confirmed. It was also found that there are a number of socioeconomic factors that correlated with school results. These are above all parental education, labour market attachment, and if the student lives with both parents or single parent. It was also found that students from families with immigrant background on average had less disposable income than was the case for native students (Skolverket, 2004).

The Agency's report on "Equivalent education in Swedish compulsory school?" (Skolverket, 2012) presented in 2012 showed that students' socioeconomic background had a continued importance in recent years. The importance of being born abroad has increased, which may be explained by students' average age is higher at immigration than before. The report also showed that the differences between schools' results have increased, partly due to the schools being segregated on the basis of socioeconomic and foreign origin. Another explanation is that motivated students (regardless of socioeconomic background) to a larger extent use the so-called *free school choice* to apply for schools with other motivated students. Because students' results is affected both by others students' results and by the teachers' expectations, the differences between schools' is further reinforced, which is called the *School level impact*. The report concluded that the equivalence in the Swedish elementary school has deteriorated (Skolverket, 2012). The importance of these reports is to be understood from a societal perspective, where the school's goals in modern times has been to offer all students an equivalent education to counteract segregation, discrimination and marginalization. A task that the Swedish school system cannot live up to today. The school's failure in this area should also be considered in relation to that income inequality in society has increased by 31 percent between 1991 and 2010 (Regeringen, 2012).

The multicultural classroom reflects at the same time as it prepares students for the conditions of the global and multicultural society. How the multicultural classroom is composed differs clearly between regions, cities, rural districts and school classes. In metropolitan areas suburbs, the problems in multicultural society are often most evident. Here the segregation is substantial and the suburb represents a social and ethnic "otherness" where large groups are marginalized in the education system, the labour market and the housing market (Andersson et al., 2004; Sernhede, 2002). The problems are made visible in subur-

ban classrooms because of inadequate resources, large classes, high teacher turnover, etc, which have clear implications for the school's ability to offer all students the right to an equivalent education. But even in the more monocultural classrooms in prosperous areas is multiculturalism an important issue to work on in relation to pupils' knowledge, identity and citizenship in a multicultural society.

Lastly, the Swedish school has also deteriorated in an international comparison. According to PISA<sup>1</sup> 2009 Swedish 15-year-olds reading and math skills have deteriorated in the 2000s. Similarly, the Swedish school system has become less equivalent in comparison with other OECD countries. In 2000, Sweden was in the top position regarding equivalence, but lost to now be an average country. The significance of students' socio-economic background has been strengthened and is larger than the OECD average (Skolverket, 2009). In summary, the changed conditions and new challenges for the Swedish school is a result both of economic conditions, economic policy and school policy as well as the emergence of the global and multicultural Society. The trend has been similar and often earlier in several other countries. A brief outlook and comparison with international research on education for cultural diversity gives perspective on the Swedish example.

## 2. SOME EXAMPLES OF ANGLO-SAXON RESEARCH ON EDUCATION FOR CULTURAL

In for example U.S., Canada and the UK, research on multicultural education in the last twenty years has had a major impact on both the school's governing documents and for the practical teaching. An influential researcher in the field is James A. Banks. He describes multicultural education as an idea, education reform and process that aims to create equal educational opportunities for all students, including minority groups of different race, ethnicity and social class. This should be implemented by changing the school environment so it reflects the diversity of groups and cultures that are represented in both the society and classroom. Banks has identified five dimensions of multicultural education, integration of content, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudic reduction, and empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2002).

In Amy Gutmann's theories of "democratic education", she argues that education should equip students with the necessary skills to maintain and develop democracy with the goal of treating all individuals as equal citizens (Gutmann, 1999, pp. 41-50). In the relationship between the state and the multicultural society Gutmann emphasizes recognition and tolerance: That a government education policy shall recognize the experiences of oppressed groups through politics and policy documents that reflect values of several cultures (as long as they respect the rights of citizens) and also show tolerance concerning disagreements about for example matters of belief and practices regarding basic freedoms (Gutmann, 1999, pp. 303-313).

