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# The Conundrum of Collaboration

A qualitative study  
on Swedish EFL  
teachers' view on  
cross-curricular  
collaboration

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## Abstract

In today's Swedish upper secondary school it is probable that EFL teachers encounter cross-curricular collaboration projects. That is, projects where another subject/other subjects in addition to English are supposed to be incorporated. Research, as well as the Swedish curriculum, show that the interest in this field has been elevated in recent years. This study sets out to shed some light on how Swedish EFL teachers reason about cross-curricular collaboration. In order to do so, the theory behind the study is phenomenography. What benefits, drawbacks and preconditions do EFL teachers think that cross-curricular collaboration entails? Six EFL teachers have been interviewed, using a semi-structured interview guide. In accordance with phenomenography the results are divided into categories found during the analysis. The categories found were: time, structure, creating context, and collegial collaboration. The results are discussed in relation to the research questions and previous research. The results show that the study is aligned with previous research which also shows that there are drawbacks to consider, benefits to reap but plenty of preconditions to bear in mind when engaging in a cross-curricular collaboration project as an EFL teacher in Sweden. Moreover, results show that teachers with more experience of cross-curricular collaboration find it more beneficial. Finally, suggestions for further research are put forth.

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# 1 Introduction

The following study sets out to illuminate what Swedish English teachers' thoughts are on the subject of cross-curricular collaboration. During work placement (VFU) as an English teacher in upper secondary school, the author had the opportunity to plan and manage longer projects together with content teachers. Both the students and the author thought this was a good way of planning and carrying out lessons, and both the students and the teachers learned a lot. To be able to cooperate with colleagues in a way so that all teachers involved have the satisfactory feeling that their subject given the time and focus that is needed has a good impact on the college as a whole. This ignited a spark of interest within the author, and on the program he was spending his VFU, cross-curricular collaboration was very much appreciated. However, there are teachers who give the impression of not enjoying that specific way of managing their time. Thus, this makes one wonder why some teachers find this way of working challenging and why some teachers seem to prefer it. As a teacher trainee in a school, a mistake one might make is to accept everything that has to do with the job, but, it is however vital to also have a critical point of view. Hence, the study at hand is determined to look further into teachers' views of what they think of cross-curricular collaboration and English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching. As a teacher candidate this is even more important, since the more aspects of the actual reality a teacher has, the more nuanced choices one can make in the future.

## 1.1 Background and theory

The Swedish curriculum is continuously changing and the research on learning theory in Sweden has, since the 1990s, been heavily influenced by the Vygotskian ideas of the socio-cultural classroom (Carlgren, Forsberg, & Lindberg, 2011). The theory rests upon the assumption that learning is situated in social relations and in the social setting (Vygotsky, 1999). Hence, according to Vygotsky (1999), learning is something that develops in discussion with other individuals. Furthermore, learning, as a phenomenon, happens when people in groups share interests and experiences in 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Klapp (2015) defines the sociocultural theory as an environment where the teacher is trying to create a setting that encourages thinking, processing and acting in authentic projects and assignments. Further, authentic projects and assignments are when the students and teachers create something together, and also reaches the solutions through cooperation (ibid).

The sociocultural theory's influence is easily found in the national Swedish curriculum for the upper secondary school. Students should, for example, be given the opportunity to work in pairs and groups in all the subjects of the curriculum, as well as independently. Students should also learn how to cooperate, and use the appropriate language for certain areas of expertise. The teachers are urged to guide students through different contexts and not tell them specifically what is correct and not correct (Skolverket, 2011). In the socio-cultural theory this is called 'scaffolding' (Lundgren, Säljö, & Liberg, 2014). Also, teachers should try to have every student's individual needs as the point of departure when introducing a new theme; commonly referred to the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (ibid).

Many features in the curriculum seem to support cross-curricular collaboration. The boundaries between subjects should not be carved in stone and teachers, as well as school structures, must be able to communicate this to the students.

Developments in working life mean, inter alia, that traditional boundaries between different vocational areas need to be reduced, and that demands are imposed on awareness of not only one's own competence, but also that of others. This in its turn imposes demands on the school's working forms and organisations (Skolverket, 2011, p. 6).

As stated above, it is important that schools have an organisation that supports teachers and students who want to work in projects that involve cross-curricular collaboration. Furthermore, it is encouraged to imitate the world outside of the educational setting, for example different kinds of jobs and the school should help prepare the students for their life after their education (Skolverket, 2011). To be able to do this it is important to note that:

Students' acquisition of knowledge is dependent on developing the ability to see interconnections. The school should enable students to gain a general and coherent view. Students should get the opportunity to reflect over their experiences and apply their knowledge (Skolverket, 2011, s. 6).

For teachers, explicitly, the curriculum states that cooperation with colleagues is necessary to be able to accomplish the different goals that are set up by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2011).

For the subject of English, specifically, there are also features that can support cross-curricular collaboration. The students should be encouraged to use English in different

contexts and for different purposes. They should be introduced to English, written and spoken, of different types in order to develop an understanding of different topics (Skolverket, 2011). In the core content of the three different English courses in the Swedish upper secondary school one can find content such as “[...] areas related to student’s education, and societal and working life [...]” (Skolverket, 2011, §1, §14, §29), “[...] social political and cultural conditions [...]” (Skolverket, 2011, §3) and “[...] cultural, historical, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket, 2011, §16, §30). They should take part of formal letters, political debates, interviews, theoretical and complex subject areas of a more scientific nature, in depth-reports and lectures etc. (Skolverket, 2011). Hence, there are reasons for looking closer at how teachers make use of these criteria and reason about it in reference to cross-curricular collaboration.

There are theoretical arguments regarding differences between cross-curricular collaboration and a division of subjects. In the field of history of ideas there are strong arguments for integration of disciplines, historically people have chosen collaboration and unity rather than fragmentation and division for general progression (Ingelstam, 1988), however, this is not always reflected in the school system. Some research indicates that teachers in Swedish schools position themselves in two camps, one side argues that collaboration is important and should be tested in different forms, whilst the other side advocates a stronger division between the subjects and that it is important for teachers and students to know when one specific subject is taught and when it is not (Sandström, 2005). This debate has its roots a long way back. Already in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American philosopher John Dewey encouraged tutoring where individuals had the opportunity to evolve and progress in unison with their surroundings and environment in order to effectively understand context (Dewey, 1991).

Of course there are a lot of ways to define cross-curricular collaboration and different methods to use it. There is a lot of research done on *Content Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL), *English as the Medium of Instruction* (EMI), *Project-based Learning* (PBL) and *Content-based Instruction* (CBI), all of which can be used when teachers of different subjects and content collaborate. CLIL derives from the implementation of immersion teaching. This (immersion teaching) was done in Canada in the 1960s and CLIL is now an ever-growing field of both research and a way to plan curricula and teach across the world (Sylvén, 2010). Sylvén (2010) states that: “The overall aim of the CLIL method is to integrate the learning of content matter, for instance mathematics, with the acquisition of another language. In many

cases the target language (TL) is English, but it could be any language” (p. 11).

The concept of PBL derives from research and theory conducted by Dewey and Kilpatrick (Iakovos, Iosif, & Areti, 2011). The students get a problem to solve and often in language learning, the content of the problem is something else than the language but the means of communication is in the target language which the students then get to practice in authentic situation (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, & Palincsar, 1991).

In second language learning and teaching, the term CBI is increasingly used. The focus in this kind of language learning is again on the subject (i.e. mathematics, politics, history, car engines etc.) and not on the language itself. The thought is that this might help the learners appropriate the language more easily through a focus on something that is mediated through the target language (Iakovos, Iosif, & Areti, 2011).

English as the medium of instruction (EMI) is an umbrella term created to incorporate all of the above concepts. It is used for when the teaching in class is mediated through English instead of the students’ mother tongues (Marsch, 2006).

