

ABSTRACT

In 1995 Sweden introduced a new curriculum for compulsory school (Lpo 94). A new grading system was also introduced, but criteria for assessment were given only for the final marks. For the term marks schools were supposed to set up their own criteria.

In my research I study the historical background to the Swedish grading system and how teachers from schools interpreted the new ideas in the curriculum in their local plans and criteria for assessment for school year eight for three different subjects: English, Chemistry and Physical Education.

Two kinds of documents are analyzed in this study. The first category is "official documents", the curricula and syllabuses used in Swedish compulsory school from its start in 1842 up to the present day, as well as inquiries and reports that deal with the question of grading. The second category is "local documents", local plans and criteria for assessment.

School grades have been known in Sweden since the 16th century. From the beginning the grades were personal comments from the teachers, later the syllabuses stated more precisely the contents that were to be taught and the grading system became more regulated. This was a gradual development that went on until the 1970s. In Lpo 94 objectives were provided by the state, while local authorities, schools and teachers were to decide how to reach the objectives.

The examination of the plans and criteria for school year eight shows in short:

- More schools 2005 than 1996 have used the central syllabuses for school year nine and made minor changes to fit school year eight.
- In the documents from several schools there is no correspondence between the plans and the criteria. The goals set up in the plans do not have equivalents in the criteria.
- The documents put high demands on the readers either to be well acquainted with the grading system or to find their own information.
- The local documents have clearly been written by the teachers. The Compulsory School Ordinance states that pupils and parents should be involved in the work. This, however, does not seem to be the case.
- Many schools seem to have lowered their demands for the grade Passed from 1996 to 2005. In some schools the demands are so low that in practice it seems as if the pupils are more or less guaranteed to get a Passed as long as they attend the lessons.

When the parliament decided upon a new grading system there seem to have been no discussions about how goal-referenced grading was supposed to work when there were no goals or objectives. That was left to the schools or teachers to solve. What happened then was that the groups of teachers wrote their own criteria. The idea that teachers and pupils should do this work together was never put into practice. The decentralization of the Swedish school has, as far as grading is concerned, led to an increase in the power of the teachers, while the pupils are still excluded from decision making.

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