In line with increased social and economic inequality, the conditions for multicultural education have changed. Within the scientific community, it has also brought an increased criticism of the above-described liberal theories of multicultural education. In the research tra-

<sup>1</sup> PISA is an OECD study that measures skills in math, reading and science.



dition “critical multiculturalism” researchers such as Basil Bernstein (1996), Stephen May, Christine E. Sleeter (2012) and Zeus Leonardo (2009) have criticized the liberal multicultural education inability to seriously make visible and address the structural social and cultural injustices that they consider the basis for the difficulties that the multicultural education is characterized by. In recent years, several works have been published with examples of practical experience of teaching from multicultural education and critical multiculturalism (See for examples: Banks & Ed, 2009; Heilman, 2012; Keddie, 2012; May & Sleeter, 2012).

There are two common characteristics for most of today’s research on multicultural education. The first is to emphasize the importance of individuals not carrying singular identities, but are included in several contexts, which define multiple identities. These contexts or groups are for example family, social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Second, identity formation or history writing is not something once and for all given. An individual’s identity does not consist of a stable core with a beginning and an end. It is an ongoing process that is influenced by the shifts in history (See for examples Bhabha 1994; Butler, 1993; Hall & du Gay, 2008; May & Sleeter, 2012; Nussbaum, 1997). Parts of the different theoretical positions in international research are also represented in the Swedish research area on multicultural education that is in focus here.

### *2.1. Some examples of Swedish research on history teaching in the Swedish multicultural society*

In an anthology about intercultural education in theory and practice, teacher educators and researchers from Södertörns University present example of subject-specific applications of intercultural pedagogy. In the 1980s intercultural education meant a “desire to create an understanding of immigrants’ ethnic uniqueness and thereby increase the potential for a conflict-free coexistence in the Swedish society.” (Lahdenperä, 2004, p. 16). During the late 1990’s and onwards the terms multiculturalism and diversity became the starting point for an education that “at the same time should promote cultural identity and knowledge of and respect for other cultures.” (Lahdenperä, 2004, p. 16). In the same anthology the historian Awebro presents a project for developing an intercultural pedagogy archive where students with both Swedish and non-Swedish origin had the opportunity to look at and reflect on archival material from different cultures and countries (Lahdenperä, 2004, pp. 114-116). This is only one concrete example of how schools can work towards greater integration and understanding in a multicultural classroom, in aspects such as for example minorities’ desire to preserve their culture and Swedes meeting with non-Swedes.

History didactics aim to link the historical content the science and the outside world with the knowledge of students and their learning (Andersson, 2004). The didactic research on the role and identity of history as a school subject in the multicultural society is relatively new and has been implemented to a limited extent. In his thesis, Nordgren (2006) formulated a central question to the field of research: “How do the multicultural experiences influence the reach of history writing? Or conversely, through which historical consciousness do we consider our time?” (My translation, p. 13). In his studies, he finds that the contents of Swedish policy documents is unclear and partly contradictory when it comes to the ob-

jectives of developing students' intercultural competence. Nordgren's analyzes shows that the textbook authors have had problems to adapt their writings to society's multi-cultural development as well as to the intercultural ambitions in the policy documents. The textbooks are still largely monocultural and leave a limited space for non-European and global history (Nordgren, 2006, pp. 217-218). There are additional textbook studies that confirm how teaching materials bring about a Eurocentric portrayal of other cultures and the dichotomy of "us vs. them" (Ajagan-Lester, 2000; Kamali & Sawyer, 2006; Palmberg 2000).

In his doctoral thesis, Lozic (2010) also problematizes the subject of history in relation to the multicultural society. He explores the relationship between young students ethnical identifications and their views on the subject of history (Lozic, 2010, pp. 12-13). In the so called communitarian school and identification policy a starting point is that teaching should build on pupils' ethnic identifications. However, Lozic sees obstacles to such a policy because students express much more complex cultural identities than the proponents of a communitarian policy claims. Instead, Lozic suggests that students and the history teachers' positions have more in common with a so-called universal approach to the multicultural society (Lozic 2012, pp. 297-299).

