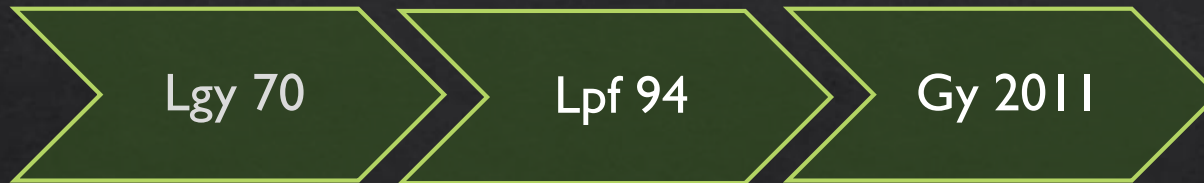


# Vocational English

The gap between policy and practice

# A study in two parts

- Policy analysis of the three latest Swedish curricula



- Interviews with English teachers in the Building and construction programme

|            | Olivia    | Daniel     | Emma       | Camilla    | Monica     | Alice       |
|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Age        | 26-30     | 36-40      | 36-40      | 51-55      | 51-55      | 51-55       |
| Experience | 0-3 years | 8-11 years | 8-11 years | 8-11 years | 8-11 years | 16-19 years |

Vocational English in Policy and Practice

Katarina Lindahl

Licentiate thesis 2015



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND  
SPECIAL EDUCATION

<https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/38413>

# Defining “Vocational English”

**CLIL**

Content and Language  
Integrated Learning

**ESP**

English for Specific  
Purposes

**VOLL**

Vocationally Oriented  
Language Learning

**Vocational English**

# The teachers' perceptions of Vocational English

- Learning vocational vocabulary
- Describing student's work
- Giving instructions (orally, but also in writing)
- Reading instructions (or listening to instructions)
- Using one assignment to reach several goals
  - English + another foundation subject
  - English + the vocational subjects
- Connecting different subjects to each other

# Horizontal and vertical discourse

## Horizontal discourse

- Everyday, common-sense knowledge
- Context dependent and local
- Likely to be oral

Vocational  
vocabulary

Communication  
in the workshop

## Vertical discourse

- Theoretical, abstract knowledge
- School(ed) knowledge
- “Official” knowledge

Describing  
student's work

Larger projects  
(several subjects)



# GY 2011 – a new structure

## Lpf 1994

- All students studied general courses that made them eligible for higher education  
(Swedish, English, civics, history, religion, mathematics, science studies, and physical education and health)
- Both vocational and academic students studied the same courses

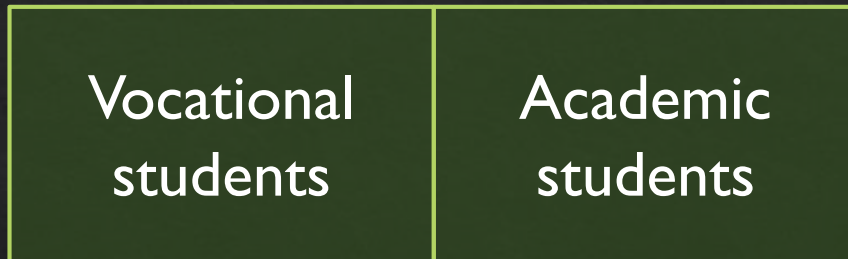
## Gy 2011

- Courses in general subjects have been reduced and replaced by vocational subjects
- Some courses have been separated (e.g., history, mathematics, and science studies)
- English remains the same course for both vocational and academic programmes

# GY 2011 – a new structure

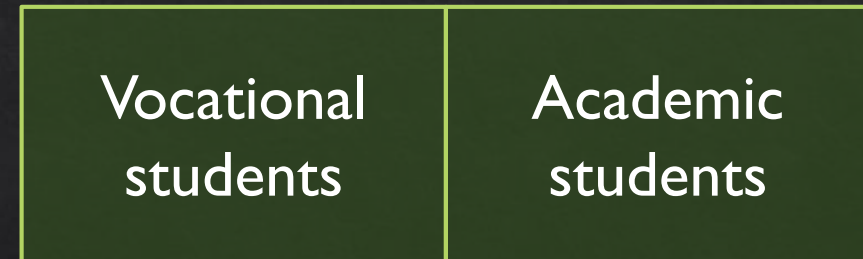
## Lpf 1994

- Weaker boundaries



## Gy 2011

- Stronger classification (Bernstein, 2000)



# Policy Enactment

- Not ~~policy implementation~~
- Policy texts are constantly struggled over
- Complex and creative process
- Policy is put *into practice*
- Teachers and students are policy makers



# Students in vocational programmes

- Perceived as unmotivated to study “theoretical” subjects
- Students are either “practical or theoretical”
- Lower demands on vocational students

“I noticed, and it fascinated me, that the majority of the students managed [the course in] English really well, some were bright, competent, so they were downright *brilliant* students.

And I wondered, ‘Excuse me, are you really in the right programme?’”

Alice

“Yes, well, I usually do about same things with everyone. But you can’t do too easy assignments for students in the natural science programme, it has to be on a higher level, because they’re higher up on the grading scale right away. You can tell that they have more prior knowledge, they are much more motivated to study.”

“On the whole, they want more and they demand more. /.../ Everyone wants an A there.”

“And the students in the Building and Construction programme don’t?”

“No, they don’t care about that. E is enough for them.”

Monica

# Themes in upper secondary policy

- The democratic foundation
- Lifelong learning

“The national school system is based on **democratic foundations**. The Education Act (2010:800) stipulates that education in the school system aims at students acquiring and developing knowledge and values. It should promote the development and learning of students, and a **lifelong desire to learn**.”

Gy 2011 ([Skolverket, 2013](#))



# Themes in upper secondary policy

- The democratic foundation
- Lifelong learning
- Internationalisation
- Individualisation

“An **international perspective** is important to be able to understand one’s own reality in a global context and in order to create international solidarity. Teaching in different subjects should /.../ prepare them for a society that will have closer cross-cultural and cross-border contacts.”

Gy 2011 ([Skolverket, 2013](#))



“No, I don’t care about them much at all. It feels like I can’t acquaint myself with all that, I do my own things instead. No, I don’t care what their diploma goals are, it’s impossible to get into that, there are too many documents anyway.”

*Daniel*

## The Diploma Goals

- Possible explanations for the gap between policy and practice

“I’m not very familiar with them. Partly because I haven’t had time to acquaint myself with them, and partly because I only teach the first grade, I haven’t actually had time to prioritise some kind of long-term solution.”

*Emma*

## The Diploma Goals

- Possible explanations for the gap between policy and practice

“It is written in the previous curriculum, isn’t it? And then it is written, I don’t remember exactly what is in the current syllabus, but there are diploma goals for every programme and they should permeate the courses somehow, shouldn’t they? I’m not quite sure how to interpret them, I have to admit.”

Alice

## The Diploma Goals

- Possible explanations for the gap between policy and practice
- The idea of “it’s in there somewhere”

# What influences teaching more than policy documents?

- Student's opinions
- Group dynamics
- Student's prior knowledge

“What students want to do”

*Emma*

“What they know how to do”

*Daniel*

“What they find exciting”

*Olivia*



# What influences teaching more than policy documents?

- Student's opinions
- Group dynamics
- Student's prior knowledge

“You can't prepare too much, you have to meet the students.”

Alice



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