However, for this study there are three reasons for why a too narrow definition of cross-curricular collaboration is left out. First, it is important not to exclude teachers who do not exclusively work with a particular concept even if they might adopt it from time to time. Second, closely tied to the first reason, exclusion of teachers who are willing to discuss their way of working with cross-curricular collaboration but might not be familiar with the above concepts would be unnecessary. Finally, it is imperative for the author to discuss co-operation with teachers who might not find it beneficial working with cross-curricular collaboration projects, hence, choose to discard that way of working completely.

English as a foreign language (EFL) and cross-curricular collaboration is a field of research not that widely explored and more studies are needed to fully understand teachers’ views on the topic (Trent, 2010). Furthermore, cross-curricular collaboration and its occurrence in Swedish schools has shifted from time to time and is affected by the current political and social ideas and events. During the 1970s there was a worry of a loss in specific subject knowledge, hence, the different subjects in school became more rigid. Now, however, it seems like the wind has changed and an interest for collaboration seems to be growing (Krantz & Persson, 2001). Consequently, the study’s aim is to shed some light on how some teachers of English view cross-curricular collaboration of English and another subject/other subjects.

It must be mentioned that in research there are two terms concerning language learning and teaching that are similar to each other, English as a foreign language (EFL) and



English as a second language (ESL). Yet, since this study is conducted in Sweden, EFL is the most appropriate term to use.

### **1.1.1 Phenomenography**

The theory on which this study rests is *phenomenography*. There are two different kinds of theories that are similar to one another: the first, and the most frequently adopted, is where you study the world in order to make different statements about it. This is called phenomenology. In the second one, which is the one used in this study, the interest lies in people's ideas and experiences about our surroundings, namely, phenomenography (Marton, 1981). An important aspect of phenomenography is that one does not try to discern facts or how certain phenomena of the world actually transpire. One, simply, tries to shed light on people's thoughts and understandings of the chosen phenomena. These kinds of studies are often complementary to other research; in order to understand why something happens in a certain way, it is sometimes necessary to figure out, either beforehand or afterwards, how people think about the topic at hand in order to understand why they act the way they do (Marton, 1981). The theory is often used in didactic research in order to, as in this study, find out what school staff think and how they reason about certain aspects, then, to describe variations of the chosen aspect. The researcher is, hence, interested in the variation and disparities of the, for example teachers', ways of experiencing the world (Marton & Booth, 2000). The variations that crystallize are then put into different categories and the researcher is considered done when no more variations and categories seem to emerge (Kroksmark, 2007). The goal is to study as many aspects as possible of a certain phenomenon in order to fulfil a sort of clarity. However, one must be aware that, when using phenomenography as a theory, one can happen to gather information that is false. It may be false in the sense that the answers you are given do not correlate with reality (Kroksmark, 2007). Nevertheless, this should be reflected in the categories one has written and it should be possible to distinguish abnormalities in the study if they appear (Marton & Booth, 2000).

Subsequently, the central issue for this study is not to find out whether or not cross-curricular collaboration is something good or bad in the teacher's practice, but rather if the individual apprehends it as something that adds to the learning and working situation amongst language teachers and students, or if it is something that stands in the way of a good teacher and learning practice.

## 2 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to find out how some EFL teachers in the Swedish upper secondary school reason about cross-curricular collaboration. This is important because, since in today's Swedish upper secondary school, one will most probably come across situations where cross-curricular collaboration is either encouraged or discouraged and the curriculum does imply that it can be important. Hence, the research questions are:

- What benefits do EFL teachers see with cross-curricular collaboration?
- What drawbacks or disadvantages do EFL teachers see with cross-curricular collaboration?
- What preconditions are, according to EFL teachers, necessary for cross-curricular collaboration to work?

## 3 Previous research

A lot of research done in the field of language learning and cross-curricular collaboration has a focus on CBI, CLIL, EMI and PBL (see e.g. Lo, 2014; Méndez & Vázquez, 2012; Trent, 2010; Chang & Lee, 2010) However, for this particular study the scope of interest is not any of those concepts per se, but general cross-curricular collaboration and Swedish EFL teachers' view on it. Hence, this study has a broader focus on collaboration. Moreover, most of the studies on the topic at hand are from international studies. The literature put forth in this review is therefore divided into international and Swedish research.

### 3.1 International research

Hargreaves (1994) found that one problem that might appear during teacher collaboration can be referred to as contrived collegiality. That is, something forced on teachers from headmasters or another higher authority. Hargreaves (1994) puts it as follows:

In contrived collegiality, collaboration amongst teachers was compulsory, not voluntary; bounded and fixed in space and time; implementation- rather than development-oriented; and meant to be predictable rather than unpredictable in its outcomes (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 208).

Moreover, he states that it is imperative for the effectiveness of collaboration between teachers that one is prepared to actually change the way one teaches if one is going to undertake a collaborative project of some sort. According to Roth and Tobin (2007) it is not just another way of accomplishing an assignment given to you as a teacher. It is also paramount according to Hargreaves (1994) that teachers are seen as equal when managing cooperative tasks:

Sharing should not be construed as sharing among the skilled and less skilled, the expert and the novice, but among communities of professional equals committed to continuous improvement (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 204).

Moreover, Hargreaves (1994) explains that at larger secondary- and upper-secondary schools one can find an organisational pattern that reinforces the current division of subjects. He argues that this sets limits for learning among students, for the possibility of change in the college of teachers and for the overall development of the schools. If collaboration is to work, Hargreaves (1994) argues that it is bound to bring change into the classroom and the teachers' practice and that the organization of the school must allow this, otherwise it is not very likely that it will work.

Another problem that some face when incorporating English in content subjects is that, even though the students might become more proficient in English, the students suffer from a lack of learning in the other subjects. This was, for example, found in a study carried out in secondary schools in Hong Kong where 261 teachers answered questionnaires. This was complemented with six semi-structured interviews (Lo & Lo, 2014). The same problem might emerge from the language point of view. The danger might also be that when language teachers and content subject teachers collaborate, the language might be marginalized and also the language teacher's pedagogical skills (Creese, 2010). Creese (2010) also argues that if teachers try to collaborate but without the structure and time that is needed, the curricular material will be too simplified either for the content subject or the language. Thus, there are problems from both a language teacher's and a subjects teacher's perspective. Furthermore, research suggests that cross-curricular collaboration is unusual and, even more interesting, exceedingly difficult to preserve and sustain. When looking at teacher collaboration, Little (1990) argues that the closer one comes to issues of curriculum and specific directives in different courses, the more scarce collaboration seems to be.

Additionally, it seems like meaningful collaboration was something that only worked when teachers only scratched the surface of the curriculum.

Moreover, co-operative teaching in EFL is a complex area and is “neither easy nor unproblematic” (Davison, 2008, p. 472). It is important that collaboration between an English teacher and a content teacher is not seen as just “another pair of hands” (ibid). Davison (2008) upholds that teachers’ spectra, when it comes to collaboration between EFL teachers and content teachers, are very wide and with different agendas and points of views. Everything from self-concern about one’s own work environment, to reluctance of change, to a scale from some awareness to a lot of awareness and interest, is to be found in today’s schools. This is also confirmed by Lo and Lo (2014), who found that it seems that teachers often belong to one of two groups. The first is very interested in cooperation and the second is more reluctant and seems to uphold the importance of the preservation of subject independence.

There are studies that focus on cross-curricular collaboration. However, most studies tend to concentrate on different methods for the actual teaching. That is, how teachers are to take on the cross-curricular work (Davison, 2008). Moreover, Davison (2008) states that the interesting fact here is that it seems like the research started here and not on the teachers’ views on and the effectiveness of cross-curricular collaboration. There seems to be a relatively new interest in EFL teachers’ and content teachers’ collaborative work (Davison, 2008).

