Reading for Life

Three Studies of Swedish Students' Literacy Development

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Cover: Swedish child reading for life ©Jakob Damber

Without a vision for tomorrow hope is impossible,
Paolo Freire

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List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers:

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Introduction and general purpose

The overall purpose of this thesis was to explore school-classes reaching higher levels of reading achievement than could be predicted by their socio-economic status (SES) and language background. One further purpose of the present thesis was to study the connection between reading achievement and academic success in students with diverse language backgrounds. Reading competence and good reading comprehension are highly valued and important skills in Swedish society of today. A good command of both oral and written Swedish also includes access to multiple discourses such as language used in the family domain, at work, in encounters with authorities and so forth (cf. Teleman, 1979). Depending on the situation, different types of language use are perceived as "correct". The school context makes its own demands regarding both oral and written language. A good command of the language used for academic purposes is essential for all students' academic success. In particular, this applies to students who use their second language for learning in school (Gee, 1996; Scarcella, 2003). For this group of students, teachers have described not only language per se, but also access to the Swedish, urban, middle class codes, as the gateway to success in school and further education, jobs and "a future" in Swedish society (Runfors, 2003).

Residential segregation was one of the conditions for the three empirical studies in this thesis. The major aspect of segregation highlighted is the ways in which school can counteract the negative effects of segregation, such as lower levels of achievement for learners who were not native speakers of Swedish. Within the realms of the thesis the aim of exploring what makes some classes/individuals more successful than others was pursued in three different studies employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, a large-scale quantitative study at class level was conducted. Secondly, a smaller quantitative study at class level, also encompassing in-depth teacher interviews, was performed with a stronger focus on students with diverse language backgrounds. Thirdly, a small-scale qualitative study was carried out focusing on high-achieving students with diverse language backgrounds from one of the targeted classes in study two. The relationship between a large-scale perspective paying respect to

social structures in the society at large *and* a micro-level insider perspective, is at the heart of this thesis. In particular, attention has been paid to "cracks" in the structural pattern, as the targeted individuals in the third study did not display the socio-cultural and all-Swedish criteria which characterized the over-achieving classes in the first study. As a consequence selected major ideas and empirical studies adhering to different perspectives on literacy will be referred to in the following. It is my conviction that the relationship between the societal structures and the individual can not be understood from one perspective only, as one perspective can not stand alone without the other. Since social change may be seen as a major area of interest in educational research, divergent patterns may indicate routes into the future.

Categorisations

The students in the following studies were categorized as students with Swedish as their first language and as students with a language other than Swedish as their first language. The students were also categorized according to their socio-economic status background. The use of such categorisations needs to be discussed as each category encompasses much heterogeneity and several different definitions are referred to in research. Therefore, a brief discussion of these categorizations precedes the general description of the research questions and the research process.

Students with a first language other than Swedish

In Swedish contemporary statistics, immigrant children are primarily categorized as children with a foreign background, that is, children who were born outside Sweden or children who were born in Sweden with both parents being born outside Sweden (Skolverket 1999, Statistiska centralbyrån, 2002). In the present thesis an older way of categorizing these children is used, namely a definition which is not tied to country of origin, but to the use of a first language other than Swedish in the home (Skolverket, 1992).

Several difficulties with this definition may be discussed. As already indicated, one major problem is that the category "Children with a first language other than Swedish" is a very heterogeneous

group. The length of stay in Sweden varies, the reasons for migrating to Sweden differ, language-use in the home differs, the relationship between minority-majority group/language differs depending on the area of residence, and the children's own perceptions of their identity and language-use are ignored. I was aware of these shortcomings. However, as language background was the most prominent aspect of multi-culturalism that was dealt with in the thesis, this definition was chosen as the empirical data provided information concerning "a first language other than Swedish". The term "ethnicity" is not frequently used, because ethnicity deals with how a collective of individuals perceive themselves as a group (Chancer & Watkins, 2006). Questions on how this dynamic construction of similarities and differences was created among the multi-cultural informants, were not included in the student questionnaires employed in the empirical studies. However, perceptions of assumed collectives will be discussed further on, primarily in terms of the deficit discourse.

