Abstract

The process in which girls and boys are constructed and construct themselves to pupils takes place in a context where conceptions of “the good pupil” are distinctly manifested in national school documents. In different types of texts concerning school and education, the image of the pupil that society wants to create emerges. Documents from early childhood education up to university level prioritise qualities such as independence, initiative, accountability and freedom to make one’s own choices. Qualities or competencies that are preferred during a certain period change as time passes and society develops. The idea of the democratic subject is not the same today as it was 25 years ago. The purpose of this article is to emphasise and compare different desired qualities described in two Swedish national curricula, competencies that pupils in the compulsory school are supposed to develop. The discussion encompasses the political ideas of the pupil during a period of twenty-five years in light of changes in Western societies during the last decades.

Key words: Competencies, national curricula, “the good pupil”, governing the soul, governmentality

SUBJECTION, DISCIPLINE AND DISCOURSE

The discourse of the desired pupil

Throughout their lives, people are continuously busy with constructing themselves and being constructed by others in the environment, to become precisely as richly varied, multiple and diverse as we need to be in encounters with others (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999). An individual is not a coherent, homogeneous self with only one fixed identity; rather, she is composed of many different sub-identities that appear in different degrees depending on the present context. Subjection takes place within different discourses which all have their own explicit or implicit rules. Certain discourses dominate in a certain context during a period of time and these change as time goes by (Foucault 1969). The dominating discourse about “the good pupil” has undergone great changes during the last decades and the political ideas of which capacities should be developed have radically changed. These changes cover conceptions of the pre-school child as well as school pupils and teacher education students.

School is one of many places where young people develop different aspects of themselves by the construction of themselves in close cooperation with the environment. To be a school girl or a school boy is merely one of a child’s multiple subjectivities (Dahlberg 2005; Lentz-Taguchi 2004; Nordin-Hultman 2004). The authorities provide an explicit discipline of the individual, which continuously takes place in school. Subjection occurs in a context where

"Subjection" is a concept used in English-language literature by Judith Butler, Bronwyn Davies and Valerie Walkerdine, among others.
more or less formal instructions and requests about a person’s behaviour constantly appear. To learn to master and submit oneself to school's dominating discourse about the good pupil is a continuous process and something that every girl and boy is constantly working on during her or his school years (Davies et al 2001, Butler 1995a).

A changing society
The Western society and its people find themselves in a continuously changing world. The word “change” has become something of a mantra among politicians, journalists and business executives in different fields. In many different contexts (e.g. the daily press, magazines, television, theatre, film and official reports) we can read about those changes in society that have taken place during the decades surrounding the new millennium. Globalization and a culturally diverse society together with technical achievements have given people new conditions and possibilities. Changes in society contribute to a new way of thinking within different domains and the demand for a change within state institutions – for example, the national school system – becomes the topic of the day. New ideas about knowledge, learning and pupils develop and manifest themselves in new curricula and syllabus. All societies, wherever they are situated in the world, need to discipline their subjects in a certain direction and make them behave in a politically acceptable way. The ideals and values that underlie a certain mentality of governing have consequences for everything that takes place in society (Hultqvist & Petersson 1995; Rose 1999). Pupils' and university students' desired qualities can be better understood if they are considered in light of societal changes and changes in the mentality of governing the subjects. The new way of governing in western societies does not have its base in a belief in authorities with detailed state regulations, but in terms of decentralization and an increased accountability for the individual (Rose 1989, 1999). The transition from a society governed by detailed state regulations within the frame of state institutions to a society with active influence from market economy where "freedom of choice" is an expression frequently used demands that the subjects develop new competencies and abilities to be able to handle this new situation. Society needs to create a new kind of human being who is capable of handling a different social order with new public duties.

The national curricula
Curricula and other political documents concerning education are discursive applications, messages that must be read as ideological and political products that have emerged from a specific historical and political period (Weiner & Berge 2001). On a national level, the national curriculum together with legislation within the educational field are the most important documents to govern the Swedish compulsory school. In Swedish curricula after the Second World War, the emphasis was on the duties to teach, discipline and care; and the curricula all have an introductory part with an all-embracing democratic purpose that includes social and pedagogic/psychological aims. Curricula are, not counting the educational content, theories about intellectual and physical development and contain understandings of the world that are neither accidental nor arbitrary. They contain selections, rules and agreements that relate to questions of power, personal identity and philosophical issues about the human nature. In the curriculum it is the child who is in focus for these theories (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Every change in texts concerning educational matters is a result of a struggle for power over purposes, aims, contents and the legitimacy to exercise this power (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000).