## 3.2 Swedish research

Ingelstam (1988) argues that knowledge in pieces, that is, not connected to a broader context, is widely acknowledged in schools in Sweden. This has a lot to do with teachers trying to cover as much as possible during a limited amount of time. If this is the case, one runs the risk of exposing the students to a disorderly mass of details and the relations in between might not be explained. If you do not actively try to create a connection between these details you will run the risk of students accumulating ignorance instead of knowledge (Liedman, 1984).

In the 80s and 90s a new concept found its way into the Swedish school system, and a “[...] strive for adjustment of course content in English teaching to the programme (termed ‘infärgning’ in Swedish)” (Berggren, 2013, p. 1) became popular. The thought is that if the teacher has the students’ interests in mind when approaching a subject, this will aid the learning. One often took the character subjects as a point of departure since the thought was that since the students have chosen a specific orientation, for example, social science or

natural science, it is an educated guess that they actually have an interest in the field (Rudhe, 1996). If the character subject is a tool or used as content in different subjects, the students will more easily see the context in which their education takes place (ibid).

Yet, there are difficulties with cross-curricular collaboration and cooperation found in Swedish research as well, at least according to Krantz & Persson (2001). According to the authors, there is a problem if the collaboration between teachers is too extensive. One, then, runs the risk of losing the bigger picture, instead of creating it and that one accidentally creates one subject, raised above all others. The authors are of the opinion that one should find a balance between division of subjects and collaboration. They argue that no teacher is attracted by the thought of an education on a single-track nor an education recognized by its fragmentation (ibid). Additionally, as previously mentioned, Sandström (2005) argues that teachers often end up in two different camps where one argues for or against more collaboration between teachers.

### 3.3 Summary

According to the research there must be a structure that allows teachers to test collaborative projects and teachers must be willing to try to develop their own practice (Hargreaves, 1994; Roth & Tobin, 2007). Moreover, it is argued that teachers must be seen as equal in skill (Hargreaves, 1994; Davison, 2008). From the students' point of view, according to Lo and Lo (2014) and Creese (2010), it is also important, that the project provides sufficient time and effort for all subjects incorporated in the collaborative work so that the students do not suffer from a lack in learning in any subject. Finally, it is also said that well-planned collaborations are hard to sustain and quite scarce (Little, 1990) and that a too extensive collaborative work might run the risk of changing the educational structure at schools into something that could diminish the status of sole subject's importance (Krantz & Persson, 2001). It is clear that a Swedish study is needed on the topic of collaboration and EFL learning. No previous research has yet brought clarity to the scope of interest for which this study aims. What can be found in previous research are a lot of preconditions that are needed and predicaments that follow in the footsteps of cross-curricular collaboration.

## 4 Method

First, the choice of method and a description of participants will be described here. Second, the procedure and the data analysis are described. Finally, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are acknowledged.

### 4.1 Choice of method and participants

The choice of method was based on the assumption that it would be the most efficient way of gathering the data needed for the study, hence, qualitative semi-structured interviews were suitable. Since the goal of the study is to find out what teachers' think, and not how they actually go about in their practice, this is a suitable method (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2007). It is also a fitting method in the aspect of getting to know more about teachers' thoughts and perceptions, since it allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions in hope of a deeper understanding (ibid). However, Trent (2010) argues that a large quantitative study is needed to give the area of research a more solid foundation. Most research conducted is smaller qualitative studies that might be hard to generalise. Nevertheless, a qualitative method is perhaps the approach best suited to fully understand what teachers really think about the matter in question. Besides, no such studies have been carried out in Sweden, therefore, a small-scaled qualitative study is appropriate. Still, not contending with Trent's (2010) opinion on the matter, the frame of the project did not allow for a more in-depth or broader approach.

The respondents of the study are six teachers in upper-secondary school, all of which teach two or more courses in English. Of 16 inquires, the 6 participants are the ones who agreed to partake in interviews. The respondents are a sample of convenience. They are practitioners at two different communal upper secondary schools, with about 1000 students in both School 1 and School 2 (for presentation of teachers, see Table 1). As mentioned before, it might be the case, that they, the interviewees of the study, do in fact work with CBI, CLIL, EMI or PBL. However, that is not where the interest for the study lies. If they do not state that they follow a particular method, it is given that they do not. Hence, the approach has been to give the teachers in the survey a chance to define what they think cross-curricular collaboration is for them.

According to Kvale and Brinkman (2014) there are generally too many or too few respondents in a qualitative study based on interviews. Normally the number of interviews is between 5 and 25 depending on the time and resources available for the researcher (ibid).

With this measurement this study can be said to act within the scope of what is usually depicted as a sufficient amount of interviews. Furthermore, a lot of interview studies would gain from a smaller number of interviews and more time conducting a rigorous analysis (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014), hence, the data from the six interviews should be adequate for a solid analysis.

An interview guide should account for two dimensions, thematic and dynamic (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). A thematic question in an interview focuses on the knowledge the researcher can achieve, whilst a dynamic question contributes to the human interaction, or bond if you will, between the interviewer and the respondent. Well-planned interviews should of course have both, which also postulates that the researcher is experienced and good at her/his job (*ibid*). This study is leaning more towards a dynamic dimension, mostly because it is the author's first empirical study but also because a well-oiled jargon was important for the author, so that both parties in the interview were comfortable.

Table 1 Presentation of respondents.

Name	Age	Years as a teacher	Subjects	Courses at the time of the interview	Current programme	School	Experience of cross-curricular collaboration
Alva	56	30	English and Swedish	Swedish 2, English 5 and 6	Technology Programme	School 1	Extensive
Leo	38	9	English and Swedish	English 5, 6 and 7	Social Science Programme	School 1	Limited
Fredrik	41	12	English and Swedish	English 5, 6 and 7, Swedish 1	Business Management and Economics Programme	School 1	Moderately /Extensive
Olof	58	32	English and Swedish	English 5 and 6, Swedish 1 and 2, Rhetoric	Business Management and Economics Programme and Technology Programme	School 1	Moderately
Karl	30	5	English and Social science	English 5 and 6, Social science 1b and 2	Social Science Programme	School 2	Limited
Moa	46	18	English and Latin	English 5, 6 and 7, Latin	Social Science Programme and Humanities Programme	School 2	Limited

## 4.2 Procedure

The interviews took place in respective teachers' schools, either in their offices or in common conference rooms, and followed an interview guide (see Appendix A). The interviews were conducted in Swedish and are, for the sake of this study, translated into English by the author. Unnecessary reiterations have been omitted to make the quotes more appropriate to the written language.



Since the study aims at understanding how EFL teachers think and reason when it comes to cross-curricular collaboration the questions in the interviews were designed to measure just that. However, it is of course difficult to say if they answer truthfully since they might respond to what they think that the author is looking for. Yet, the author made it clear that there was no assessment and that the interest was their opinions and not if they had the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ thoughts about the phenomenon discussed. Furthermore, to achieve this, the respondents were not told about the topic of the interview until 15 minutes before the start of the interview. This was done purposely since it was, otherwise, likely that only teachers interested in cross-curricular collaboration would accept being part of the study. Additionally, topics that were not mentioned by the interviewer were raised in a similar fashion in all the interviews. Hence, both validity and reliability are somewhat accounted for.

### 4.3 Analysis of data

In the process of analysing the data, a phenomenographic theory was applied (see 1.1.1 Phenomenography). The central aspect was to divide the results into different categories or themes, which surfaced during the interviews. To be able to easily get an overview of the data, the interviews were recorded and transcribed, as described by Larsson (1986). The gathered data was then re-read numerous times in order to get an overview and to find differences and similarities. It is not the differences and similarities per se that then led to the categories, but, whether the discussion showed variances and parallels within common themes and categories in the different interviews. Hence, it is those categories that the result in this study is divided into. Quotes from the respondents exemplify the categories and are the foundation on which the result rests.