Socio-economic background

The term "socio-economic background" occurs frequently in this thesis. The socio-economic index developed by Statistics Sweden is denoted in Swedish as "socio-economic indicators" (SEI). It is built on an older categorization of social groups based on individuals' professional status, and incorporating their educational status. According to statistics produced by the Swedish National Board of Education (see Skolverket, 2003) there is a considerable correlation between the parents' educational and professional status and their children's school performance. However, more detailed information on the parents' educational or professional status was not available on an individual level when the classification of socio-economic background employed in this study was established. Therefore, an attempt was made to approach the SEI-index, in order to validate the use of "number of books in the home" as an index of Socio-Economic Status (SES). This procedure will be described in more detail in the following.

The fact that intersectional perspectives are ignored is one major shortcoming which should be mentioned. In recent educational studies, attempts are often made to focus on the connections between social class, gender and ethnicity as these factors seem to work interactively,

rather than autonomously (Chanser & Watkins, 2006; Tallberg Broman, 2002).

There is also the question of how categorisations of ethnicity or social class, for example, may contribute to the creation of such categories. This will be discussed further on in the text (cf. Tallberg Broman, 2002).

A general description of the research questions and the research process

The aim of the three empirical studies was to examine the contexts and the practices of school classes with higher attainment in reading than could be predicted by SES and language background. In the first study, the focus was on *what* seemed to promote high achievement in reading with regard to the classroom, teacher and home environment factors. From earlier studies we know that the socio-economic background of the students and the educational attainment of the parents are influential factors on achievement (August, 2006; Myrberg & Rosén, 2006; Scarborough, 1998; Skolverket, 2003; Van der Slik, Driessen & de Bot, 2006). Therefore, in the statistics, socio-economic background factors as well as language background factors were statistically controlled for, in study one and in study two.

However, a quantitative approach on which classroom, home environment, and teacher characteristics are associated with reading achievement does not allow in-depth analyses of *how* such factors promote reading at a classroom level. Therefore, in the second study, I decided to include research questions aimed at describing more fully the classroom environments promoting reading, and in this way to go further than the statistical procedures employed in study one. This change in research questions from what to how also evoked a change from a quantitative to a qualitative research approach. Thus, the main empirical work in study two, and even more so in study three, was based on qualitative analyses. A closer look at the mean performances in reading at the class-room level, when accounting for SES and language background, revealed that a few classes from one particular low-SES geographic area displayed exceptionally high levels of achievement. It also turned out that a majority of students from these classes spoke Swedish as their second language. As these classes which were clearly beating the odds attracted my attention, the main

focus in study two and three is on students with diverse language backgrounds.

The first step in this thesis was to identify over-achieving and under-achieving classes in reading, that is, classes performing on a higher or a lower level than could be expected with regard to SES and language background. The more specific research questions addressed in the first study were:

> • What student characteristics discriminate between over-achieving and under-achieving classes?
> • What teacher/teaching characteristics discriminate between over-achieving and under-achieving classes?
> • What classroom characteristics discriminate between over-achieving and under-achieving classes?

As mentioned above, the focus shifted between the studies in this thesis, from questions such as *what* activities teachers and students were engaged in, and the frequencies of those activities, to *how* the activities were carried out. Simultaneously the focus was narrowed down to the students with diverse language backgrounds. Affective, motivational, and empowering qualities were emphasized and in-depth interviews were also employed as a research method. As a result of this shift in focus similar research questions to those in the first study were addressed again, but new questions were added. The research questions addressed in the second study were:

> • What student characteristics discriminate between targeted over-achieving classes and the reference classes?
> • What teacher/teaching characteristics discriminate between the targeted over-achieving classes and the reference classes?
> • What classroom characteristics discriminate between targeted over-achieving classes and the reference classes?
> • *How* was the classroom climate and discourse created, according to the teachers?
> • *How* was literacy acquired and developed in the targeted classes, according to the teachers?

