Swedish – An updated school subject?

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Abstract
The focus in this article is the extent to which the school subject of Swedish in the new national curriculum in Sweden introduced in 2011 (compulsory school) has been updated in relation to ways of discussing mother tongue education. Discourse analysis is used to analyse the syllabus for Swedish from 2011. A comparison is made with the previous syllabus from 1994 in order to see if any changes have been made. The main finding is that the syllabus from 2011 is primarily updated with fundamental aspects of the genre approach. This is interpreted as a reason for the observed foregrounding of language and downgrading of literature in the curriculum. Further, two traditions of the teaching of Swedish in school are discussed. The first tradition concerns the focus on the formal aspects of language. The second tradition concerns the invisible socio-political perspective in the lower grades, and this perspective’s low-key character in the upper grades. It is concluded that these traditions are still alive and strongly influencing the curriculum.

Keywords; syllabus for the subject of Swedish, discourse analysis, mother tongue education

Introduction
Over the past 40 to 50 years, research has been conducted and dynamic discussions have taken place in the field of mother tongue education in many countries. Limitations of the traditional content of this education have been highlighted, while alternative and more extended ways of talking about and performing education have been discussed. Motivations for this discussion, as well as discussions concerning other school subjects, have been and still are the changes in society which lead to new demands on education and the education system (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Herrlitz, 1994). Such changes include globalisation and an increasingly multilingual society. Changes also include the constantly evolving technology in society that has led to an ever increasing extension of the compulsory as well as non-compulsory education system. The third aspect of the changes in society is the ever more pronounced requirements concerning equity and the equal access to ways of pronouncing one’s own voice, and interacting with other people’s voices. The fourth and last aspect concerns the rapidly changing media landscape in which everyone is e.g. required to be able to navigate in a flood
of information. In light of this background, it is of interest to see whether, and if so how, the changes in society and subsequent discussions of education have affected syllabuses and other types of regulations concerning mother tongue education. An important outcome of the research concerning mother tongue education is the ways of talking about these issues, i.e. a metalanguage is created to highlight different aspects of mother tongue education.

In this article we focus on the Swedish situation and the syllabus for teaching the national language Swedish. How much has the school subject Swedish been updated in relation to changes in society and ways of discussing mother tongue education? This question is of crucial interest since a new national curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre was introduced in 2011 and syllabuses in all subject areas have been revised. This syllabus for Swedish from 2011 will be compared with the former syllabus from 1994 (here the revised version from 2008 will be used) in order to see if any changes have been made (Skolverket, 2008, 2011a). Initially, an overview of the discussions concerning an extended mother tongue education will be provided together with a description of the analytical framework employed to approach the syllabuses for the school subject Swedish. The results of the analyses will finally be reviewed in light of the discussion concerning an extended mother tongue education.

**An extended view on mother tongue education**

Traditionally, the content of mother tongue education has been language and literature. Basic language skills of reading, writing and talking have dominated primary grades. In secondary grades the main focus has been on the reading of literature, more specifically classical literature, and learning about the authors. In the formation and homogenising of nations, in e.g. the nineteenth century in Europe, mother tongue education became, as Herrlitz (1994:1) puts it, “an especially powerful weapon in the fight for standardization and homogeneity”. Beginning in the 1960s this content of mother tongue education has been questioned and discussed, partly because of the above mentioned changes in society.

In a series of seminars, starting in Dartmouth in 1966 and proceeding for ten years, teachers and researchers in the USA, UK and Canada met and discussed the question of what the school subject English is and can be (Dixon, 1975). Later on, representatives from Australia joined these seminars. A significant outcome of the seminars was the identification of three main models of the teaching of English (Dixon, 1975:1). The first model is described as being formed in an era when initial literacy was the prime demand. This model aims at teaching the basic skills. The second model focuses on the cultural heritage and is said to fulfil the function of civilising and socially unifying content mainly through literature studies. Both of these models were found to dominate much of mother tongue education. The third and current model, as Dixon expressed it in 1975, concerns personal growth. This model was seen as a response
to the limitations of the two first models, and to some changes in society such as the increasing recognition of the socio-political contexts in which young people live. In this way, the seminars tried to define the school subject English by emphasising the activities we engage in through language, and not only to single out language skills or cultural heritage.