A changed outlook on the subject

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2 Rose (1999) uses the expression "conduct of conduct"
During the 1970’s and 1980’s, a far-reaching process of decentralization began in Sweden with an increasing emphasis on the individualistic and the subjective. Expressions like “freedom of choice” became popular in different settings—expressions that today are considered natural and taken for granted in an official context (Dahlgren & Hultqvist, 1995). Concepts in society of the adult citizen as well as the growing child have changed from an idea of the subject as a collective being dependent upon others to a more individualistic idea where the subject is depicted as independent and autonomous. These changes in the concepts of the subject are not especially connected to Sweden, but to the Western society in general (Rose 1989, 1999); and new powerful groups see their chance to influence the development in society (Dahlgren & Hultqvist 1995). Political parties from left to right have during the last decades acted upon a diminished state influence in the field of education. Market interests where profit comes first on the agenda compete with the earlier state-regulated institutions in society. Depending on who interprets the meaning of words such as autonomy, independency, influence and individualization, the original meaning and extraction of the words may be displaced and changed (Biesta 2004)

**Governmentality**

I suggest “governmentality” to be a useful concept when examining desired competencies and qualities in political documents. This concept encompasses a new type of governing, directly appealing to the subjects. Rose (1999) calls this phenomenon ”conduct of conduct”, in other words, ways to control people’s behaviour and manners. Hultqvist suggests that the concept should be understood as “increased possibilities to govern” (Hultqvist in Hultqvist & Pettersson, 1995). With these increased possibilities to govern, Hultqvist means a transformation of the exercise of power where power has been liberalized and decentralized and appears benevolent and positive. The exercise of power always corresponds to an earlier idea of the subject, an understanding that determines the human nature during a certain period. Ideas about “discipline” and “society” are formed through an exchange between political power and academic knowledge (Foucault 1975). These concepts have no given or natural meaning and they are continuously displaced. The determination of the human nature is coded and recoded continuously and Hultqvist suggests that the new interpretation is not completely new but contains fragment of ideas from earlier periods (Hultqvist 1995). The idea of the good pupil in the present Swedish curricula is a result of the close interaction between power and knowledge the construction of the democratic subject after the Second World War. Those in power in the political sphere determine which groups have access to the societal production of knowledge, to how this knowledge should be used and to the competencies the democratic subject ought to strive for (a. a.). When it comes to educational matters, ideas about the subject/student/pupil are manifested in steering documents like The Education Art and the Higher Education Act.

**The disciplining of pupils**

Education at school and at home is regarded as the main activity of childhood in many Western societies (Mayall, 2002). Children must spend a great deal of their time in school, which provides an opportunity for very focused and considerable control of a large group of people within the population. The fact that children are gathered in the same place with the same adults during a long time of the day makes this kind of discipline possible (Foucault 1975, James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). To a great extent, children’s activities take place in school and at home where adults can control the character of children’s experiences (Mayall, 2002). What is considered good and normal for children concerning education has varied the latest

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3 Biesta shows how the meaning of the English word “accountability” has changed over time to become an expression with a close connection to economic accountability
150 years. Physical punishments have been a way to guide children’s conduct towards the desirable for a long time. The punishment has been both physical and psychological, and a box on the ear or a slap on the cheek has together with school reports and marks worked as discipline instruments. In later years, the physical violence has been replaced by a very intimate correction of pupils’ minds. A transition from an external room to an internal is very obvious when it comes to changes in child-rearing, pedagogies and psychology. Rose describes this change from an outer punishment to an inner burden of guilt as the governing of the soul (Rose 1989). We control and supervise ourselves and the external experience of shame and degrading has turned into this inner feeling of guilt. Modern-day children are their own policemen (James, Jenks & Prout, 1999) and this development towards the subjects' increasing autonomy can be traced in all Swedish national curricula during the last fifty years.

THE READING OF STEERING DOCUMENTS

The purpose of this investigation

In this paper a comparison is made between two Swedish national curricula from two different eras regarding the idea of the democratic subject. My choice fell upon the curriculum from 1969, the steering document from my first years as a teacher, and the curriculum Lpo 94, which guides the work of teachers today. My interest is in ideas about individuals and society and has been focused on how the Swedish society is described in 1969 and in 1994 and which competencies and qualities the two societies consider important for the subjects in the contemporary society. The following questions about the two different texts are addressed:

- Which desired qualities/competencies are to be found in both the curriculum from 1969 and the one from 1994?