The third study focused on how the students themselves had perceived their elementary school years and their later school

trajectories up to beginning university studies. The research questions addressed were:

> • *How* did successful students describe and explain their academic success, with reference to their school trajectories?
> • *How* did the successful students relate their early school experiences to their later school experiences?
> • To what extent had the successful students developed a Future Time Perspective?

The outline of the thesis

Firstly, as different perspectives on reading are displayed in this thesis, the historical background and the major features of the autonomous and the ideological view of reading are portrayed.

Secondly, some of the cornerstones in reading research will be outlined in the chapter *Becoming a Reader*.

Although my studies mainly focused on reading comprehension test results at class level, research on some major biological and cognitive factors explaining individual differences in reading achievement will be presented, as these factors have great impact on reading comprehension. These factors are only indirectly connected to the studies that were carried out, but are relevant in building an understanding of how reading comprehension is manifested. Different stages in reading development and different dimensions underlying literacy development, such as the phonological, syntactic and semantic aspects are then described. Research on classroom environment, the teacher, and the home environment, all of which are factors relevant for class-level achievement in reading, are also presented.

In the next chapter, *Becoming a bilingual reader*, factors highlighting the role of bilingualism with respect to literacy acquisition are presented. The main focus here is on the understanding of the symbolic concept of print and on oral proficiency including phonological awareness and vocabulary.

As in Heat's and Street's (2008) description of an ethnographic research approach, I felt "the need to read across topics/…/ and disciplines" (p. 50) grow as the research progressed. I was looking for perspectives which took into more serious consideration the ways in

which cultural background is related to reading achievement. Phenomena such as unequal conditions for schooling drew my attention. Studies of multi-literacies and second language acquisition across different disciplines such as linguistics, applied linguistics, and pedagogy contributed to this broader perspective on literacy in L2 learning. That means that studies employing, for example, ethnographical methods, discourse analysis and other qualitative methods contributed to my understanding of the field. In the chapter entitled Broader perspectives on L2 learners' literacy development phenomena such as the deficit discourse and ownership of the academic codes are portrayed. Here the ideological view of reading is further exemplified and explicated. By use of the Four Reader Role Model the technical side of reading is augmented with social and cultural perspectives (Freebody & Luke, 2003). Thus, attention is paid to the linguistic diversity among today's children and the width of the linguistic repertoire that children will need in a multi-literate, multi-cultural society. Future-oriented pedagogy building on Vygotskian ideas is also presented.

Some factors specifically relevant to the L2-learners in the empirical studies, such as book flood approaches and the function of explicit pedagogy, conclude the literature review.

Summaries of the three empirical studies precede a general discussion, where the shortcomings the studies suffer from, and the uncertainty of some of the results, will be discussed.

Perspectives on reading - the autonomous and the ideological view of reading

As I perceived the distance in large-scale studies to context-bound aspects on literacy development as troublesome, I started my search for new perspectives by plunging into theories of reading. The definition of literacy is fundamental, as the choices of research questions and methods, the applications of results, and the inferences from the results, are all dependent on how literacy is defined.

A historical view of the development of theories of reading, gives some perspectives on the changing definitions of reading. According to reading theories prevalent in the beginning of the twentieth century, reading instruction was prescriptive in nature. Meaning resided with the author (Straw, 1990), and literacy was seen as a conduit,

transferring meaning from the author to the reader. Separate reading sub-skills, such as letter-sound correspondences and word recognition, were the skills promoting reading acquisition (ibid.). Reproduction of the author's ideas was the ultimate purpose, and memorization guaranteed that "banking" of skills and knowledge was performed (cf. Freire & Macedo, 1987). This view of literacy is often referred to as the autonomous model of reading, linked to the idea of language as a self-contained symbolic system (Au & Raphael, 2000; Street, 1995).