Similar discussions as those taking place within these Anglo-Saxon seminars are found in a Swedish context beginning from the early 1970s. Limitations of the skills model and cultural heritage model when it came to engaging students in learning language and reading literature were discussed in terms of a crisis of the school subject Swedish (Brodow et al., 1976). This Swedish discussion around the subject of Swedish primarily took place in a group consisting of school teachers and researchers at Lund University called “Pedagogiska gruppen” (in English the Pedagogical Group; henceforth: PG). The knowledge produced by members of PG and other researchers has provided a detailed picture of Swedish mother tongue education from both a historical and contemporary perspective (see e.g. Bergöö, 2005:35-74). Similar to the Anglo-Saxon context, the personal growth model was very much in the focus of the PG’s early discussions as an alternative to the models that were dominating in schools, i.e. the skills model and the cultural heritage model. The personal growth model was implemented through intervention studies so as to show its strength. In this model, students’ experiences are used as a launching pad, while the abilities which the students are expected to develop concern cognitive, communicative as well as social-psychological aspects (e.g. Malmgren, 1996:89-90). In the mid-1980s, members of the PG joined forces with colleagues in other countries around Europe and formed a network on European soil: “The international mother tongue education network” (henceforth: IMEN; see e.g. Herrlitz, 1994). One aim was to conduct comparative studies in order to illuminate teaching practices in different countries and thereby strengthen and enrich the analysis. However, limitations of the personal growth model were gradually identified in the Anglo-Saxon seminars as well as in the PG and IMEN. As a consequence, in IMEN a fourth way of discussing mother tongue education was added to the former three: critical literacy (Ball, 1987). Political, economic and ideological aspects of language use and literature were at the centre of this model. In later writings within the Swedish context, Swedish as a school subject has been discussed as a subject concerned with democratic issues (see e.g. Ewald, 2007; Molloy, 2002) as well as radical aesthetics (Aulin-Gråham et al., 2004). These positions have been based on a critical literacy perspective, often combined with the personal growth perspective.

Democratic issues such as those discussed above also lay at the centre of discussions starting in the early 1980s among a group of teachers and researchers in Australia. A key issue for this group was the question of students’ possibilities to gain access to the dominant texts in society. The genre approach was developed as an answer to this issue (see e.g. Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Martin & Rothery, 1980). In this model,
the linguistic characteristics of five fundamental genres – narrating, instructing, describing, explaining and arguing – are taught explicitly. This is done in order for the students to become aware of linguistics structures of different genres and to be able to produce texts in accordance with the purposes they are serving in specific contexts. The genre approach shares the aim of increasing student power with Freire’s critical pedagogy (Luke, 1996:313). Luke (1996:321) states that the genre model, Freire’s critical pedagogy as well as the personal growth model all share the tendency to totalise power, i.e. “power is treated as something which can be identified, transmitted and possessed”. As an alternative, Luke (1996:332-333) proposes that the emphasis has to be put on the relationship between knowledge, texts and difference and the continual interrogation of power since power is sociologically contingent.

Already in the early 1990s, Luke together with Freebody (Freebody & Luke, 1990) presented a model of literacy they named “The four resource model”. They tried to abandon a simplistic view of literacy teaching and suggested that a reader or writer takes on four different roles. In later writings, they have replaced the term “role” with the term “family of practice” since “role” tends to have the connotation of individualising and to be defined a priori for someone to “fit into”. With this shift in terminology they wanted to “foreground how literacy as a social practice is necessarily tied up with political, cultural, and social power and capital” (Luke & Freebody, 1999:4). Literacy thus comprises a repertoire of practices that allows learners to take part in code-breaking, meaning-making, the use of texts, and critical text-analyses including text transformation, i.e. practices central to mother tongue education. The practices are described in the following way (Luke & Freebody, 1999:4-5):