- Which desired qualities/competencies are inconsistent and have disappeared in a period of 25 years?

- How is the Swedish society described in 1969 and in 1989?

- Which competencies are absent from the text and are not valued in the Swedish society of 1994?

Written texts last over time and can give an historic understanding of something that perhaps is not available as spoken words (Hodder i Denzin & Lincoln 1994). The meaning in the text arises when it is written and read and is not anything that purely exists there as something “true” or “original”. When a text is read in a new context it is provided with a new meaning separate from its author, time, producer and user—which might seem contradictory (A. a. with ref. to Derrida 1978). In my reading of two different curriculum texts I have been looking for linguistic utterances that reveal qualities/competencies. A parallel reading of two texts, one from 1969 and the other from 1994, influences the reading in both directions. Concepts in the texts which are statements and adjectives that directly correspond to behaviour and qualities have been chosen. Discourse analyses make it possible to question and discuss linguistic concepts by placing them in an appropriate discursive context. This paper examines different discourses about “the good pupil” as they are described in two different contexts, the Swedish society 25 years ago and today4.

4 The present Swedish curriculum “Lpo 94 – Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre”, was first edited in 1994.
Competencies and abilities from times long past

I will start with focusing on those ideas about the subject which manifest themselves in the desired qualities one can find in the curricula from 1969. Which abilities are inconsistent with the subject in the 21st century? If we have our starting point in the idea that the representation of the subject is coded and recoded continuously and that the representation contains remnants from earlier ideas, we should be able to find abilities and criteria for the conduct of pupils descending from an earlier ideal, maybe with its discipline roots in chastise and obedience. Out of the text in the curriculum from 1969 raises the picture of a human being where helpfulness, good manners and honesty are emphasized abilities, something which today may seem old-fashioned and outdated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In 1969 the pupil should strive for being…</th>
<th>And…</th>
<th>The pupil should also strive for having…</th>
<th>And be able to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Honest</td>
<td>-Considerate</td>
<td>-Good habits</td>
<td>-Estimate their qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Reliable</td>
<td>-Motivated</td>
<td>-Self discipline</td>
<td>-Show a good self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Clear and precise</td>
<td>-Eager to improve</td>
<td>-Job satisfaction</td>
<td>-Show responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Unselfish</td>
<td>-Eager to cultivate the intellect</td>
<td>-Belief in the Future</td>
<td>-Find their place (in society)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Helpful</td>
<td>-Idealistic</td>
<td>-Joint responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Careful</td>
<td>-A worthy administrator of the past</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Patient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Methodical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Truthful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Desired qualities and competencies in Lgr 69 that are not found in Lpo 94

As we can see it is important for the pupil to be truthful and fair, as well as careful and patient. Expressions like “clear and precise” and “find ones place” may describe an individual acquiesces and conforms to regulations and circumstances which are not compatible to today’s ideas of the democratic subject. The text also says that the emotional and volatile aspects of the subject's mind need to be developed with help from school and also that the individual through education shall be impressed with a certain sense of taste. It is through improvement and self discipline that the individual shall find his or her place in society. But – as we shall see in the next paragraph – this loyal, patient, unselfish, striving and struggling individual exists parallel to an active, enterprising and creative subject.

A strong belief in the future

In my analysis of the purposes for school's child-rearing task and desired qualities, I found that a good portion of the qualities were the same in Lgr 69 and Lpo 94. In the curriculum of 1969 it is stated that school raises children for the future and therefore it is not strange that that many of the subjects’ desired competencies are the same twenty years later. But even if the words are the same, for example “self confident”, it does not mean that they have the same meaning or lead to the same actions. How a word like “respectful” is understood depends on the content this concept is given by the surrounding society; we can say that it is highly discursive. To be autonomous in a context where conformity is given priority is not the same as being autonomous in a context where diversity is predominant. The table below presents a combination of desired qualities which are mutual for the two curricula and which occur to almost the same extent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In 1969 and 1994 the pupil</th>
<th>And…</th>
<th>And…</th>
<th>And should be able</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Table 2 Mutual eligible abilities in two Swedish curricula, Lgr 69 and Lpo 94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should strive to be...</th>
<th>To...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Secure</td>
<td>-Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Harmonious</td>
<td>-Respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Autonomous</td>
<td>-Tolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Positive</td>
<td>-Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Unique</td>
<td>-Generous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Versatile</td>
<td>-Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Self-assured</td>
<td>-Empathic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Inquiring</td>
<td>-Reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Eager to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Enterprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Unscrupulous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Conscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Show solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Take standpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Utilize skills of argumentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the table above we recognise many concepts frequently used in educational texts the last decades. As mentioned earlier these abilities might have different connotations in different historical contexts and possess different meaning. But are there any new eligible abilities in the present curriculum, abilities that the subject needs in the 21st century?