Gradually, the locus of meaning shifted from the author, to the text, and finally, to the reader as a participant in a social context (cf. Au & Raphael, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2001; Kern, 2000; Street, 1995). With roots in reception theory a new conceptualization of reading emerged, where for the first time meaning was seen as indeterminate, a construction generated by the reader in the act of reading (Rosenblatt, 1979). From theories influenced by Vygotsky (1978), concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding emerged as key concepts for the teacher to consider (Straw, 1990). According to Vygotsky (1978) this zone equals "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers "(ibid. p. 86). Related to the ZPD is the concept of scaffolding, developed by researchers who have explored the application of the ZPD in educational environments (Bruner, 1975; Gibbons, 2002; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Thus, the interaction between students and educators became a crucial determinant of the student's academic development, for better or for worse (Cummins, 1996, 2000).

However, the description above is not only an account of a historical development, but also a description of the field of reading research today, as different views of reading exist in parallel, both among practitioners and researchers. On the one hand, we find the metaphors of information transfer and acquisition, advocating a psycho-linguistic view of language as described by Gough and Tunmer (1986). The view of literacy as a transmittable substance is a prevalent conceptualization of literacy among a number of educators (Kern, 2000). Opponents of the autonomous model of reading claim that implications of the psycho/neurolinguistic view of language, learner, and learning environment, are that those entities are seen as static,

rather than dynamic (Au & Raphael, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2001; Kern, 2000; Luke. 2004; Street, 1995). Heath and Street (2008) formulates these implications as follows:

> The *autonomous* model of literacy works from the assumption that literacy in itself, autonomously, will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. From the perspective of social theories of power, this model of literacy disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions and presents literacy's values as neutral and universal (p. 103).

On the other hand, reading is described as participating in a socially, culturally and historically constructed practice (Au & Raphael, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Cummins, 2000; Gee, 2001; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995). Functions of literacy are viewed as cultural capital, reflecting the relationship between knowledge and power. As Heath and Street (2008) expressed it: "[s]igns and symbols are not innocent" (p.20). In this enlarged definition of literacy, denoted the ideological model by Street (1984), not only the text but also the reader's prior experiences of the world, social identifications, attitudes, and the surrounding culture and society, all contribute to the outcome of the negotiations of meaning, enabling different constructions of meaning. Language, identity and culture are all seen as dynamic entities and the employment of the plural form, literacies, allows for critical framing of the relationships between school and marginalized learners' literacy activities (Au & Raphael, 2000; Kern, 2000; Straw, 1990). Thus, as cultural practices vary from context to context, the ideological view of literacy "offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices" (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 103).

There is also the view that language and language acquisition may be seen as interactively constructed, both 'in the head and in the world' (Atkinson, 2002; Gee, 2001; Lantolf, 2006). Acknowledging that all individuals have their different literacy histories, including family, social and cultural background, does not diminish the importance of descriptions of the technical aspects of reading processes (Barton, 1994). A rich body of research on the technical sub-skills of reading has generated knowledge about the storage and retrieval of information

(cf. Anderson & Pearson, 1984), and the special needs of children with impaired phonological abilities, in terms of prerequisites necessary for the technical reading process to take place (cf. Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Stanovich, 2000). However, there are researchers who claim that the employment of the autonomous model in *educational practice* may lead to a decline in the children's interest if they do not perceive the activities as meaningful or valued (Cummins, 2007; Heath, 1983). Thus, according to proponents of the social constructivist view of literacy, the practitioner or the researcher who wants to study practice can not avoid transactional perspectives on reading development. The social, emotional, and cultural factors, intertwined and interdependent with the cognitive factors at work in the on-going learning processes in a classroom setting, must all be taken into account (Sfard, 1998).