Sernhede has published a number of works that emphasize the conditions for marginalized groups in major Swedish cities' suburbs. The authors starting point in the anthology is two concrete examples of suburban schools where different pedagogical models and approaches are described and discussed. One school has since the late 1990s developed a model based on the so-called Monroe model that prioritizes school knowledge and good order (Sernhede, 2011, p. 85). According to the municipality's quality measurements the students show high wellbeing and security, while the average grade at the school is low in comparison with other schools (Lundblad, in Sernhede, 2011). The book's second example describes "The gap between policy and the school's inner reality"<sup>2</sup>. The school has implemented a reform whereby school policy texts describe an intercultural pedagogy, which was unprecedented in teaching and every day life (Gustafsson, in Sernhede, 2011).

These examples of Swedish research in this area reveals some of the challenges that the Swedish school meets in the multicultural society, as they emerge in the meeting between different groups of students and intercultural education, teaching materials and policy documents. However, in the research field there has been little focus on teachers' work and experiences.

Based on theories of identity in a multicultural society a tool for analysis is developed making it possible to distinguish at least four approaches and strategies for teachers work with students' identity. These strategies appear sometimes as contradiction with each other, but can also overlap and complement each other. The strategies are presented here for a discussion of the seven interviews presented below.

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<sup>2</sup> My translation. The Swedish title is: "Om klyftan mellan policy och skolans inre verklighet".

### 2.1.1. An analysis tool: Four possible strategies for teaching in a multicultural society

The school is a public context where students' identities are represented, constructed, challenged and changed. It appears clearly from the Education Act and other governing documents that the Swedish school should work for the recognition of different groups and that all people are equal regardless of origin or identity. The implication of this goal has been to promote equal rights and opportunities, such as right to equal education and that school should clarify and promote students' (and parents') rights and obligations to actively participate in the democratic process of society (Skolverket, 2011). Gutmann (1999) underlines that the educational system has a task to equip students with necessary skills to maintain and develop democracy, with the aim to treat all individuals as equal citizens regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, ... (Gutmann, 1999, p. 41). The goal here is to promote universal and individual-based rights and freedoms, based on an assumption of consensus regarding the common good, by which inequalities between individuals and groups should be avoided. This *universal approach* is clearly linked to liberal political values (Gutmann, 1999; Taylor, 1999). However, it has been criticized for treating people in a difference-blind way and denying their identity by forcing people into a supposedly neutral form, a form that in fact reflects a hegemonic majority culture (Taylor, 1999, pp. 51-52).

The modern notion of identity in a multicultural society has also given rise to a *communitarian approach*. Some researchers suggest that the communitarian approach characterized the Swedish multicultural school policy during the 1970s (Lahdenperä, 2012, p. 16; Lozic, 2010, pp. 38-39). This "politics of difference" declares recognition of the specific identity of an individual or group. Behind the demand for recognition there is also a principle of universal equality through condemning discrimination. But here, instead of everyone's 'equality' (equal value) for rights and opportunities, it is groups 'diversity' towards others that are safeguarded. The aim is that these differences need to be recognized and protected from being ignored by or incorporated into the majority identity (Taylor, 1999, pp. 46-47).

Most researchers dealing with multicultural education question the notion that individuals represent singular identities. Instead, humans are included in several contexts, such as family, social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, sports, etc. All of these contexts influence the formation process of several identities. Amartya Sen develops the notion of multiple identities further. From serving as a clarification within the field of multicultural research, to also playing a crucial role for the construction of questions and analysis within the area. According to Sen, being critical to the communitarian approach, the "politics of difference" tends to point at the concept of culture as the causal factor in problematic social situations in multicultural contexts. In addition, the communitarian approach tends to emphasize the need for cultural preservation (Sen, 2006, pp. 109-111). Stated differently, the communitarian approach requires the existence of minority groups in the public sphere that are defined or define themselves by singular identities. By questioning this notion of singular identities and instead clarify the importance of multiple identities, which also gives us the freedom to prioritize and change identities, a third strategy of multiple identities could be formulated. According to Sen, the hope of harmony in our world rests on the diversity of identities, which overlap each other and prevent sharp boundaries and dividing lines. Our common humanity is endangered if diversity is reduced into a universal classification system (Sen, 2006, p. 31).