**Influence and responsibility/accountability**

In the Lpo 94 the loyal and industrious subject is replaced by the creative and influential member of society. If we compare the different ideas about the subject in the two curricula, two new competencies distinctly stand out in Lpo 94: responsibility and influence. In the Lgr 69 joint responsibility within certain fields is mentioned as well as the possibility for pupils to participate in decision-making to some extent. The word influence does not exist. In the present curriculum influence and responsibility are depicted as the very basis for pupils' learning. Vallberg-Roth (2002) says that compared to earlier curricula a heavy burden is laid upon the pupil today in the shape of a liability to produce knowledge and life-long learning in interaction with others. The tendency and capacity to be responsible/accountable and to exercise influence is expected to embrace all pupils, irrespective of gender, social or ethnic origin. Hultqvist (1990) points out that this as a problem with all types of social programs: they collide with a reality consisting of contrasts in class, gender, ethnicity and diverse values.

To what extent the subject is responsible for herself and for other people respectively has changed during the last decades. In a ten-year-old report from the National Agency for Education, it is said that the school's democratic child-rearing includes the individual as well as the collective and that influence is exercised through a responsibility for ones own and other people's interests (Report no 36, 1993). It is also stated in the report that there is a tension between individual and mutual responsibility and that Sweden is heading towards a more individualistic ideal of democracy. We are now going to take a look at how the Swedish society and its subjects are presented in the curricula of 1969 and 1994. We will then be able to see how these descriptions match with the ideas of the collective and dependent subject and the autonomous subject, respectively.

**Lgr 69: The subject as a part of a collective**

In the curriculum from 1969 the Swedish society is depicted as the natural and unquestioned background for the subjection of the individual. The individual is described as a member of a

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5 This matter would certainly be very interesting to examine but goes beyond the purpose of this paper.

6 We deal with a translation problem here since “responsibility” and “accountability” are one and the same word in Swedish. Gert Biesta (2004) discusses in a paper how the English word “accountability” has changed its meaning and has become a concept connected with ideas from market economy rather than from a democratic idea of sharing.
societal collective, even if personal development is considered important. To work together in solidarity and to be an active member of society is regarded as the very foundation for the democratic subject. When it comes to the development of society, Lgr 69 takes up an attitude of optimism and belief in the future. The future will have changed opportunities and will call for new competencies. Society and school shall interact and work as a positive and creative force in this development. Education shall give people common and equal knowledge and norms and a common societal frame for these matters is recommended. The individual is described as someone who needs to develop his/her personal gifts with the purpose of becoming a part of the mutual societal solidarity in the form of an efficient and capable citizen. Labour is a part of society and therefore of great importance. In school the individual shall provide good habits and the pupils shall learn to show respect towards every kind of well-performed piece of work. School should also take care of economical inequity and equalise the diverse set of values concerning different occupations. The Lgr 69 describes a contemporary, inclusive, well-known Swedish society, where most people do things the same way even if being different is allowed.