Inferences made from research results always emerge from an assumption about the world and how it may be explored. When discussing learning the two dominating assumptions are reflected by the metaphors of *acquisition* and *participation* and, according to Sfard (1998), both metaphors have their limitations, as do the major research approaches. Qualitative patterns in large-scale quantitative studies may stay hidden in the analyses, whereas the small samples often used in qualitative studies make generalization impossible. However, both generalized patterns building on aggregated data, and situational, local, unpredictable patterns sensitive to coincidence, are needed if a holistic approach to the research problem is the aim. As the needs and possibilities children reveal are different, different approaches to the research problem are required (Ercikan & Roth, 2006). In this thesis the incompatibility standpoint is rejected and a pragmatic view dominates, allowing the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and multiple perspectives where different views on reading are seen as complementary rather than contradictory (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In addition, educational research always involves practice in one way or another. Thus, finding useful answers to the research questions, also in the eyes of the practitioners, felt important (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

To summarize, both the technical aspects of reading and the psycho-social aspects of reading development need to be observed. However, a definition of literacy which is too narrow, will not substantiate a full description of reading development in the classroom

setting, as pedagogical aspects must be included (Gibbons, 2002; Pressley, 1998). Thus, there are reasons to view the relationship between the metaphor of *acquisition*, implying information transfer, and the metaphor of *participating* in a social practice, not as one between disparate poles, but as a continuum where both pedagogical and psycho-linguistic aspects are important (Atkinson, 2002; Sfard, 1998).

As learning in academic contexts draws heavily on reading ability and reading comprehension, some basic premises for literacy acquisition will be described in the following chapter.

Becoming a reader

The prerequisites for literacy acquisition are basically the same, irrespective of native language (Bialystok, 2002, 2007; Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002; Cummins, 1996; Kulbrandstad, 1998). Much of what we know about "cracking the code" from research on L1 learners also seems to apply to L2 learners (Bialystok, 2002, 2007; Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002). With letter knowledge and a general conception of print and how print works, the conditions for successful literacy acquisition are established (Elbro, 2001/2004; Stanovich, 2000). Bialystok (2002, 2007) describes the cracking of code as follows: "When children learn to read, there is an epiphanic moment in which they realize that text represents meanings. This insight sets the stage for children to learn about the formal structures that are the key to uncovering those meanings" (p.50).

To know how a book is read, to have some idea why print is used and to know how print is different from other symbolic systems, is knowledge which may start growing long before the child becomes involved in formal reading activities (Adams, 1990). Children's emergent literacy awareness and parents' involvement in the children's interest, as well as the parents' own interest in print activities are important factors for the children's early literacy development (Baker, 2003; Hart & Risley, 2003; Sénéchal & Le Fevre, 2002, Scarborough, 2001).

Understanding reading development from an autonomous point of view of reading

Although this thesis mainly focuses on group performances, a description of the cognitive development underlying individual differences in reading acquisition, preceeds the description of the more culturally dependent aspects of literacy.

To understand the complexity of the reading process the three-level framework of Frith (1999) is employed. Figure 1 illustrates the factors involved in literacy acquisition explaining the variation between individuals in their literacy development. Frith describes an underlying biological level, a cognitive level and a behavioural level (henceforth

denoted the manifest level), which all interact with environmental factors. In this thesis the manifest level of reading is reading comprehension and the research questions refer to environmental influences, such as the socio-cultural context, classroom climate, home literacy environment and teachers' work. As a result, factors at the biological and cognitive levels are not in focus. However, I believe it is important to make clear that biological and cognitive factors are also involved in the reading process, and thus, related to reading comprehension. Therefore some major aspects such as phonological, syntactic and semantic dimensions accounting for individual differences in developing decoding and comprehension skills are described in this review.