- break the code of written texts by recognizing and using fundamental features and architecture, including alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, and structural conventions and patterns;
- participate in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts, taking into account each text’s interior meaning systems in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning systems;
- use texts functionally by traversing and negotiating the labor and social relations around them – that is, by knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school, and understanding that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality, and their sequence of components;
- critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral – that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people’s ideas – and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways.
Similar views on language, language use and, more generally, literacy as found in Luke and Freebody’s model of literacy practices can also be identified in other researchers’ ways of discussing literacy. In a more detailed study concerning writing research and the tradition of the teaching of writing, Ivanič (2004) identifies different types of discourses, or ways of talking about these aspects. According to Ivanič (2004:240), these discourses of writing research and the teaching of writing also correspond quite well to discourses of reading research and the teaching of reading. Both the writing and the reading discussed include situations where non-fiction as well as fiction texts are in focus. The analysis used by Ivanič is based on a multi-layered view of language where the textual aspects of language are “embedded within, and inseparable from, mental and social aspects” (Ivanič, 2004:222). The metaphor of ‘layers’ is used to capture the sense of embeddedness. The ‘text’, which consists only of the linguistic substance of language, is at the centre of this multi-layered view of language. It includes visual and material as well as linguistic characteristics (layer 1; cf. code-breaking). The next layer includes what happens in the minds of people. It focuses “on ‘languaging’: the mental processes of meaning-making, and in relation to multimodal meaning-making, the focus is on ‘design’” (Ivanič, 2004:223) and what type of content is created in the meaning-making (layer 2; cf. meaning-making). The next layer (layer 3; cf. the using of texts) encloses the immediate social context in which language is being used: the purposes for language use as well as the social interaction. The last layer (layer 4; cf. critical text-analyses) “goes beyond the material facts of language and language use (represented by layers 1–3) to identify why they are the way they are, sometimes also with a sociopolitical agenda for contestation of the status quo and action for change” (Ivanič, 2004:224). It involves a critical eye on traditions, norms and values and thereby the identities, power positions and privileges associated with different situations of speaking, reading and writing. These layers of language correspond quite well to Luke and Freebody’s four literacy practices. In a Swedish context, Liberg and Säljö (2010) base their discussion on a similar view of language and languaging when discussing the concept of basic skills in a more extended way than is traditionally done. Further, Ivanič as well as Liberg and Säljö stress in a similar way as Luke and Freebody that an extended pedagogy takes account of all four practices (Luke & Freebody, 1999), layers (Ivanič, 2004), or dimensions (Liberg & Säljö 2010).

Analysis

The research discussed above has created different ways to talk about mother tongue education, i.e. a metalanguage has been developed. The metalanguage created within these more comprehensive views of language and languaging will form the basis for the following discourse analysis of the two syllabuses of the subject Swedish in Lpo94 (revised version 2008) and Lgr11 (Skolverket, 2008, 2011a). More specifically, Ivanič’s models will be used in order to discuss the different sections in these syllabuses in terms of which layers and thereby which aspects of the school subject are foregrounded.
in these sections. The goal of the analysis is to present a description and comparison of the discourses as they are constructed in the syllabus of the subject of Swedish in Lpo94 and Lgr11.

**Syllabuses in Lpo 94**

In the curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre Lpo94 (Skolverket, 2008), the syllabuses are organised in six main sections. Initially, the *aim of the subject and its role in education* is expressed. This section covers how the subject contributes to fulfilling the goals of the curriculum and gives general reasons for studying the subject in question. Following this more general introduction to the subject, *goals to aim for* clarify the orientation of the work in school. These goals specify the qualitative development desired in school and serve as the main basis for the planning of teaching as they give the direction the subject should take in terms of developing students’ knowledge. The third section presents the *structure and nature of the subject*, thus commenting on the core of the subject as well as specific aspects and perspectives of the subject. Following these sections, the minimum goals that all students should have attained by the end of the third, fifth and ninth year in school are specified. Below, these sections will be commented on from the analytical perspective presented above.

**The subject of Swedish in Lpo94**

The two sections *Aim of the subject* and *Structure and nature of the subject* are similar in the sense that they both focus on the overall purpose of speaking, reading and writing different types of texts in various contexts (layer 3). In these sections there is also a focus on the traditions, norms and values associated with different situations of speaking, reading and writing (layer 4).