### 4.4 Ethical considerations

The names that are used in the study (see Table 1) are fictional and no information in the study can be traced back to the respondents. The four aspects of good research ethics stipulated by the Swedish Research Council are accounted for: the demand for information, the demand for consent, the demand for confidentiality and the demand for usage (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Before the interviews, the respondents were given information about the purpose of the study and that the transcribed interviews would only be used for the result in this study, as described by Kvale & Brinkman (2014). The interviewees were reminded that

they could at any time choose to stop the interview. After the interviews, the transcribed interviews were all sent to the respondents and had been approved to be used for the purpose of the study at hand. One ethical issue, and also a limitation of the report, is that some of the teachers work at the same school (see Table 1) and could, hence, theoretically be traced by their colleagues. Those teachers are aware of this and have given their consent to be part of the study anyway.

## 4.5 Limitations

In a small study, such as this one, there are bound to be some limitations. First and foremost, the teachers in the study are quite few to the number, and, there are only teachers from two different schools in an urban area of western Sweden. Additionally, all of the teachers work at programmes that are preparing the students for higher education (see Table 1). Hence, the generalizability is low. It is impossible to generalise the result of this study over a broader population of teachers. However, since it is a qualitative study this would be very difficult in any qualitative study without infinite funds and means. Moreover, Kvale and Brinkman (2014) argue that interviewing is a craft and it is somewhat of a paradox to write a handbook about it, since you have to practice the craft in order to become a good practitioner. This study is the first qualitative study the author undertakes, hence, he is not yet fully trained in the art of conducting interviews. Moreover, the theory behind the study is, as mentioned, phenomenography. This theory comes with some critique. Since, the foundation is to understand how people see and understand things differently, it comes with the question whether this is a plausible undertaking without considering the actual reality as well (Englund, 1997). However, even if this is a concern, it is always possible to question the theory of a study. Moreover, phenomenography is frequently used in studies where the interest lies in the educational field (Englund, 1997).

## 5 Result

In accordance with phenomenography, the results of the interviews are divided into four categories found, regarding cross-curricular collaboration: Time, structure, creating context and collegial collaboration.

## 5.1 Time

All of the teachers discussed time, and how it is either a challenge or a benefit when working in a collaborative manner. They discussed time from two different perspectives. The first aspect is time and the teachers' workload and the challenge for the teacher to make ends meet, schedule-wise. The second aspect is time and the amount given to the subject of English in a project.

### 5.1.1 Time and workload

Two of the teachers in the study, Alva and Fredrik, did not seem to think that time was a decisive factor for a cross-curricular project. Fredrik did not think that he had to change his practice at all when adopting a collaborative project and states that "I don't know if I'm experiencing any difference directly, no I don't think so. If this way of working is practiced in the group you're working with it's no real difference if you ask me"<sup>1</sup>. Whilst Alva actually thought that she saved time. When asked about this she said:

Some teachers talk about what they will do the next lesson. That is never a problem for me because I always know what I am going to do the following lesson since my lessons are a part of a context all the time. I do not have one lesson about one thing. It can happen occasionally. But sometimes the technology teachers might want to start a project in a couple of weeks, then I have a couple of weeks to prepare for this. I usually do something with the students that is adjacent to what we will do then, I can lay the foundation for that project. And that is something that I also term cross-curricular collaboration.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, there are teachers who have the opposite opinion about time and cross-curricular collaboration. Leo, who is a teacher at the same school as Alva, talks about the workload a

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<sup>1</sup> Author's own translation of: Jag vet inte om jag upplever det som någon större skillnad direkt, nej det tror jag inte. Finns det här sättet att jobba i arbetslaget så är det ingen större skillnad tycker inte jag.

<sup>2</sup> Author's own translation of: Ja, en del lärare pratar ju om "ja vad ska jag göra den här lektionen?", det är ju aldrig något problem för mig för jag vet ju alltid vad jag ska göra följande lektion eftersom mina lektioner ingår i ett sammanhang hela tiden. Det är inte så att jag har en enstaka lektion om något. Det händer nästan aldrig. Det kan vara något enstaka tillfälle. Men annars så är det ju så att ibland så vill kanske tekniklärarna köra något lite längre fram och så har jag några veckor inför detta. Och då kan jag ju köra något som angränsar själv, så att jag liksom bäddar vägen för det projektet. Och det kallar jag också ämnesintegrering.

teacher has to carry when managing a cooperative project, he says that: “You have to find the time for planning a project. That is what I have experienced, that it takes its toll on you, it does. You have to cope, it is important.”<sup>3</sup>. Olof has a similar thought about how time consuming it is, he is however very positive towards a collaborative way of working but on the question of drawbacks he explains that the biggest one is:

The workload for the teachers. Regardless of all changes. If you do not work as you usually do you will have to add more time. Much more time which you need for planning and coordination. You need more meetings in order to get started. What we do now is that we reuse old projects that worked well last time we undertook them, however, in a much smaller scale.<sup>4</sup>

The workload, which Olof is talking about, is synonymous with time or is at least referred to as the same problem in the discussion and has to do with the same problem in all the interviews. The teachers use either workload or time interchangeably when they talk about how much they have to do and how little time they have to do it. Furthermore, when Olof is asked about why he and his colleagues do not work more with cross-curricular projects he, inter alia, says that: “We were very enthusiastic when we started and we worked very much too much. And after a while one starts to realise that it is enough if one works full-time.”<sup>5</sup> Olof still thinks that cross-curricular collaboration is very beneficial for him and his students even though it takes up more of his time. On the question of whether he would like to work more with cross-curricular projects he says: “I really enjoy working like this. [...] I sincerely think that it is valuable.”<sup>6</sup> Moa, who does not have many successful encounters with cross-curricular collaboration, also talks about time and the importance of getting a chance to prepare and discuss common goals for projects: “It is because we do not have the time to sit

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s own translation of: Ja, men så har väl jag upplevt det, att det tar lite på krafterna, det gör det. Man ska mäka med, det är viktigt.

<sup>4</sup> Author’s own translation of: Arbetsinsatsen för lärare. Alltså oavsett, alla förändringar. Om man inte gör som man brukar göra, så får man lägga lite mer tid. Eller mycket mera tid som man behöver för att planera eller samordna. Och fler möten för att komma till skott. Vad som hänt nu är ju att vi återanvänder en del gamla projekt som funkade då, fast i betydligt mindre omfattning.

<sup>5</sup> Author’s own translation of: Vi var väldigt entusiastiska när vi drog igång och vi jobbade väldigt mycket för mycket. Och sen efter ett tag tycker man att det räcker med att jobba heltid.

<sup>6</sup> Author’s own translation of: Jag jobbar jättegärna med det. [...] Jag tycker verkligen att det är värdefullt.

down and talk about it (the projects) and we do not have a common goal.”<sup>7</sup> Moa explains that if you do not have enough time to plan the projects, they will probably not be very successful. On the question of what her expectations was of a current project that they worked with at the time of the interview, she said:

Yes, this is a part of the problem, we haven't really collaborated or defined it. A quick 'mash up' of "ok we'll do this" and then everyone gets to figure it out the best way possible on their own. As I said before, our goal was to help the students, decrease their workload, but we do not have anything substantial more than "this theme". I'm sure that we all have different goals as well. Because we haven't talked about it enough.<sup>8</sup>

Similar thoughts come from Karl who is a teacher at the same school as Moa. He is also talking about time to plan and discuss projects, and, to make it work according to the schedule.