Environment	Biological
	Cognitive
	Behavioural

Figure 1. The three-level framework. After Frith (1999, p.193)

According to Samuelsson and colleagues (2005), approximately 50-60% of various cognitive abilities related to early reading acquisition are accounted for by genetic influences. One implication of their findings is that it is crucial for the educational community to diminish the negative effects related to environmental factors, as far as this is possible. The impact of environmental factors on reading

development is likely to increase as the child grows older. Thus, a supportive educational environment becomes crucial with respect to closing the gap in reading performance between students with different biological, cognitive and environmental prerequisites for reading

Phases in the development of reading proficiency

In order to create an understanding of the prerequisites for individual variation at the manifest level of reading, the process of becoming a fluent reader, which all readers go through, is described below. The ultimate goal in technical reading development is to reach the final stage of sight word reading proficiency (Ehri, 2005). The act of reading may be considered as starting even before the phase of actual reading begins. If the small child starts to "read" the story of Little Red Riding Hood in the telephone directory, this may be seen as a reading activity from the emergent literacy perspective. However, the process of reaching the stage of fluent reading is a question of creating links between the letter strings of words, to their meanings and pronunciations stored in the memory. The fundamental prerequisite for the reading process to start is alphabetic knowledge including grapheme-phoneme relationships, which enables the child to distinguish the separate sounds in the spoken words. The four phases in this learning process are described by Ehri (ibid., pp. 173-176):

1. In the pre-alphabetic phase the child's ability to form letter-sound connections to read words is not yet developed. The child perceives words like pictures. For example the logotype of a toothpaste can be perceived as "Colgate", but also as "brush teeth". The child uses a few salient visual features to remember the meaning of words, even though this process is not yet alphabetic. This phase is also known as the logographic phase in reading (cf. Beech, 2005).
2. In the partial alphabetic phase, the child has learnt some connections between letters and sounds. To a greater extent the child relies on phonological information to remember the words in this second phase. It is common that the initial and the last letter sounds are recognized in words. The child is not yet fully able to segment the spoken word into its phonemes.

Incomplete knowledge of the alphabet makes it difficult to decode words, as it is the knowledge of the letter names and letter sounds which creates access to a mnemonic system that facilitates sight word reading (Ehri & Wilce, 1985; Roberts, 2003).

3.   The transition to the full alphabetic phase occurs when the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences are known. Now children also can decode unfamiliar words and the correct spellings of words are better remembered. However, the ability to map graphemes to phonemes in words that have been read repeatedly, so called 'sight words', develops. According to Ehri the development of sight word vocabulary is central for the process of reading (Ehri, 1999).

4.   During the consolidated alphabetic phase, more and more words are retained in the memory as recurring letter strings, are processed as larger units and become consolidated in the memory, not just as individual units such as occurs in the full alphabetic phase, but as recognizable orthographic patterns. This phase is denoted the orthographic phase by Frith (1985). The ability to process words in larger, but fewer units of letter strings, reduces the memory load and promotes the child's fluent reading and comprehension (cf. Stanovich, 2000). In particular, the familiarity with letter chunks makes the reading of multi-syllabic words easier, as fewer connections are needed to secure those words in memory.

According to Ehri (2005) the storage of "visual spellings of words in the memory, by analyzing how graphemes symbolize phonemes in pronunciations" (p. 176-177) also has the potential to improve the capability to remember spoken words, and hence works in favour of an extended vocabulary. Above all, the amount of print exposure becomes significant because of the linkages between repetition, storage in the memory and quick access to orthographic and phonemic units stored in the memory. According to Ehri learners both of transparent and opaque writing systems are believed to undergo these phases in their development towards fluent reading, which emphasizes the importance for both L1 and L2 teachers being familiar with this progression in literacy development.

Phonological dimensions in literacy development

The relationship between phonological awareness and reading acquisition is a central question in reading research (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Stanovich, 2000; Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994). Impaired phonological processing is believed to be linked to difficulties in transforming letter strings into phonological patterns (Stanovich, 2000). Not only does phonological awareness promote literacy in monolingual children learning an alphabetic script, but is also believed to have a central role for bilingual learners and learners of non-alphabetic languages (Ho & Bryant, 1997; Shu, Anderson, & Wu, 2000).