This can, for example, be seen in the following quotation from the section *Aim of the subject* where the focus is put on the importance of language for the development of identity and how the subject should develop an understanding of cultural diversity (Skolverket, 2008:83):

> The subject of Swedish aims at strengthening the pupils’ identity and their understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds.

The importance of language as well as literature (expressed and presented through various texts and forms of expression) for developing identity and cultural understanding is further stressed in the section *Structure and Nature of the subject* (Skolverket, 2008:85):

> Work with language and literature creates opportunities for satisfying pupils’ needs to express what they feel and think. It provides common experiences to reflect over and discuss. It provides knowledge of the Swedish language, of different cultural heritages and our sur-
rounding world. Assimilating and working through a text does not necessarily imply reading, it may involve listening, drama, role plays, films, videos and looking at pictures.

As can be seen from the above example, language and literature are treated as equally important. However, in the sections which more directly specify the qualitative direction desired in school, the subject is to some extent differently constructed. For example, in the section Goals to aim for, the discourse comments on all of the four layers described in the initial part of this paper. Yet a specific emphasis is put on speaking, reading and writing texts with different purposes in various contexts (layer 3). Language rather than literature serves as the focus of discussion (Skolverket, 2008:84):

The school in its teaching of Swedish should aim to ensure that pupils develop their ability to read, understand, interpret and experience texts of different kinds and adapt their reading and work on texts to its purpose and character.

This difference in what is foregrounded in the subject of Swedish becomes even more prominent when comparing the sections discussed above with the sections that specify what all students at a minimum should have attained by the end of the third, fifth and ninth year in school.

In the goals to be attained by the end of the third year the attention is turned more towards the craftsmanship of reading and writing and, more specifically, decoding (layer 1) and towards the actual contents of the texts (layer 2). Students should for example “be able to read with fluency texts that are familiar and closely related to their specific contexts or, be able to spell correctly, words which they themselves often use when writing and words which frequently recur in texts related to their specific contexts” (Skolverket, 2008:87). This could of course be expected from the first school years when the fundamentals of literacy are built. It is notable, however, that the mentioning of norms and values of the subject is completely omitted in these formulations for grade 3.

When comparing the goals to be attained by the end of the third year with subsequent years, a progression can be noted that primarily has to do with a shift towards reading and writing for different purposes and in different contexts (layers 2 and 3).

By the end of year 5 students should, for example (Skolverket, 2008:87-88):

- be able to read with fluency, both aloud and to themselves, and understand events and meaning in books and non-fiction written for children and young persons, and be able to discuss their experiences from reading, as well as reflect over texts,
- be able to produce texts for different purposes as a tool for learning and communication

By the end of year nine, students are to a larger extent expected to reflect upon their activities, as expressed in the following quotation (Skolverket, 2008:88):

- Students should be able to read literature appropriate to their age from Sweden, the Nordic area, and other countries, and also read non-fiction and newspaper articles on general subjects, as well as be able to reproduce the contents coherently and also reflect on this.
In sum, it is noted that the subject of Swedish is to some extent differently constructed in the different parts of the syllabus. The craftsmanship of reading and writing different texts in various contexts is foregrounded in the sections which more directly guide the planning of teaching. Traditions, norms and values and thereby the identities, power positions and privileges associated with different situations of speaking, reading and writing are foregrounded in the parts which present the core and the overall purpose of the subject. These discussions of norms and values are, however, not operationalised to any substantial degree in the sections that more directly guide the direction the subject should take in terms of developing students’ knowledge. It is noted that although literature is commented on in most passages, the more specific formulations concern the language part of the subject rather than aspects of literature.

Syllabuses in Lgr11

In the curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre 2011 (Skolverket, 2011a), the structure and headings for each school subject differ from Lpo94 (Skolverket, 2008). Following a very short introduction to the subject in question in the syllabuses in Lgr11, the aim is formulated. This section closes with a bulleted list that sums up the main aims of the subject. In the next section, the core content of the subject is presented separately for grades 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9. Finally, the knowledge requirements are formulated for grades 3, 6 and 9. For grades 6 and 9 the knowledge requirements are formulated in relation to grades A, C and E in terms of what a student is able to do. The difference between these grades is more or less a question about grading according to intensity, e.g. using reading strategies in a basically functional way (grade E), an appropriate way (grade C), and an appropriate and effective way (grade A). In this analysis, we focus on grade E, i.e. the lowest grade possible in order to pass.