Well, the hardest part is to get the time to plan a project so that you actually can do it and the other thing has to do with the schedule and the organisation. [...] That is the absolute hardest part, that the workload aside [from the project] is so high that you know that "well I have my plan from last year, I'll just go with that one" but if I want to do a cross-curricular project, then there are eight hours extra.<sup>9</sup>

As shown in the quotes, some teachers think that time is a big problem when facing a cross-curricular project, whereas one teacher, Alva, actually thinks the opposite, that it saves time. Fredrik does not think that he has to change his way of working at all if he does a project or

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<sup>7</sup> Author's own translation of: Det är mycket för att vi inte har tid att sitta och prata om det och vi inte riktigt har samma mål allihop.

<sup>8</sup> Author's own translation of: Ja, det här har vi ju inte arbetat ihop eller definierat, det är en del av problemet. Ett sånt här snabbt hopkok "det här gör vi" och så får alla lösa det på bästa sätt på egen hand. Som sagt, målet var att underlätta för eleverna, minska arbetsbördan, men vi har liksom inget konkret mer än att "det här är temat". Vi har också säkert olika mål med det allihop. För vi pratar inte om det tillräckligt mycket.

<sup>9</sup> Author's own translation of: Alltså det svåraste är ju det att få tid till planering för att man faktiskt ska kunna göra det och det andra är rent schemamässigt och organisationsmässigt. [...] Det är det som är det absolut svåraste och liksom att arbetsbelastningen i övrigt är så hög att man vet att "ja men jag har min planering från förra året, jag kan köra på den" men om jag vill göra ett samarbete så är det liksom åtta arbetstimmar extra.

not. However, it is something to consider since all of them, except Fredrik, think that their way of working changes in some way when cooperating with other teachers.

### 5.1.2 Time and the subject of English

Another aspect of time that the teachers in the study bring up is that language teachers sometimes give time in projects, but do not necessarily receive any in return. This can be a problem if you do not have a clear understanding with your colleagues about how the project will develop. Fredrik, who did not think that time was that important a factor, explains that he usually does not give away all of his lessons to a project because that impedes the English learning.

Generally I feel that when English is a part [of a project] you might not want to let all of your lessons be a part completely, because the time spent working in English is not always continuous. To some extent you get that back later on of course, so it is useful that English is a part of it.<sup>10</sup>

Fredrik also discusses what can happen if you do not get the time that is needed to include all of the students. Some students can avoid English if a collaborative work is undertaken, hence, it is important, according to Fredrik, to not let all the English lessons go to the project. He says,

[...] it is easier for some [students] to hide [in a project]. Foremost, it tends to be the students where English is not their strongest subject. The strongest students then gladly take over and get the work done [in English] and then the students that struggle can focus on other things.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Author's own translation of: Men jag kan känna lite så att generellt så kan jag känna att är engelska en del [av ett projekt] så kan det vara så att man inte vill släppa alla lektioner fullt ut, för det blir inte alltid jättemycket gjort på engelska kontinuerligt sådär. Sen till viss del så får man ju tillbaka det sen då, så det är ju nyttigt att engelska är med en del.

<sup>11</sup> Author's own translation of: [...] vissa [elever] har lätt att gömma sig undan [i ett projekt] lite då. Framförallt tenderar det ju att vara de som inte är de starkaste i engelska heller då. Det är de starkaste som gärna tar över och gör jobbet [på engelska] och så fokuserar de som har det lite svårare på annat då.

Olof does not really think that the consideration Fredrik has really matters. He (Olof) sees a problem in that the focus on English within a project sometimes is substandard. Olof acknowledges the problem but thinks that the benefits still far exceed the drawbacks and on the question if there is a risk that English does not get the focus it requires he answers:

Yes, of course there is a risk. My experience is that language maybe contributes with time and not that much content. That you as a teacher offer time. Still, I think that it [English] is a subject of skill, it is the skills that are supposed to be trained. If you then read corporate economy content in English, or if you read anything else in English, it does not matter really, in my opinion. If you are a subject-content-fundamentalist you might think that you do not have enough time to your own content. Strong verbs or grammatical presentations and such, possibly. [...] Most often [the problem is] that you offer too much time. But for me that has never been a problem really. Although I've heard some whining.<sup>12</sup>

Alva, who works with collaborative projects all the time, thinks that it can be an unfair distribution of work when working together with colleagues. However, she still thinks that it is worth it because it makes her job much more fun and she believes that if you do not work together with other subjects you do not follow up to the demands set on you as a teacher. She explains that: “[...] if you do not work with cross-curricular projects I do not think that you can reach the goals [of the courses]. That is how far it goes for me.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, when discussing drawbacks she describes that:

There are problems. That can be in the shape of unequal conditions. For example I always have a whole class. [...] If I am supposed to handle 31 writing assignments all the time in my subjects whereas my colleagues only handle 3 or 15 tops it is a very big difference in

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<sup>12</sup> Author's own translation of: Ja, det finns ju en risk med det. Min erfarenhet är att språk kanske bidrar mer med tid och inte så mycket innehåll. Att man som språklärare bjuder på tid. Samtidigt tänker jag att det är ju ett färdighetsämne, det är ju färdigheterna som ska tränas. Om du då läser företagsekonomiinnehåll på engelska eller om du läser något annat på engelska så spelar det ju mindre roll kan jag tycka. Om man är ämnesfundamentalist så tycker man nog att man inte hinner med sitt innehåll. Starka verb eller grammatiska genomgångar och sådär, möjligen. [...] Oftast så är det [problemet] att man bidrar med tid. Men för mig har det aldrig varit något bekymmer faktiskt. Men jag har hört att det knorrats.

<sup>13</sup> Author's own translation of: [...] om man inte ämnesintegrerar så tycker inte jag att man kan nå målen [i kurserna]. Så långt går det för min del.

workload. [...] I have been stubborn and have not cared about that since I think that the benefits still exceeds [the drawbacks] and I think that my job as a teacher becomes so much better, but it is an obstacle. A difficulty.<sup>14</sup>

Karl, who is a teacher in social science and English, thinks that cross-curricular projects are a good way of saving time for himself and that it gives the students a chance to hit two birds with one stone. He thinks that it is good if you can limit the occasions of examinations since he believes that this helps the students. When asked about whether or not he enjoys cross-curricular projects he answers that:

Well, I appreciate mixing [my subjects] with myself, which I appreciate. I appreciate getting that resource in time, which it implies. [...] The more you can work with one thing in English and at the same time work with it in social science, right there I cut one examination. I believe that is the biggest benefit, you can measure it, you just count the number of examinations, the students feel it and it helps to relieve the stress. [...] It is also fun for the students when something happens that is different from their normal way of working.<sup>15</sup>

## 5.2 Structure

When discussing structure the respondents in the study generally talked about two different aspects. They discussed the structure of the schools they worked in, had worked in, or the structure of schools which their colleagues worked in. However, they also talked about how to structure a cross-curricular project and what they thought should be done and what one should avoid. These two features of structure are discussed below.

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<sup>14</sup> Author's own translation of: Det finns problem. Och det kan vara i form av ojämlika villkor. Jag har ju alltid helklass till exempel. [...] Ska jag hantera då 31 skrivuppgifter hela tiden i mina ämnen och de ska hantera 3 eller 15 högst så blir det väldigt olika arbetsböda. [...] Jag har ju varit envis och liksom struntat i det för jag har tyckt att fördelarna uppväger [nackdelarna] och jag tycker att mitt lärarjobb blir så mycket bättre, men det är ju ett hinder. En svårighet.

<sup>15</sup> Author's own translation of: Alltså, jag uppskattar att blanda [mina egna ämnen] med mig själv, det uppskattar jag. Jag uppskattar också att liksom få den resursen i tid som det innebär. [...] Ju mer du kan arbeta med en sak i engelskan och samtidigt i samhällskunskap, där kapade jag ju en examination då. Det är ju den största fördelen, den är mätbar, du kan bara räkna antalet examinationer, den är kännbar för eleverna och den har liksom stor effekt i att minska stressen. [...] Det är också kul för eleverna när något händer som inte är precis som de brukar arbeta.