Many children take their first steps towards mastery of the formal forms of literacy and the alphabetic principle "through gradual and successive approximations" during the phase of emergent literacy (Sipe, 2001, p. 265). In the gradual discovery of the relationships between sounds and letters, studies show that children gain in phonemic awareness (Levin, Patel, Margalit & Barad, 2002; Silva & Alves, 2003; Treiman & Rodriguez, 1999). Phonemic awareness is a precursor of early reading and spelling acquisition (Adams, 1990; Lundberg, Frost, & Peterson, 1988), and is a fundamental prerequisite for cracking the code and entering the full alphabetic phase (see Ehri, 2005). Several activities may be linked to the growth of phonemic awareness. Besides directed interventions, early writing and invented spelling are believed to enhance acquisition of phonemic reading awareness (Frith, 1986; Eriksen Hagtvet & Pálsdóttir, 1993; Liberg, 1993). According to Liberg (1990) early writing activities may be one way to approach the alphabetic principle. To sum up, the reader's awareness of the phonemes is fundamental to all further reading development, regardless of the approach to learning to read that is employed.

Syntactic dimensions in literacy development

Another prerequisite for early literacy development is syntactic awareness, that is, the ability to understand the grammatical structures of the target language. This applies to both first and second language beginning readers (Chiappe & Siegel, 1999). In particular, the ability to make predictions of what word is likely to be next in a sequence of

words is a critical factor for comprehension. Impaired sensitivity to word order is related to impaired reading acquisition (Gottardo, Stanovich, & Siegel, 1996; Scarborough, 1991).

Syntactic practice may lead to better reading comprehension, as "syntactic knowledge may aid word recognition if children can use the constraints of sentence structure to supplement their decoding" (Adams & Bruck, 1993, p.446). Syntactic awareness is related to comprehension on a sentence level, which creates the basis for higher-level comprehension. Syntactic awareness also contributes to self-regulatory processes, such as the reader being able to correct his/her reading mistakes (Oakhill, Cain & Bryant, 2003).

Morphosyntactic ability is one specific aspect of syntactic knowledge that has been linked to reading comprehension (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003). To understand compound words, how morphemes work and the linguistic conventions by which such words are ruled in the target language, is crucial for comprehension. Such knowledge will enhance both understanding and language production as word formation rules may vary between languages (Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002). As syntactic and morpho-syntactic abilities are believed to both promote and be promoted by reading and writing activities, these abilities constitute another important field of knowledge for teachers to pay attention to (Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2003).

Semantic dimensions in literacy development

It is well documented that vocabulary is a key-component for reading comprehension (Adams, 1990; Crawford, 1993; Fredriksson & Taube, 2003; Nagy, Anderson & Herman, 1987; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). According to Stanovich (2000), vocabulary development and individual differences in reading ability describe a reciprocal relationship. Reading contributes to the growth of vocabulary, and the range and the amount of words children will encounter during reading can never be covered by direct vocabulary instruction (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). There are indications that mere exposure to print improves vocabulary, as exposure to the less frequently used words found in print helps to build up experience of this type of vocabulary (Landauer, 1998). Reading volume is correlated to vocabulary knowledge (both receptive and expressive) and to reading

comprehension, which implies that vocabulary knowledge may also be a measure of knowledge of the world (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1993; Stanovich & Cunningham, 1992). Again, there is a reciprocal relationship suggesting that the more one knows, the easier it is to comprehend, the easier it is to read, the more knowledge one gains…

To sum up, there are phonological, syntactic and semantic aspects, as well as pragmatic aspects and environmental influences, to be considered when trying to understand how children acquire literacy competency (see Frith, 1999). These aspects also apply to reading comprehension across language domains.