Finally, the strategy of *critical multiculturalism* originates from British anti-racist scholars and is based on a neo-Marxist perspective. Its proponents claim that multicultural education seldom is conducted from a neutral starting point, but by the standards stated by the majority society, which are rooted in a liberal policy. Based on this, the universal approach is criticized for describing all humans as equal citizens. This directs attention away from the multicultural society structural inequalities and power relations between groups. For similar reasons, critic is directed against the idea of multiple identities: Since people are not living under similar conditions, they have not equal opportunities to select and prioritize what identities they wish to highlight in different contexts. Individuals and groups' spaces for influence are limited by structural forces of capitalism, racism, colonialism and sexism. Culture and Identity are here understood as being multilayered, fluid, complex and subject to multiple social categories that are constantly reconstructed through participation in social situations. The implication of this type of structural analysis in school is to challenge power relations by identifying how power is used and institutionalized and, through collective forces, working for changing such power relations (May & Sleeter, 2012, pp. 5-10).

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN FOR THE INTERVIEW

History writing and the science of history have in the last 100 years had a crucial role in the development of both a Swedish national identity and for the image of "the other". Far into the twentieth century, the primary task of teaching history was to preserve a Swedish national identity. The role for the school subject of history in Swedish school has partly changed with globalization and the multicultural society, which appears from political directives and from school policy documents. Meanwhile, there are still clear unisexual, monocultural and Eurocentric features in historiography, focus and perspectives of history teaching. As mentioned above, the problems in multicultural school increased further by the growing number of pupils leaving school without grades. Moreover, teachers often find it difficult and feel insecurity in working with students in a multicultural classroom. As a consequence of this, it is primarily the school's problems that previous research has focused on (Kamali, 2006; Nordgren, 2006). However, there are teachers who feel that they have found workable models in their teaching. Since it is important to make progress in this complex issue the choice of the teachers interviewed was guided by their reputation of being talented, ambitious, and that they believe they have developed working approaches to the teaching of history. Of course, these teachers' teaching is not without problems, nevertheless there are good reasons to examine the strategies successful teachers use in their teaching. As it has appeared already *the objective of the interviews has been to, out from the analytical tool as presented above, compare and discuss seven upper secondary school teachers' experiences from teaching history in the Swedish multicultural society.* Hereby it may be possible to clarify some similarities and differences between established theories in the field and practical experiences of teaching. In a Swedish context, the analysis of successful teachers' experiences is a contribution to developing the area of research a step further from being primarily problem-oriented to also consider how to develop successful strategies.

The number of interviews is limited to seven teachers and the selection is not representative of Swedish history teachers in general. However, in addition to the their reputation

for being talented and ambitious teachers, and without aiming at so-called theoretical saturation, the intention has been to interview teachers who represent as much variety as possible regarding their geographical and social origin, gender and years in the profession. This is based on the assumption that these aspects affect the teachers' professional skills and practices (Esaïasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson Wängnerud, 2007, p. 292). The seven teachers interviewed are briefly presented in the table below (table 1).

Table 1  
*Presentation of the interviewed teachers*

Respondent	Age	Active years in the profession	Class background	Geographic origin
Female teacher 1	31	3+9*	Lower middle class	Small town, Sweden
Female teacher 2	33	5	Working class	Small town, Sweden
Female teacher 3	40	15	Lower middle class	Small town Nordic countries
Male teacher 1	35	4	Middle class	Small town, Sweden
Male teacher 2	44	15	Working class	Town, Sweden
Male teacher 3	46	15	Middle class	Town, Latin America
Male teacher 4	57	20	Middle class	Town, Sweden

Note: \*9 years work as unauthorized teacher.

The interviews were semi-structured and open, which allowed the teachers to quite freely explain their experiences from, and ideas of, history teaching. In order to develop a comprehensive picture of the teachers' teaching experiences and values, the interviews were guided by a framework of the three didactic questions of what (content), how (methods) and why (intentions) teachers teach history in the way they do. The grand tour questions were supplemented with follow-up questions that intended to focus on the specific challenges that teachers face in the multicultural classroom (Esaïasson et al, 2007, pp. 298-299). With the intention not to control the teachers' responses, they were not informed about the four possible strategies (as they appear from the analytical instrument) for teachers work with students' identities.