The subject of Swedish in Lgr11

In the short introduction to the subject of Swedish in Lgr11, it is declared that “Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning” (Skolverket, 2011a:222). It is also stated that language is a means for developing identity. A combination of layers 3 and 4 is well represented in this section which in total consists of five lines of text. The motivation for the subject of Swedish here is that a rich and varied language is a necessary tool for functioning in a society. On the other hand, literature as such is not mentioned at all.

In the next section the aim of the subject Swedish is elaborated. Already in the first line it is stressed that students should receive the opportunity to develop knowledge in and about the Swedish language. Throughout this section language is much more foregrounded than literature. When, in the third paragraph, literature is mentioned for the first time, it is followed by a statement that it is also important that students develop their knowledge concerning non-fiction texts (Skolverket, 2011a:222):
In teaching, pupils should meet and acquire knowledge about literature from different periods and different parts of the world. Teaching should also help to ensure that pupils develop their knowledge of various forms of non-fiction. When encountering different types of texts, performing arts and other aesthetic narratives, pupils should be given the preconditions to develop their language, their own identity and their understanding of the surrounding world.

The predominant aspect dealt with in this section is that the students should meet different types of texts in various media and develop an ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and contexts (layer 3). Less foregrounded, but still in focus, are the aspects concerning language structure (layer 1) and students’ ability to use language and express themselves (layer 2). As seen in the above quote, the possibility for students to be able to develop their identity and their understanding of the surrounding world is included in this section. Further, their ability to critically evaluate information is mentioned (layer 4). All layers are thus represented in this section, albeit to varying degrees, as well as in the summing up of the aim in five bulleted lines. In these lines it is stated that teaching in the subject of Swedish should give students opportunities to develop their ability to (Skolverket, 2011a:222-223):

- express themselves and communicate in speech and writing;
- read and analyse literature and other texts for different purposes;
- adapt language to different purposes, recipients and contexts;
- identify language structures and follow language norms; and
- search for information from different sources, and evaluate these.

The next section describes the core content of the subject. This core content is extensively formulated in bulleted lists and arranged under five subheadings. These are Reading and writing, Speaking, listening and talking, Narrative texts and non-fiction texts, Use of language and Searching for information and critical evaluation of sources. The same subheadings recur under each grade span 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9. As in the aim, all four layers are represented in the core content for all grades. But there is a shift in focus compared to the section describing the aim. The development of language skills and formal aspects of language, speaking, reading and writing (layer 1) has a much more prominent position in the core content than it had in the earlier sections. This is even more pronounced in the lower grades than in the upper grades.

The picture found in the core content is largely repeated in the next section concerned with knowledge requirements. But there is one important exception. In the knowledge requirements for grade 3 it is not possible to find any instances concerning critical evaluation or a focus on the traditions, norms and values (layer 4). In grade 6 (grade E) this is something that is touched upon but not clearly expressed. In contrast, in the knowledge requirements for grade 9 (grade E) this aspect can be noticed, as is shown in the following quotation (Skolverket, 2011a:230). (Words in bold are those words that will be upgraded in the higher grades C and A.)
Pupils can search for, select and compile information from a relatively varied range of sources and then apply developed and relatively well informed reasoning to the credibility and relevance of their sources and information.

Moreover, a commentary on the syllabus concerning the subject of Swedish is published (Skolverket, 2011b). This commentary claims to provide a broader and more profound understanding of the syllabus. The analysis shows that the core content of the curriculum is motivated, reformulated and specified in different ways in this commentary, but some aspects are more motivated and specified than others. Such examples include comments on handwriting and the organising and editing of text by hand and by using computers on one hand, and multimodal texts on the other hand (layer 1). Another well-motivated aspect has to do with the learning of reading strategies (layer 2), which can be found in the core content as well as in the knowledge requirements for all grades. The negative trend in the Swedish results from the international study PIRLS (Progress in international reading literacy study) is used as a motive for strengthening this more basic aspect of reading. In general, the results from PIRLS are referred to quite extensively in the commentary. The position of literature in the syllabus is also discussed in the commentary and its importance is stated. The reading of literature is motivated by referring to the development of students’ identities and for the pleasure of reading (layer 4 and 2). It is worth noting that in the commentary it is proclaimed that a literary canon is not to be used.

