A meso level perspective
School based writing projects in multiple subject areas in Danish upper secondary schools

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The multi subject construct

- Upper secondary reform 2005: compulsory, multi-subject coursework – specialized study projects
- Reform curricular aims
  - Preparation for higher education
  - General education/Bildung, providing the knowledge and competence necessary for students to be able to act as enlightened citizens in contemporary democratic society.
  - Both aims must be seen as background for the new positioning of writing competence as a general study competence to be addressed by all students.
Research questions and data

- What are the learning potentials in interdisciplinary “research” writing as seen from curricula and students’ viewpoints
- What are the implications of differences in demands on writing in secondary and upper secondary education.

Data

- Steering documents in secondary and upper secondary education
- Ethnographic data, two students’ writing projects in grades 9 through 12: instructional documents, student texts, student interviews.
Curricular study projects

1. **Grade 9: “Project assignment”**.
   Curricular goal: project competence. Group or individual. 1 week. Common theme, students select topic. Wide scope of product and presentation options; report not mandatory.

2. **Grade 10/11: “Danish/History assignment”**.
   Curricular goal: training of extended academic/disciplinary writing. Individual. 3 days. Students select topic within subject(s). 7-10 pages.

3. **Grade 11: “Study specialization assignment”**.
   Curricular goal: training of academic interdisciplinary writing within study specialization subjects. Individual. 3 days. 7-10 p

4. **Grade 12: “Study specialization project”**.
   Curricular goals: disciplinary “immersion/depth” and study competence as demonstrated in academic writing. Individual. 2 weeks. 15 p
A curricular gap

- The positioning of writing
  - Secondary: Writing a transparent project and process tool; extended writing one of many options which is not necessarily recommended; a wide media and genre register suggested, inviting creativity.
  - Upper secondary: Extended, academic writing a crucial aspect of general curricular aims (preparation for higher studies). Verbal language and subject dependent semiotic registers.

- The implementation of interdisciplinarity
  - Secondary: key word project. Main sources of knowledge questionnaires, interview, internet websites and personal experience. Disciplinarity regarded as tool.
  - Upper secondary: key word disciplinarity. Main sources of knowledge theoretical literature and analysis of subject specific data types. Project methodology tied to academic ‘research’ writing.
## Students’ projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9 Project assignment</th>
<th>Jens</th>
<th>Sofia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“COP 15”</td>
<td>Sampled video</td>
<td>“Young people’s leisure time”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation supported by power point</td>
<td></td>
<td>Manuscript and storyboard for video, plus brochure</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creative oral presentation, supported by power point and video sequences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 10 History - Danish ass.</td>
<td>History - “The American Revolution”</td>
<td>Danish - “Danishness”</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 p including illustrations</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 p</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 11 Biotechnology and Physics</td>
<td>“The function and application of the ELISA method of analysis.”</td>
<td>Math and Physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 p including diagrams, photos</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The trajectory of a projectile”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 12 Biotechnology and Math</td>
<td>“Population Dynamic Models”</td>
<td>Biotechnology and Danish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 p including photos, graphs and diagrams</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Chlamydia”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12 Biotechnology and Danish</td>
<td>Biotechnology and Danish</td>
<td>30 p including diagrams, tables, graphs and a photo</td>
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Jens and Sofia on gains and learning

- Jens: You know, it was just like camping at home, sitting, not getting out at all, (...) just sitting, writing, that was quite fun, actually. (020312)

- Sofia: I wanted to write about speeches because I find it exciting how you get your message out, and, you know, hide it in different layers in the text. (280212)

- Jens [on why he liked writing the math part of study specialization paper best]: I don’t know, but at any rate that was what I enjoyed most having written afterwards because it was like a victory having understood the math (14.1.13)

- Sofia: I found this article at the library which was really good about the risk of getting infantile if you suffered from Chlamydia. (…) That was a really exciting thing, and not very many people know that this disease may lead to infantility (8.1.13)
Potentials of learning, the student perspective

- Potentials of learning are tied to ‘research’ aspects:
  - Self-regulation of organization and time
  - Liberty of choice (topic and issue), personal relevance
  - Overcoming challenges
  - Exploring new fields of knowledge.

- In interviews on grade 9 project students focus on self-regulation and personal relevance, whereas in interviews on grade 12 study specialization project they focus more on challenges and new fields of knowledge.
Conclusion - discussion

- Interdisciplinary “research” writing holds obvious learning and Bildung potentials, not just from curricula, but also from students’ viewpoints.

- The Danish interdisciplinary construct must still be regarded as an experiment with unsolved issues, but the empirical data confirm that teachers and schools strive to meet the ambitions.

- Even though verbal writing is still to a high extent transparent in content discipline projects, the learning potentials of these projects are obviously tied to the fact that they demand extended writing.

- The gap in demands on writing between secondary and upper secondary education is probably rooted in the Danish educational history. The gap is problematic and should be addressed.