### ***3.1. The content of history teaching on the basis of students' different identities and preconditions***

Initially, the teachers were asked to give some general thoughts regarding what working with students' identity meant to them and how it influenced their selection of content in history courses. All teachers agreed in a definition of persons identities based on multiple contexts or groups, such as family, social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Furthermore, they also agreed on the importance of paying attention to students' identities in history teaching. However, the teachers also stressed, and especially the female teachers, that they were not accustomed to think in terms of working actively with students' identities. Female teacher 3 even expressed her concerns about working with students' identity in terms of being careful not to force students into an identity based on their ethnical background. Instead, students should be given the opportunity to choose which identity they want to use in the school context. This may be that they are members of a football club or other activity where they strongly identify themselves. In history teaching, she works consciously from the concept of diversity, which means not restricting content to the norm in

traditional historiography, i.e. white middle-class, heterosexual, European man. She seeks to portray history in a way that pupils should be able to recognize them; find someone to identify with. In her focus, female teacher 3 uses the words “diversity” and the “little man-kind” and gives an example:

We talk about that boundaries do not always follow national boundaries; that a fisherman in a coastal community in western Sweden easier identify with a fisherman in Normandy, than with the man from the inner city of Gothenburg. Although they are very close to each other geographically, they can live very different lives (Interview with female teacher 3, February 29, 2012).

Female Teacher 3 sees this as a type of identification, which she compares with: “If you have emigrated, you can also understand how it is to be a refugee”. Regardless of time and space, it is the same kind of fears that humans carry. In their choice of content the three female teachers all put efforts to make the teaching exiting; to meet the students in their reality of time and space, and most of all, they gave priority to processing and analysis of the content rather than to the importance of content itself. In addition, the female teachers said to be more guided by the curriculum, and less by textbooks, than was the case for their male colleagues. Female teacher 1 being critical to the textbooks put it as:

At the school where I work, many elder teachers are using materials that are very Euro-centric and does not problematize the division of epochs and then... It's convenient and easy to use, but year after year you consolidates what is in there. This takes no account of the multicultural classroom (Interview with female teacher 1, April 4, 2012).

Both the male teacher 2 and male teacher 3 highlighted the importance of social class to understand students' identity. They pointed out that immigrant background and lower social class frequently overlap. Male teacher 3 said that it is important to consciously make use of the different origins present in the classroom. He does not say it explicit to the students but wants them to link their learning to their own origin. At the same time he thinks that it is a problem when the debate on multiculturalism generalizes and puts a label on immigrant students. He argues that structural injustices often have greater importance for pupils' identities than cultural background. When we discuss the content of teaching, he describes how he uses the students' and his own origin to problematize historiography's otherwise Euro-centric starting points:

I'm a result of history [...] I speak my native language, which is Spanish. Why do I do that? I'm not born in Spain, I was born in Central America. Just to make students aware of this. There are students who come from Latin America or other parts of the world that have been colonies, then, why there? (Interview with male teachers 3, March 28, 2012).

Male teacher 2 is working within the IB program (International Bachelor program), which among other things means that student achievement is assessed externally and using the same criteria regardless of where in the world they study. This means for example that content and objectives of the curriculum are clear and detailed, which limits the teacher's in-

fluence on the content. We talk about how these conditions differ from the Swedish school in general and how it affects teaching. The teacher replies:

Generally, I think that Swedish school in the last twenty years has had a problem with that there has been too little control [...] I am one of those who think that municipalisation of school was an abomination. But what came then in -94: The objectives of teaching were formulated but no clear descriptions of what to do in the courses. These in combination [...] were woefully, but it was a good excuse to save money, I believe, and equivalence wrecked. [...] So, it is liberating to work on a program that has a clear structure concerning what is to be achieved (Interview with a male teacher 2, March 28, 2012).

Regarding the choice of perspective from the Swedish schools' fundamental values, the teacher believes that the gender perspective is treated in a slightly outdated way on the IB program. Gender is treated as a separate issue regarding women's history that can be added to the "general" history. Otherwise, he thinks that there is a space to include different perspectives.