**Comparison between Lpo94 and Lgr11**

When comparing the syllabus concerning the subject Swedish in Lpo94 and Lgr11 (Skolverket, 2008, 2011a), the difference in structure is quite obvious. The most notable change is the shift from “goals to attain” in Lpo94 to “knowledge requirements” in Lgr11. Another important structural difference is the explicit articulation of the core content in Lgr11 without any correspondence in Lpo94. The layout with five subheadings and bulleted lists helps to highlight this section of the syllabus. The commentary which is published separately from the syllabus of the subject of Swedish in Lgr11 has no real counterpart in Lpo94, except for the short comments and motivations included in the section concerning the structure and nature of the subject.

One aspect that is less foregrounded in Lpo94 but stressed in Lgr11 concerns knowledge about the languages in the Nordic area and about the national minority languages. This content is thoroughly motivated in the separately published commentary by referring to the fact that students are today less able to understand each other between the Nordic countries, and that knowledge about these languages will provide increased opportunities to communicate with people in the Nordic countries and to study and work in our neighbouring countries. Some regulatory documents are quoted in the commentary as mandatory motives for teaching the national minority languages.
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However, several similarities can be found in the syllabuses concerning the subject Swedish. The first to be noted here is the overall focus on language rather than literature in both syllabuses, even though this feature is articulated to a larger degree in Lgr11. There is a tendency in both documents for the subject of Swedish to be constructed differently in different sections. In sections which deal with the overall description and aim of the subject, a combination of the purposes for and context of language use (layer 3) and a critical perspective (layer 4) are emphasised to a larger extent than in sections which more directly guide the direction the subject should take in terms of developing students’ knowledge. In those sections, a combination of formal aspects of language, speaking, reading and writing (layer 1) and the purposes for, and context of, language use (layer 3) are stressed much more. A final similarity to be mentioned here concerns the prominent position of the skills of reading and writing (layer 1) and the neglecting of a socio-political view on language and languaging (layer 4) in the early grades.

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As stated in the introduction, changes in society have served as important motives for discussing an extended view on what could be included in mother tongue education. In this discussion different types of teaching models (Ball, 1987; Dixon, 1975; Herrlitz, 1994; Luke & Freebody, 1999) have been identified and contrasted. What is in focus in this article is the extent to which the current syllabus of the school subject of Swedish has been updated in relation to such discussions and extended views on mother tongue education.

Analysis of the syllabus of the school subject Swedish in Lgr11 as well as in Lpo94 shows a change in focus when moving successively from the introductory section of the syllabus over to the knowledge requirements in Lgr11 and the goals to attain in Lpo94. Similar results are presented by Lundström et al. (2011) who have also analysed the syllabus concerning the school subject of Swedish in Lgr11, but with a focus on literature. Superimposed on this change in focus, it is possible to identify an expanding movement concerning a socio-political view on language and languaging (layer 4) in fiction as well as non-fiction texts from the early grades and onwards. These results will be discussed in more detail below.

Three subjects of Swedish

The incoherence in the syllabus found in the analysis of both Lpo94 and Lgr11 opens up for the interpretation that the subject of Swedish in fact consists of several subjects. A first school subject of Swedish with quite a wide scope is found in the introductory sections where the aim is described in the syllabus, and in Lpo94 an overall description of the structure and nature of the subject is given. These introductory sections in both Lpo94 and Lgr11 indicate quite an extensive view by emphasising one or more aspects of the four layers described by Ivanič (2004), i.e. aspects of a text, meaning-making,
the use of different texts and a socio-political perspective on these three first layers. Using Luke and Freebody’s (1999) terminology, it could thus be concluded that the practices of code-breaking, meaning-making, the use of texts and a critical perspective are all indicated. Even though all of these layers or practices are discussed in these introductory sections, it is possible to identify a more extensive focus on the use of different texts than on the other layers or practices. The focus on the use of different texts implies that literature is seen as just one type of text that should be studied. This is a first indication in the syllabus, more so in Lgr11 than in Lpo94, that literature is moved into the background while language and language skills are brought into the foreground (also see Lundström et al., 2011). This emphasis on the use of different text-types may be interpreted as a consequence of an increasing interest in the genre approach in Sweden (e.g. Axelsson et al., 2006; Magnusson, 2008). Further, when a critical perspective is treated, power does not seem to be viewed as contingent. This is in accordance with a genre approach according to Luke (1996:333). The critical perspective is neither explicitly stated to include, as is done by both Ivanič (2004:224) and Luke and Freebody (1999:5), a contestation of the status quo, action for change, and possible transformations and redesigning of texts, which are important aspects of a socio-political agenda.