**Lpo 94: The subject as a global individual**

The Lpo 94 declares that the Swedish society has basic values that should be firmly established in school but also that every school has a duty to let every individual find his or her own distinctive character. The foundation for the democratic subject is the common as well as the unique and the subject shall take part in society “by giving their best in responsible freedom” (Lpo 94, s.3; 1. “Fundamental values and tasks of the school”). Society is described as flexible and culturally diverse where it is important that the individual establish a secure identity. Another task for school is to prepare the pupils for an active participation in society as responsible/accountable subjects. Lpo 94 declares that all Swedish subjects need a common frame of reference and that this is another duty of school. Through dynamic thinking the pupils shall develop a readiness for the future. The world is described as complex and changeable, and expressions like *global contexts*, *internationalism* and *cultural variety* are used to describe the Swedish society of today. The subject in this society is expected to be responsible and participant and to have a personal and unique relation to the world given that this relation is based upon common Swedish values and norms. In Lpo 94 the world – not just the Swedish society – is described as bit unfamiliar and in constant motion. In this world people's actions are expected to be diverse and the subjects are not expected to share ideas and ideals to the same extent as in earlier times. The subject is primarily regarded as an autonomous individual who perhaps is a part of a smaller group of people. The subject is expected to be accountable, to be responsible and to exercise a great influence over his or her situation. Ideas about daily interactions in society have been replaced by ideas about responsible freedom for the individual.

**Non-neutral values**

The desired qualities touched upon in this paper reflect the common values in the Swedish society of how a good democratic subject should be. These values are reflected in steering documents from pre-school to university. We are dealing with ideas of normality where some people find themselves inside and others outside the borders of normality, certain qualities and competencies are accepted others are not (Foucault 1975). Values embraced by the society where the subject is born and bred can easily be understood as neutral and obvious, perhaps because these ideas are found in so many different areas of society. Class, ethnicity, gender, generation etc. are crucial to what extent we submit to the values of the surrounding society. Qualities and competencies that do not belong to the norm in a society during a certain era can later on be promoted to something desirable and worthy (Hultqvist &
Pettersson 1995). Competencies like being self-assured, active, and critical, having initiative, and being able to argue were not to long ago considered to be masculine in the Western world (Gilligan 1982). In many cultures the ability to take a stand, to examine and have influence, and to be creative with a purpose to develop are seen as belonging to the male domains. Likewise security, harmony, generosity, empathy and the ability to be positive and respectful can be regarded as female competencies. In spite of Swedish legislation about equality and the mainstream opinion about masculinity and femininity it is undoubtedly so that people have different ideas of the qualities and competencies that are delivered in the curriculum, competencies which school is expected to help young people to develop. This reasoning embraces teachers as well as other groups of people in the Swedish society.

A contrasting picture
Is it possible through analysing the text in the curriculum to discover abilities that are not of higher value in the Swedish society and which are not found within the borders of normality? If we construct dichotomies to those abilities which are given priority in the present curriculum, a picture emerges of an individual with a different cultural heritage that emphasises other desired qualities. The constructing of dichotomies can further elucidate the discursive roots of concepts describing ideas of the subject, ideas that go back to class, ethnicity, gender, generation etc. (McQuillan 2000). A contrasting picture to the Swedish idea about the secure, harmonic, respectful, cooperative, flexible and confident subject is consequently an adventurous, expansive, frank and unaffected individualist. The opposite of the scrupulous, participating and equal man or woman becomes a person who has all the answers, who does not ask for advice and who receives special benefits in his or her position. If we consider the dichotomies above in relation to the concept of “governmentality,” it is reasonable to think that the competencies described in the Swedish curricula are a condition for the autonomous subject in a democratic society. Individuals who together with other members of society shall govern themselves without too much involvement from public authorities, need to possess competencies that embrace the possibility of a dialogue with other people. In the picture of the responsible/accountable subject, a number of competencies that together constitute the conditions for this type of governing, which is not built upon external regulations and punishment but upon an inner control of the soul, are conflated (Foucault 1975; Rose 1985, 1995).

By constructing dichotomies and trying to find opposites or contrasting pictures to described competencies there is also a possibility for things beyond the dichotomy to emerge (Spivak in Derrida 1974; McQuillan 2000; Elam 1994). Is it possible to find a new position where we no longer are caught in traditional thinking? A position where it is possible to be both? Unlike the political rhetoric, schools’ discursive practice is complex and insists that the pupil be both autonomous and dependent, both cooperative and individualistic. Sometimes it is desired that the pupil is creative and critical, sometimes being reserved and dependent is more highly valued. Teachers and teacher educators must in the immediate future extend the ongoing discussion about the ideas in the curriculum concerning the autonomous subject in relation to pedagogy. To maintain a good pedagogical quality teachers, teacher educators, teacher students and pupils need to discuss these competencies in relevance to a certain course or school subject. The sections in the curriculum decided by the National Agency for Education about pupils’ personal responsibility/accountability for their studies and the successive
possibility to exercise influence need to be examined in relation to the age and maturity of the pupils as well as in relation to the educational content.

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