## 5.2.1 The structure of schools

To begin with, the school in which one works must allow teachers to take part in cross-curricular projects and the school must also provide a structure that allows for the teachers to plan a solid project. To clarify, Leo says: “You have to get the time to plan the project. It is very important that it is a good preparatory work, otherwise no one knows what to do and it all fails, that’s that.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the school’s structure is an important aspect since it ties the teachers to certain schedules and different pedagogical approaches. Alva is somewhat disappointed in her school’s approach when it comes to English and her very positive way of viewing cooperative projects. Nevertheless, she tries to be positive and influence the course setup. She says:

You have to try to optimise so that English 6 for example, is adjacent to history and social science, that would have been perfect. That’s not always the case, then you have to try and integrate them anyway [...] you have to be pragmatic. In the long run you can try to affect the course setup so that you optimise after the projects and areas you want to work with.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes your and the school’s pedagogical approaches might differ, this can be a problem, argues Alva, if it diminishes your chances of developing what you as a teacher think is a good teacher practice. She claims that some subjects get elevated higher in a sort of hierarchal system, which is a problem when one works with cross-curricular projects. She explains: “If the school administration has the view that English and Swedish [are subjects] which you can just put anywhere, just pack [into the schedule], while you in for example technology must be in smaller groups, then it is a drawback [...]”<sup>18</sup> She continues and explains her view on subject independence: “Subjects are a construction for a schedule and an assessment practice

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<sup>16</sup> Author’s own translation of: Man måste få tid att planera projekten. Det måste verkligen vara ett bra förarbete, för annars så vet varken vi eller eleverna vad man ska göra och så blir det pannkaka, så är det.

<sup>17</sup> Author’s own translation of: Man får försöka optimera så att till exempel engelska 6 ligger gentemot historia och samhällskunskap. Det hade ju varit perfekt. Nu gör det ju inte det alltid, då får man ju jobba integrerat med dem ändå [...] man får ju vara pragmatisk. På lång sikt så kan man försöka att vara med och påverka kursupplägget så att man optimerar efter de projekt och arbetsområden an vill syssla med.

<sup>18</sup> Author’s own translation of: Om skolledningen har kunskapssynen att engelska och svenska [är ämnen som] bara stoppas in, bara korvmata [in i schemat], medan i till exempel teknik måste man vara i mindre grupper, då är det ett problem.

but when it comes to work there are no subjects, according to me, that can stand on their own. I mean English is nothing without history, social science, well all sorts of subjects.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the structure of the school can also affect the teachers’ practice in an even more direct way. Karl and Moa, who work at the same school, talk about how some cooperative projects are forced on them without an elaborate plan. Karl describes their situation as follows: “I like it when the projects are small, teacher-to-teacher. But in this program we work with two themes during the student’s first year. It is decided by the school. Sometimes I feel that it is very forced.”<sup>20</sup> Moa talks about the same thing: “[one of the themes] has not been amazing, not for the sake of the English course anyway. [...] I don't think it should be an end in itself [to work in cross-curricular projects].”<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, Fredrik explains that a very important factor is that you work in teams of different subjects (Sw. arbetslag). Then, he claims, it becomes natural to work together: “I have always worked in teams, so it is a natural contact area with all [the other teachers] who have the same classes, then collaboration comes naturally.”<sup>22</sup>

## 5.2.2 The structure of projects

The teachers in the study all talk about the importance of how a project is created and the thoughts behind it. Karl, Fredrik and Olof all talk about how projects often encompass group work, something which can be both negative and positive. The negative aspect of group work is especially that the teachers do not get a solid foundation for assessment. Karl explained his point of view as follows: “[Projects carry] drawbacks. With group work, with difficulty to measure the students individually. I always want to have something individually.”<sup>23</sup> Another

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<sup>19</sup> Author’s own translation of: Ämnen är en konstruktion för ett schema och för en betygssättning men annars arbetsmässigt så finns det inget ämne, anser jag, som klarar sig självt. Jag menar engelska är ju ingenting utan historia, samhällskunskap, alltså alla möjliga ämnen.

<sup>20</sup> Author’s own translation of: Jag gillar när projekten är små, lärare till lärare liksom. Men på det här programmet jobbar vi med två teman under årskurs ett. Det är bestämt på skolan. De tycker jag ibland känns konstlade [...].

<sup>21</sup> Author’s own translation of: [ett av temana] har inte varit fantastiskt just för engelskans skull. [...] jag tycker inte att det ska vara ett självändamål [att jobba ämnesöverskridande].

<sup>22</sup> Author’s own translation of: Jag har ju jobbat i arbetslag hela tiden sådär, så man har ju en naturlig kontaktyta med alla andra [lärare] som har samma klasser, så det har kommit naturligt i mångt och mycket.

<sup>23</sup> Author’s own translation of: [Projekt medför] nackdelar. Med grupparbeten, med svårighet att mäta individuella prestationer. Jag vill ju ändå alltid ha något individuellt.

problem with group work is that it is sometimes hard to identify if the pupils actually do what they should be doing in English, not just for assessment but for their general learning and training in English. Fredrik explained what he meant:

it is easier for some [students] to hide [in a project]. Foremost, it tends to be the students where English is not their strongest subject. The strongest students then gladly take over and get the work done [in English] and then the students that struggle can focus on other things. [...] It is also hard since the group should deal with a situation and take care of and allot [different assignments]. Of course you have to try to remind them that English is a part of the project and that everyone should use it [English], but it is hard.<sup>24</sup>

Olof also discusses this specific aspect of cross-curricular collaboration, but he also considers the fact that you should maybe not assess everything the students do. They should be allowed to practice their skills as well, hence, he does not think that group work is such a bad way to go about when organizing a project. He said:

A problem I have experienced is that, for example when they [the students] write reports, they are supposed to write in groups, and in that case I do not have any ground for assessment for the individual. However, I believe that you should not assess everything, they should practice as well.<sup>25</sup>

Alva on the other hand, thinks that it is not necessarily group work that is best for cross-curricular projects. She believes that all sorts of different varieties of constructing a project works, as long as you have a clear-cut idea of what you want to achieve with it. On the question of how a project is constructed she answered: "It can be very different. It can be

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<sup>24</sup> Author's own translation of: [...] vissa [elever] har lätt att gömma sig undan [i ett projekt] lite då. Framförallt tenderar det ju att vara de som inte är de starkaste i engelska heller då. Det är de starkaste som gärna tar över och gör jobbet [på engelska] och så fokuserar de som har det lite svårare på annat då. [...] Alltså, någonstans blir det ju svårt också för att det handlar om att de som grupp också då ska handskas med en situation och ta hand om och fördela [uppgifter]. Men det är klart att man får försöka vara med och pusha och påminna om att engelska är en del av arbetet och att alla sak använda sig av det [engelska], men det är svårt.

<sup>25</sup> Author's own translation of: Ett problem som jag har upplevt, det är att de [elverna] ibland, till exempel vid rapportskrivning, ska skriva i grupp, och då har ju jag inget bedömningsunderlag för individen. Men å andra sidan kan jag tänka att man ska ju inte bedöma allt utan man ska ju träna också.

everything from covering similar things at the same time to actually designing common assignments and common lessons.”<sup>26</sup>

### 5.3 Creating context

The first thing all of the teachers said, when asked about what expectations one might have of a cross-curricular project, was a wish to let the students get a more holistic view of their education. Creating context is, hence, something that is a top priority when engaging in projects where different subjects are involved. As mentioned, all of the teachers talked about this but the most vivid explanation is the one given by Alva. She said:

That students will get a holistic and a more transparent contextual image since different parts of knowledge come to play and work together, different competences work with the same thing with the students. They get my competence and my colleague’s competence, you tackle the problems from so many different directions. You get more dimensions instead of a flat picture. It gets more dynamical and you get more dimensions, simply put.<sup>27</sup>

Moa explains with an example from her own practice how much easier it gets when collaboration works and different teachers help creating context:

what I often see in English is that, what they [the students] are so good at in Swedish, somehow that does not apply in English. Suddenly they do not know how to divide into paragraphs, as if all that knowledge disappears. [...] It is very good to be able to answer the question “Is it the same as in Swedish? Are we supposed to do as we do in Swedish? Is this also alliteration?” “Yes, it is.” It is very valuable to collaborate in situations like that.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Author’s own translation of: Det kan se väldigt olika ut. Det kan vara alltifrån att vi bara håller på med samma saker ungefär samtidigt till att vi faktiskt utformar gemensamma uppgifter och gemensamma lektioner.