Among the interviewed teachers there were primarily two teachers that in a pronounced way, based the content of teaching on the group of students they had at the moment. In the selection of teaching content, male teacher 4 sees both to the program choices that students have made and also to the students' pre-knowledge and how motivated they are. Otherwise, the curriculum and his own areas of interest determine the selection of content. Male teacher 1 does not put priority on what is in the curriculum and textbooks when he makes his selections. In addition to students' programming choices, he is very careful to find out what interests the students:

Now I have a class in science for example. I know that I have many aspiring engineers [...] then I have very much focus on technology and economics. [...] The class in social sciences I had was very interested in art and literature. Then I focused on that. [...] It kills everything, if you do not work with things that you find interesting (Interview with male teacher 1, April 13, 2012).

Also female teacher 2 emphasizes the importance of starting from students' reality and that the students' differences are made visible in order to respect them. Even in the selection of teaching content she prioritizes differences when she works with historical themes and concepts. She gives an example:

What is the meaning of the term genocide? What do you associate to? There is not one right answer, there is not only one explanation and I want to highlight that there is not only one story! [...] But there are several historical timelines depending on which perspectives we adopt (Interview with female teacher 2, April 2, 2012).



### 3.1.1. *Methods and intentions in history teaching*

Several of the teachers emphasized the importance of structure and clarity in teaching. Male teacher 2 refers to the educational sociologist Basil Bernstein and his theories regarding how clear guidance in education facilitates learning for students:

He argues for an entirely different perspective [...] that those who lose the most when school does not have a clear structure, this can apply to both content and methods, is the weakest students. So, when you talk about the school adapting to different social practices, in my world the result is that students who come from homes with a good study habit, also bring a lot of school culture with them. They are doing fine no matter what the school looks like. [...] From that perspective, I think it is an advantage that there is clear governance in school (Interview with male teacher 2, March 28 2012).

The importance of clarity and structure in teaching is also supported by the female teachers 2, 3 and male teacher 4. The latter develops a matrix where students can compare different elements in history. Furthermore, he would never teach without the textbook because it is a good support for the students who are not so strong. The textbook gives them a good structure. When the female teachers 2 and 3 describe the importance of good planning and structure, both emphasizes that the procedure of their teaching also requires a lot from students' own capacity of reflection and discussion. We discuss how their teaching methods are received by students and both the female teachers 2 and 3 admit that the weaker students often find it difficult to keep up with the more motivated students. I wonder how they respond to students who fail the high demands? Female teachers 2 answers:

- Well, I think that to reach an approved level it is really only to reproduce a historical background to a genocide or whatever it is, why did this occur? [...] So the answer is based on the textbook or the material we have worked with. The idea is that there should be something for everyone in this (Interview with female teacher 2, April 2, 2012).

We discuss further how the upper secondary school reform GY2011 will affect teaching; for example that the subject of history is a compulsory subject even for students in vocational programs:

No, I'm not worried about that. There are many teachers that focus on the low-performing students and who want to help them. I am a bit opposite there. It may be incorrect to admit, but I want to help students who really want to get further. There is so much focus on all those who are not performing, so the others, who are actually talented and who need to get further, ends up in the background (Interview with female teacher 2, April 2, 2012).

I have some sort of idea that I must push myself even more to evoke interest in the subject. Although you do not want to have that preconceived idea that they [students in vocational programs] would be weaker, but if they do not want to study... [...] Well, you do not want it to be different. Since it's the same course,

so it has to be the same content. But I think it may be that you have to require lower... (Interview with female teacher 1, April 4, 2012).

The female teachers give priority to the students being able to identify with the content. The two female teachers 1 and 2 always introduce a new course with the pupils making their own timelines. Another method is that students may immerse themselves in and identify with different people in history who represent different perspectives, such as gender, class, and geographical backgrounds. Unlike the other two female teachers, teacher 1 felt that she was able to reach out to all groups of students with her practices. She emphasizes the importance of giving feedback to students; she spends a lot of time to respond on students' texts to help them further.