A second school subject of Swedish is found in the syllabus’ sections which more directly guide the management of teaching and the development of students’ knowledge as seen in “goals to attain” in Lpo94 and “core content” and “knowledge requirements” in Lgr11. Here the emphasis is, to a much larger degree than in the earlier sections, on formal aspects of language, speaking, reading and writing (layer 1) in combination with the purposes for and context of language use in different contexts (layer 3). A somewhat more narrow and specified subject thus emerges in these sections. The specification concerns more general, formal aspects of speaking, reading and writing, and of spoken and written texts (phonological/orthographical, morphological and syntactical) and, more specifically, formal aspects of the macrostructures of different types of texts. The more general formal aspects have traditionally been strong in syllabuses of Swedish as a school subject (Bergöö, 2005:35-74). The teaching of skills, especially reading and writing skills, has long dominated the subject and, as shown in many current studies, the skills discourse is still quite dominant in teaching practices (e.g. Skolverket, 2007a:8). This is one important part of the “powerful weapon in the fight for standardization and homogeneity” (Herrlitz, 1994:1). Further, the focusing on different types of texts and the specification of their macrostructures can, as stated earlier, be interpreted as a consequence of introducing the genre approach to Sweden. A question that could be asked is if this change to include more text-types, and also study their formal macrostructures, is a more modern version of such a powerful weapon in the fight for standardization and homogeneity. In light of Luke’s (1996:321) perspective on the concept of power within the genre approach as something which can be identified, transmitted and possessed, an affirmative answer may be given to this question.
Lundström et al. (2011:22) have pointed out yet another reason for the imbalance between literature and language. The area of literature in the Lgr11 is, according to them, reduced to something measureable in the knowledge requirements and concerns knowledge about literature rather than what is possible to experience and learn through literature. This shift is in line with the increased focus on assessment in Sweden, as well as in many other countries, through national as well as international tests. The “teaching to the test” syndrome, where the knowledge requirements take over, is a very imminent danger. Both the impact of results from the international studies and the way of assessing students’ abilities in these studies must be considered in order to understand the continued survival of the tradition on teaching language skills. For example, in the commentary material accompanying Lgr11 concerning Swedish, results from the PIRLS international study are used as a motive for strengthening the more basic aspect of reading, which better lends itself to measurement. Likewise, the shift in terminology from “goals to attain” in Lpo94 to “knowledge requirements” in Lgr11 points in this direction.

This second school subject of Swedish identified in the syllabuses can actually be seen as having two facets when comparing the lower grades to the middle and, especially, the upper grades of compulsory school. As a consequence, it is possible to talk about a third school subject of Swedish. As concluded from the analysis of Lpo94 and Lgr11, one can identify that the presence of the socio-political view on language and languaging (layer 4) increases from the early grades onwards. In the early grades, a critical perspective is merely mentioned in the core content in Lgr11, but is not present at all in the goals to attain in Lpo94 or the knowledge requirements in Lgr11 for grade 3. It is, on the other hand, more explicitly stated in the corresponding sections for the middle grades, and even more so for the upper grades. However, as mentioned earlier, the critical perspective does not at all include aspects such as contestation of the status quo, action for change, and possible transformations and redesigning of texts (see Ivanič 2004:224; Luke & Freebody, 1999:5).