<sup>27</sup> Author’s own translation of: Att eleverna ska få en holistisk och tydligare sammanhangsbild eftersom att då kommer olika kunskapsdelar in och samverkar, olika kompetenser jobbar med samma saker med eleverna. Så de får min kompetens och min kollegas kompetens, man angriper problemen från så många olika håll. Det blir fler dimensioner istället för en platt bild. Det blir mer dynamiskt och fler dimensioner helt enkelt.

<sup>28</sup> Author’s own translation of: det som jag ofta ser i engelskan är ju det att allt det som de är så bra på i svenskan, det är på något sätt som att det inte gäller i engelska. Plötsligt kan de inte styckesindelning, det är på något sätt som att allt det där försvinner. [...] Det är väldigt bra att kunna svara på frågan ”ja men är det

Alva sees another problem that has to do with the educational structure. Since she frequently works with cross-curricular projects it is paramount for her to help the students see that lessons with a cross-curricular theme is as important as a ‘normal’ English lesson. Some students are very fixed with the idea of one subject per lesson. She says:

There are students that have a problem with letting go of the subject structure. Students that are so familiar with the concept of subject independence and waterproof shots between the subjects. They are also used to having a course book to follow. Now it was a long time ago but sometimes there have been those who have asked, “when is the real English starting?” [...] You have to work with epistemology and methods with those students. For students it is not always obvious, what is obvious for me must also be clarified for the students.<sup>29</sup>

## 5.4 Collegial collaboration

When discussing cross-curricular collaboration, the relations between colleagues are a paramount factor and if a project is going to be smooth and successful the collegial collaboration is important. During the interviews, two factors that are connected to collegial collaboration were put forth by the teachers: a common pedagogical perspective and an ambition and motivation to incorporate cross-curricular teaching in one’s practice.

### 5.4.1 A common pedagogical perspective

Some of the teachers discuss their view on learning, pedagogics and didactics in comparison to their colleagues’. According to the teachers, this is a watershed that can devastate a cross-curricular project. Karl puts it as follows: “A problem that I do not hear that much about is that you have different interpretations, even in what seems to be very similar in the core

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som i svenskan? Ska vi göra som i svenskan? Är det här också allitteration?” ”Ja, det är det.” Det är jättevärdefullt att samarbeta i såna situationer.

<sup>29</sup> Author’s own translation of: Det finns elever som har svårt att släppa den här ämnesstrukturen. Elever som är så invanda i att det är ämne för ämne och vattentäta skott mellan ämnena. Också invanda med att man ska ha en lärobok att följa. Nu var det längesen men det har ibland varit så att de har frågat ”när ska vi börja med den riktiga engelskan?” [...] Man måste jobba mer med kunskapssyn och metod för dessa elever. För elever är det inte alltid självklart, det som är självklart för mig det måste också tydliggöras för dessa elever.

content, it has a slightly different meaning within the subject communities.”<sup>30</sup> What Karl means is that teachers of different subjects might not have the same goal with a common assignment, which will develop into a problem if you do not talk about it beforehand. Olof is on the same track and talks about a pedagogical consensus when asked about preconditions for a cross-curricular endeavour: “A pedagogical consensus. That you are in agreement of where you are heading.”<sup>31</sup> Moa explains further, and says that a successful collaboration is not depending on certain subjects, but that the chemistry between the engaged teachers is good and that you have access to those colleagues in a natural way:

My colleague here, he has a class in Swedish that I have in English, and we collaborate. This is what I prefer, because we know each other so well, we have known each other for 18 years and have continuously collaborated in a natural way, we discuss to and fro about what suits the class at the moment. [...] But [cross-curricular collaboration] works in most subjects. But for me it all comes down to the person, who teaches what and if that collaboration works.<sup>32</sup>

Olof agrees with this and does not see any problem with any subject really. He also mentions that it has more to do with the specific teacher rather than the subject he or she teaches: “We have always had a problem with incorporating math. But I do not know if it has to do with the individual [teacher] or the subject. [...] Actually, math and English should work problem-free.”<sup>33</sup> Alva also argues that it is vital that you and your colleagues have a common epistemological approach: “My epistemological approach is that subjects are a part of a

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<sup>30</sup> Author’s own translation of: Ett problem som jag inte hör att det pratas om så mycket, men just att man har lite olika tolkning, även i det som ser väldigt likt ut i det centrala innehållet, att det har olika innebörd på grund av ämnessfären liksom.

<sup>31</sup> Author’s own translation of: En pedagogisk samsyn. Att man är överens om var man vill.

<sup>32</sup> Author’s own translation of: Min kollega här, han har en klass i svenska som jag har i engelska, och vi samarbetar. Det är det här som jag föredrar, för vi känner varandra så väl, vi har känt varandra i 18 år och har liksom ett kontinuerligt och naturligt samarbete, vi pratar fram och tillbaka om vad som passar bra i klassen här och nu. [...] Men [ämnesöverskridande samarbete] fungerar i de flesta ämnen. Men för mig handlar det ytterst om personen, vem som undervisar i vilket ämne och om det samarbetet fungerar.

<sup>33</sup> Author’s translation of: Matten har vi alltid haft svårt att få med. Men jag vet inte om det beror på individen eller om det beror på ämnet. [...] Så egentligen, matte och engelska skulle ju vara som klippt och skuret.

whole. [...] I do realise that there are people who do not want to see this. But that is the way of things.”<sup>34</sup>

### 5.4.2 Ambition to change

The other factor is an ambition amongst the college of teachers that are supposed to engage in the enterprise. If there is no ambition, the project is doomed to fail before it even began. The teachers must be prepared to change their way of working in order to fully commit to the task that is a cross-curricular project. Olof says: “It is hard if you do not have the eagerness. We were very enthusiastic when we began [...]”<sup>35</sup> Leo also talks about the willingness and that it can be diminished if there are too many projects going on at the same time: “It has been really tough for those to be part of a project here and then to be part in another project as well. It has to proceed from the fact that the teacher can manage to be a part of this plan. The will has to be there so that it is not forced on you. That is never good.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, there is a difference between teachers having the ambition to change their practice for a project and their actual ambition with the project. Alva describes it as follows:

I always have the possibility, I think, and more interest in cooperation. Because I am ready to and willing to add the extra time it takes in order for it [the project] to be successful. We have different ambitions and that is one of the obstacles, that you have different levels of ambition. [...] What I can feel is that I often have rather high ambitions whilst my colleagues not always do. [...] Then you have to handle that [situation].<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Author’s own translation of: Min kunskapssyn är ju sån att ämnen ingår i en helhet. [...] Sen inser jag ju att det finns personer som inte vill se detta. Så är det ju bara.

<sup>35</sup> Author’s own translation of: Det är svårt om det inte riktigt finns den viljan. Vi var väldigt entusiastiska när vi drog igång [...].

<sup>36</sup> Author’s own translation of: Det har varit väldigt tungt för dem att vara med i ett projekt här och sen vara med i ett annat där. Så det måste ju vara utifrån att man som pedagog orkar och mäktar med detta och vara med i planeringen. Viljan ska ju finnas där så att det inte känns som ett tvång. Det är aldrig bra.