A clear common characteristic of the interviewed teachers is their tremendous dedication to the teaching of history. Male teacher 4, who last year was named the school's best teacher, explains that he always carries a tape recorder when he's out in the woods with his dog. There he gets new ideas for teaching. Female Teacher 1 and 2 describe themselves with the words:

Yes, I would say that I am a fiery spirit. I'm incredibly ambitious. [...] I think it's hard ... I mean to make a good history course, it requires a great deal [...] Just this search for material, and it takes a tremendous amount of time... (Interview with female teacher 1, April 4, 2012).

I think I can see that I have been going in with a very large commitment, far too big. [...] I think the pupils see me as a committed teacher who cares a lot about them. But I require a lot of them too (Interview with female teacher 2, April 2, 2012).

Another common characteristic of the teachers seemed to be the image of themselves as being both demanding teacher and as different from the rest of the teacher group:

I easily get disappointed, because I also require support from my students. To get something back [...] My colleagues might not set the bar as high as I do. It is a weakness sometimes when one is almost too ambitious [...] and it is difficult in the school world to have ambitions because then you risk to trample someone's toes and I think this is very sad (Interview with female teacher 2, April 2, 2012).

I can be quite controversial. I say what I think, not only to my colleagues, but also to my bosses. Therefore, one must, after all, do the job within the frames that are set. [...] So, I've got eyes on me. I know that (Interview with male teachers 3, March 28, 2012).

So I can say that I am not the one buying the latest biography of Mussolini, for example, which I know many of my colleagues do. [...] I'm probably more interested in how history is used and communicated and encourage my students to

understand what history is and that there are so many different actors today (Interview with female teacher 1, April 4, 2012).

Male teacher 3 also continually challenges his students and is well aware that the less motivated students find it difficult and cannot keep up. I ask how he handles it.

I'm taking my time with them and explain to them what we are doing. [...] I have extra classes where we go through what to consider. [...] It is obvious that the students who have the same background as me, who are able and who are diligent, they can always manage anyway. [...] It is a class issue (Interview with male teachers 3, March 28, 2012).

### *3.1.2. Discussion of different strategies in history teaching*

To begin at the end, there were several similarities in the teachers' self-image, which agreed with the good reputation that all interviewees history teacher shared. It is remarkable how the teachers in different ways describe that they differ from the rest of the teacher group by going their own way regarding choice of perspectives, methods and priorities in history.

It does not appear that any of the teachers solely used one strategy in their teaching. The results might have been different if the teachers had been informed about the various strategies. Instead the framework of the interviews was the three didactic questions of what (content), how (methods) and why (intentions) teachers teach history in the way they do, which in different ways may be related to the four possible strategies of teaching: A universal approach, a communitarian approach, an approach based on multiple identities and a strategy based on critical multiculturalism. To start with the selection criteria for the content of teaching, all teachers questioned in various ways the history writing as it mainly appears from textbooks and eurocentric historiography. With the intention to make students recognize themselves, history teachers 3 works consciously from the concept of diversity, which means not restricting content to the norm in traditional historiography, i.e. white middle-class, heterosexual, European man. She seemed to aim at a universal human recognition, regardless of time and space, where similarity goes before differences. All the female teachers emphasized in different ways the importance of starting with the individual and that the goal is for students to master academic skills such as source criticism, analytical ability and to develop a historical consciousness. Although the teachers sometimes highlight students' diverse backgrounds and experiences in teaching, it is not these that are the basis for the content or objectives of the teaching. Instead, they rather seemed to use the students' awareness of their own history as an instrument to reflect on the conditions of historiography with the aim to master academic skills. The selection criteria of content were, among the female teachers, guided more by the curriculum, and less by textbooks. With the support from curriculum the female teachers emphasized the importance of making different perspectives visible in history teaching, such as gender, class and cultures. This is both to facilitate the students' identification with the past and to create an understanding of different conditions and perspectives in history as well as today. In these respects, the female teachers criteria and intentions of teaching contents show some similarities with a universal approach. Developing the students' insights and academic skills of historiography seems to emphasize the individual's (here the student's) rather than the

society's (here the school's) responsibility in terms of gaining knowledge of history. By not highlighting specific group-based interests above others, is an approach that corresponds well with a universal strategy and liberal values based on the assumption of a consensus on the common good (guided by the curriculum), by which inequalities between individuals and groups should be avoided.