As shown, a difference in focus between lower and upper grades is identified. However, it has quite a different appearance compared to the traditional difference between primary and secondary grades mentioned in the introduction. From the start of the school system controlled by central government in Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century, mother tongue education in Sweden has been divided in such a way that the teaching of skills, especially reading and writing skills, has dominated the primary years of school. Later on in school, for those few students who up until the early 1960s went on to secondary levels in Sweden, teaching was instead centred on questions concerning literature and the cultural heritage (Thavenius, 1999). “Students should first learn to read and write, and then go on to read and write in order to learn” is a saying that captures the heart of this tradition. In a situation like the one we have today where literature has obtained a much more withdrawn position and language and language skills have taken on a more prominent position, this saying
has to be changed. A more updated version would keep the first part intact, and alter the second part, i.e. “Students should first learn to read and write, and then go on to learn to read and write in a more critical manner”.

The lack of a critical perspective in the early school years can be connected to two traditions that still strongly influence teaching in Swedish schools. The first one, as discussed above, is that teaching in early grades has had, and still has, a strong focus on formal aspects. A parallel to this tradition is found in studies of early literacy. Most of these studies have focused formal aspects and very few have studied the child as an ideological person. Socio-political perspectives are thus invisible or very much downgraded in preschool and lower grades. “‘Innocent’ children, adults may feel, should be free from such complexities, free to play on playground and paper”, says Dyson (1997:166) in her study of students in a primary classroom. She is one of very few researchers who have shown how children in preschool and primary grades, through their writing and discussions concerning their writing, can be viewed as “active contributors to evolving communities that both draw on and influence larger culture systems” (Dyson, 1997:6). She states that (Dyson, 1997:4):

In this view [a dialogic vision of language developed by Bakhtin (1981, 1986)], learning to use language involves learning to interact with others in particular social situations and, at the same time, learning to be, so to speak, within the dominant ideologies or ‘truths’ about human relationships; that is, it involves learning about the words available in certain situations to a boy or girl, to a person of a particular age, ethnicity, race, class, religion, and so on.

Updated without losing track of traditions

As can be seen from the analysis and the discussion of the findings, there is a successive change in the school subject of Swedish from Lpo94 to Lgr11 concerning the balance between literature and language, with the result that language and language skills today hold a much more prominent position within compulsory school. In the present article, this change has been shown to be connected to an increasing interest in the genre approach in Sweden, and its response to inequalities concerning access to dominant genres in society. The syllabus of the school subject of Swedish especially in Lgr11 can therefore be said to be updated with fundamental aspects of the genre approach. Even though it is possible to identify this updated aspect in the syllabus in Lgr11, at least two older traditions are still alive and have an even stronger position today than earlier. The first concerns the focus on the formal aspects of language. In the application of the genre approach, this formal tradition strikes back. In Lgr11 the more static “text-type” concept is chosen instead of the more dynamically oriented “genre” concept in terms of genre as a social process (Skolverket 2011b:16). The different text-types highlighted are further treated from a formal point of view by focusing on their macrostructures. The second tradition that is still alive concerns the lack of a socio-political perspective in the lower grades, and the apparently low-key character of this perspective in the upper grades.
Even though there have been intensive discussions around an extended view of what can be included in mother tongue education, very little of this has had an impact on the syllabus of mother tongue education in Sweden in its latest version from 2011. There are several causes of this situation, for example the political agenda in society, and the test-focused era we are now living in (also see Lundström et al. 2011). What can be done from a research perspective is to show how these extended views may be captured and constructed with an even more delicate way of talking, a metalanguage, about the issues at stake. This seems to be most pressing concerning the socio-political layer, especially in the earlier grades.

Notes
1 There are two syllabuses in Sweden concerning the national language: “Swedish” and “Swedish as a second language”. “Swedish as a second language” is an option for all students who have a first language other than Swedish. These students can thus choose to study either “Swedish” or “Swedish as a second language”. They also have the possibility of studying their own mother tongue. This last type of teaching is nowadays called mother tongue education in Sweden. This should not be confused with the English term, which usually refers to teaching the national or standard language. In this article we will focus on the syllabus of “Swedish” and use the English term “mother tongue education” for the teaching of the national and standard language, i.e. Swedish.
2 The Swedish syllabuses translated into English are downloaded from the website of the Swedish National Agency for Education.
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