

**Proposal for conference “Transitions, career learning and career management skills”**  
**Type of contribution: Paper presentation**

“The career learning curriculum

Contents, activities and promoters in Swedish compulsory schools”

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**Intent of publication:** high-quality scientific journal in the field of school-to-work transitions or career counselling (e.g. Journal of Education and Work, British Journal of Guidance and counselling)

**Keywords:** career learning, curriculum, compulsory school, Sweden

**General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework**

Young people have to make long-term career decisions at an early stage, often with very little knowledge about the terrain of upper secondary and higher education, and even less about working life. The transitions from school to work have become more extended and in many cases more risky. Simultaneously, making career choices has become harder. Internationally, so called career management skills have emerged as a curriculum content (Guiscard 2001; Gysbers 2013; Sultana 2012). In Sweden, the support for career development seems to be weaker than e.g. in the other Nordic countries, as career learning does not have a designated place in the formal curriculum; career counselling is to large extent separated from ‘ordinary teaching’. According to the national curriculum guide the whole school is responsible for giving students support for their career choices, but several evaluations (e.g. Schools Inspectorate 2013) indicate that this happens very seldom. Also the connections between school and work have tended to become weakened over time rather than the reverse. For example fewer and fewer compulsory schools offer their students work experience (*praktisk arbetslivsorientering, prao*), and also other forms of more systematic collaboration between schools and working life have vanished (SOU 2015:97). Instead an informal arena has emerged in the decentralized and market-oriented Swedish educational system with a number of actors that try to convince young people to make the ‘right’ or ‘best’ career decisions (c.f. Lidström et al. 2014; Lundahl & Nilsson 2009; Skolverket 2013). However rather little is known of the resulting *informal* curriculum of career learning and its major sources. In Sweden e.g. Daoud & Puaca maybe come closest when they analyze school as a meaning-constructing environment where young people shape and negotiate their career ideas in interaction with the organization, working methods and teaching contents in a wider sense. Our study is however more focused on contents, methods and activities that have a clear intention to influence career learning. We also find it important to consider schools’ varying profiles, catchment areas and target groups when analyzing career counselling and education (c.f. Foskett (2008).

*The aim of the paper* is to contribute to the knowledge about the informal career learning curriculum emerging in Swedish compulsory schools. The following *research questions* are central: What are the contents and activities of this curriculum? To what extent is it governed by school and formed by career counsellors, teachers and other school staff, and to what extent are external actors invited to do so? How do young people receive and value the contents and activities of the career learning curriculum? Does the curriculum and its reception vary between municipalities and regions, and, if so, how can we understand this?

The analysis of the career learning contents builds on Bernstein's (2000) curriculum theory on vertical and horizontal knowledge and pedagogical discourses – singular that are based on traditional disciplines and school subjects, regional that are mostly seen in higher professional education, and generic discourses. More recent than the two first discourses, the generic discourse has developed outside of education and has a close connection to the change of working life, and young people's employability and flexibility. Furthermore, Bernstein's concepts classification and framing are useful, as another analytical aspect concerns the extent to which career learning is integrated in or separated from other school subjects, that is how strongly or weakly classified it is. The strength of such divisions reflects power and status conditions between different knowledge contents. Also the counsellor's or teacher's control over the transmission of career knowledge, i.e. the strength of framing, is analyzed (Bernstein 2000).

### **Methods/methodology**

The paper mainly builds on an analysis of answers from two surveys with both fixed and open questions: one addressing approximately 1500 grade 9-students in three regions, and one addressing career counsellors in the same regions (the response rate is still unknown). We may also refer somewhat to our case studies in a limited number of schools, containing observations and interviews with head teachers, career counsellors, teachers and students.

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