Another teaching approach, shared by all the teachers, is to reach the students' attention by starting from their reality and identities; however the methods and ideas regarding how to reach the students differed between the teachers. The female teachers 1 and 2 use to introduce a new course with the students making their own timelines. Another method is that students immerse in and identify with different people in history. Again this may be seen as an example focusing on the individual and the universally human perspective. In contrast, the male teachers 2 and 3 highlighted the importance of social class to understand students' identity. Both teachers pointed out that immigrant background and lower social class frequently overlap, and they both paid particular attention to reach out to this group of students. By linking their teaching to the origin and conditions of underprivileged groups, the teachers aim to recognize the differences between groups (Communitarian approach), differences they mainly explains with current and historical structural inequalities in society (critical multiculturalism). It is interesting to note that both these teachers have a working class and non-Swedish background respectively. Still another way to reach the students' attention is represented by the male teachers 1 and 4. They both see to the students' choices of program as an indicator of their identities and their areas of interests. This approach applies partly to recognize the conditions of different groups and partly to the students' possibility to choose which identity they want to highlight in different contexts. These could be compared to the communitarian approach and the strategy of multiple identities respectively.

Out from the teachers' own experiences and in relation to the ongoing changes with the Upper Secondary School reform (GY2011), the students various conditions, motivation level, ability and academic performance was discussed. To facilitate for students with less study habit several of the teachers underlined the importance of clarity and structure in teaching, again partly from different approaches. Male teacher 2 with experiences from the International Bachelor program advocated (more of) clear governance in the Swedish school in general and male teacher 4 developed matrixes and used textbooks to support weaker students in their learning. The male teacher 3 and female teachers 2 and 3 admitted that less motivated students often find it difficult to keep up with the more motivated students when it comes to their capacity of reflection and discussion. However, female teacher 2 claimed the idea that the students themselves may choose what results they are aiming at. Male teacher 2 explained the differences in results as primarily a class issue. Both male teacher



2 and female teacher 1 claimed the positive outcomes of giving the weaker students extra resources such as additional lessons and feedback.

#### 4. SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

It is difficult to discern any clear pattern of the teachers' opinions and descriptions from their experiences. The female teachers seem to prefer practices and principles close to a universal approach. It is difficult to point out any similarity between a universal approach and their identity of being small-town women. As has appeared earlier, there may be a connection between the female teachers' preferences of guiding their teaching by the curriculum and the universal approach. The male teachers 2 and 3 expressed themselves in terms similar to a communitarian approach and a strategy of critical multiculturalism. Their positions may be related to their origin as well as from their values. One possible conclusion may be that the variability of teaching content and methods that teachers have described can be seen as if the space for interpretation regarding the school's intentions is (too) great. This may be an expression of lack of clarity in objectives and guidelines.

The review of the Swedish history didactic research in this area has demonstrated the need for a soon and systematic review and revision of both Swedish textbooks and the school's various policy documents. This is to facilitate to the school to better present a view of history and goals for students' knowledge that match the needs of the multicultural Sweden of today. For example, Swedish research shows a pretty clear picture of Eurocentric teaching and unclear policy documents regarding its objectives to develop students' intercultural competence. This picture was also confirmed by the seven teachers' experiences, when they expressed criticism against limitations in textbooks and guiding documents.

The deteriorating equivalence in Swedish schools affects primarily the student groups who barely or not are approved and thereby get less opportunity for work and further study. These are the same students who are often identified as weak and less motivated by the teachers and in different ways requires more clarity, structure, and not least, more of the teachers' time and resources. A conscious and special investment in these students would in a short term necessitate increased funding for the school, which is not in line with the currently implemented school policy. However, there is support for such an approach both in research, National Agency for Education reports and experiences from working and ambitious teachers. Expressed differently, if Swedish politicians are not getting their knowledge from societal existing social structures, a scientific basis and proven experience, what should the Swedish school policy be based on?

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