<sup>37</sup> Author’s own translation of: Jag har ju alltid mer möjlighet, tycker jag, och mer intresse av att verkligen samarbeta. För jag är beredd på och vill lägga tid på att det verkligen ska bli bra. Vi har lite olika ambitioner och det är ett utav hindren, att man har olika ambitionsnivå. [...] Det som jag kan tycka själv då, det är ju att jag ofta kanske har lite höga ambitioner men mina kollegor svarar kanske inte alltid upp mot det [...]. Då får man hantera det.

## 6 Discussion

The discussion is divided in three headings, each heading aims to discuss one of the three research questions: Benefits, drawbacks and preconditions of cross-curricular collaboration from EFL teachers' perspectives. Even though the study is small, there are some pedagogical implications to consider. Furthermore, it is vital to state that the study considers a local Swedish context, hence, the discussion may not be generalizable for a broader EFL teacher population. However, it could provide some guidelines for how EFL teachers think and act in reference to cross-curricular projects.

### 6.1 Benefits

The main benefit that crystallized in this study is the way cross-curricular projects can help the students to see the larger picture and to get a better perspective on different subject areas. Much the same way as Skolverket (2011) describes that the teacher in practice should help students develop. There seems to be a consensus amongst the teachers that collaborative projects with different subjects involved are good for the students and that it gives them a better chance at understanding the world from different perspectives, much according to what Rudhe (1996) argues. To be able to see context and not just restricted areas of knowledge is critical since this is how the world outside of the school works. Also, if one can make students see the benefits of having different perspectives and different competences working in unison, this will hopefully help them a lot in their struggle for lifelong learning. They also get to realise that there is always another perspective and that the world is not black and white.

Moreover, both the students and the teachers can hopefully appreciate cross-curricular projects and it might also help motivate students and teachers. Simply put, it is, often, fun if planned and carried out successfully. This is not something to be taken easily, if the education is not joyful you definitely run the risk of the students losing interest and their learning could be impeded, as a result.

### 6.2 Drawbacks

One problem that surfaced during the interviews was that if you try to manage too many, or just two, projects at the same time it might take its toll on you. In the result one can find that it is very important that the teacher must be able to manage a project and that it takes a lot of



time. As Krantz and Persson (2001) argue, collaborative work must not be too extensive, you then run the risk of not doing a good job and that is precisely what was found in this study.

Also, it is important that a cross-curricular project is not forced on the teachers but rather developed by the teachers; you have to want to do it. This was found by Hargreaves (1994) and is also evident in the study at hand. If the teachers feel that it is not their project it is possible, or even probable, that the success rate decreases dramatically.

A third drawback found, is that projects often are accompanied by group work. Something which is good at times, but, some teachers in the study seem to think that this decreases their possibility to assess the students individually. Hence, it might be good to not see cross-curricular collaboration projects as something that per definition must be carried out with group work as the work structure. Alva claims that it is not necessarily so that cross-curricular projects must be in pairs or group based.

On a final note, it is obvious that the teachers that see most difficulties with projects of a collaborative nature are the ones who have a limited experience. Hence, another drawback can be added, that if you have not cooperated to a wider extent you need to get used to it in order to appreciate it. Much like how one manages a craft of some sort, cross-curricular collaboration must also be practiced, re-organised and practiced again before one can reap the benefits from it.

### 6.3 Preconditions

All of the teachers in the study can see benefits and drawbacks with cross-curricular work. In order to avoid the drawbacks it is clear that some preconditions are essential for projects of this kind to be prosperous.

As was found by Lo and Lo (2014) and Creese (2010) is also consolidated by this study, namely, that one must be in agreement on the issue of how to split the time and focus between the subjects the project will consist of. It seems obvious, but almost all of the teachers talked about this. It is, hence, essential that all teachers involved have the same idea about when and how their subject will add to the project. It might be so, that not every subject gets exactly the same amount of focus, it is, however, necessary that the teachers and students know this. Also on the subject of teachers and their subjects, it seems to be imperative that they are seen as equals and even though one subject might be more prominent in a project it is not reflected in the teacher's competence. Similar to Davison's (2008) and Hargreaves's (1994) findings the teachers in the study state that different teachers have different strengths,

and in a cross-curricular project this is part of what makes it a thriving enterprise. Finally, on the subject of teachers, it is found that what could be a crucial factor for a successful project is the teachers' willingness to collaborate. Precisely as Hargreaves (1994) and Roth and Tobin (2007) stipulate, this study also found it an important factor, that teachers in a project feel that they have the time and the will to be fully committed to the project and that they also are ready to change their normal practice if necessary.

It is, however, also important that the schools, as well as the teachers, have a willingness to experiment and try different projects. The structure on the school where the teachers work is therefore a vital part in the machinery that is cross-curricular collaboration projects. Many of the teachers mention that the structure in which they have their daily practice does not allow for them to plan and carry out projects of any greater size. This is also mentioned by Hargreaves (1994) and even if it is a study carried out some twenty years ago, it still carries weight, since its findings appear to be the same as in this study.

Finally, it seems like projects across the curriculum could benefit from that teachers work in teams of different subjects. A lot of schools already have this structure and in order to give the teachers a natural setting to meet and plan projects this is, according to this study, the most favourable organisation. This is also supported by Swedish research in the form of Sandström's (2005) study.

## **7 Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to shed some light on the different views EFL teachers might have on cross-curricular collaboration. The study was, therefore, based on phenomenography and this helped to deduct different categories, which in turn were illustrated by quotes from the study. Four different categories were found; time, structure, creating context, and collegial collaboration. Each category carries pros, cons and preconditions that, according to this study, are vital factors to consider when facing a cross-curricular collaboration project.

It is clear, that the study is very close to the findings of previous research. Cross-curricular collaboration has its benefits and its drawbacks but above all it does come with numerous preconditions in order to be something that is worth the time and effort it seems to need. EFL teachers in Sweden must carry this in mind when approaching a project. English as a subject of importance must be accounted for in the project, the teachers must be able to manage it and have a pedagogical structure in their work environment that enables for projects to be carried out.

Like Trent (2010) argues, a larger quantitative study would be good, in order to give the field a solid frame of reference. However, for future research it would also be interesting to see an empirical study on the effects of cross-curricular collaboration and its effect on language learning. This can be illustrated with a quote from one of the interviews: “I do not, empirically, know if cross-curricular projects like this actually help the students.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Author’s own translation of: Jag vet inte rent empiriskt om det faktiskt hjälper eleverna att arbeta med ämnesöverskridande projekt.

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# Appendix A

## Intervju om ämnesöverskridande arbete

Du är helt anonym i den här studien och fingerade namn kommer att användas. Ingen information om skola eller kommun kommer att ingå i studien. Du får när som helst välja att avbryta intervjun och välja att inte vara med. När intervjun är transkriberad kommer du att få den mailad och återigen välja om den får användas eller inte (eller om du har några andra kommentarer som du vill framföra).

Om du vill ha kontakt med mig efter intervjun kan du maila mig på xxx@gmail.com.

Här nedan följer de huvudfrågor intervjun kommer att behandla.

### Intervjuguide

- Hur skulle du definiera ämnesöverskridande projekt/arbete?
- Har du tidigare arbetat med ämnesöverskridande projekt där engelska ingått?
- Vad har du för förväntningar som lärare i engelska inför ett ämnesöverskridande arbete/projekt?
- Vilka för- och nackdelar ser du med ämnesöverskridande arbete/projekt?
- Finns det några ämneskombinationer som lämpar sig särskilt bra för just engelska?
- Vilka förutsättningar anser du krävs för att ett ämnesöverskridande arbete/projekt ska fungera?