Factors of significance for the empirical studies

Much of the research on reading comprehension deals with the individual and how different biological, cognitive and language factors co-vary to explain variation among individuals. In this thesis one aim was to study reading comprehension at a class level. For this reason, teacher characteristics and classroom environment were included to examine variation in reading comprehension. The following two sections describe the research of classroom and teacher characteristics, found to account for group, as well as individual differences in reading comprehension. The studies reviewed describe conditions that are valid irrespective of the language (L1 or L2) background. As earlier research implies that the home environment may have substantial impact on students' literacy development, the home environment is the topic of the third section.

Teacher and classroom factors are sometimes intertwined with each other, as the teacher is in many respects responsible for the classroom arrangements. However, the content is divided into these sections to make it more accessible to the reader.

The classroom environment

One factor that has been frequently studied is teacher-pupil ratio. Even if this measure is not calculated in comparable ways in different studies, there is reason to believe that a higher teacher-pupil ratio contributes to students' reading achievement in the lower grades (Ferguson, 1991).

Class size is another debated issue. What kind of students there are in the class, how class size is perceived subjectively and how classes may be split into smaller groups makes research on this factor somewhat hard to interpret. In Sweden, classes of 21-30 students seem to attain better results than smaller classes, but these results might reflect the fact that more demanding students often receive instruction in smaller groups (Rosén, Myrberg, & Gustavsson, 2005). Some advantages observed in smaller classes, such as good conditions for

socializing newcomers to the school culture, opportunities for developing close student-teacher relationships, and a less stressful and more sociable environment also characterize a favourable classroom for literacy achievement (Gustafsson & Myrberg, 2002). Thus, a general conclusion about the effects of class-size is that smaller classes favour students' achievement, at least during the first school years (ibid.). These results could of course also be interpreted in terms of teacher-pupil ratio, which would indicate that the number of adults in the classroom is of importance.

Another classroom characteristic associated with high achievement in reading is the use of, the amount of, and the access to reading materials in the classroom (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). For example, a multitude of classroom library books and sufficient time allocated for reading is a recurring observation made in classrooms with high reading achievement levels (Gambrell, 1996; Mosenthal, Lipson, Tomcello, & Mekkelsen, 2004). A classroom rich in literature may create conditions for literacy activities, but additional factors are needed to ensure that fruitful literacy events really take place. A classroom climate with positive peer relationships and positive teacher-student relationships, and high degrees of activity and involvement, exemplify such literacy promoting factors (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Masengill, 2005; Parker, Hannah, & Topping, 2006; Pressley, 1998; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004). A collaborative rather than a competitive climate is another distinctive feature defining high achieving classes in reading (Guthrie, 2004; Pressley, 1998; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004).

Langer (2001) found that collaborative approaches to both content and skills were encouraged in high-achieving classes in reading, with students involved in discussions from multiple perspectives. Langer also found that in classes high-achieving in reading connections were made across content, lessons and grades, as well as across in-school and out-of-school applications of knowledge and skills. In addition, in these classes thinking and doing were taught and practised in the classrooms, including students' learning of strategies for planning, completing tasks and reflecting on content or activity (ibid.).

Gambrell (1996) identified four key factors in her studies assessing activities aimed at promoting reading motivation; access to books in the classroom, free choice of books, familiarity with books and social interactions about books. The creation of a classroom

culture in which book reading was perceived as a highly valued activity was observed as an important feature of classrooms with high reading achievement levels.

Taken together, factors both of inter-person relational character and the more physical affordances offered in the classroom, interplay to create classrooms which are supportive of literacy activities. This links in with the teacher's role as the person responsible for the activities in the classroom.

The effective teacher

Thus, when looking at the possible effects of the teacher in the classroom aspects referred to as teacher effects can just as well be referred to as classroom effects (Byrne, Coventry, Olson, Wadsworth, Samuelsson, Petrill, Willcut, & Corley, in press). However, as the title of this section indicates, in this section aspects related to the classroom such as classroom climate and degree of individualized tuition in class are seen as tightly connected to the teacher as a person, and to the teacher's actions in the classroom. The effective teacher is seen as the person in charge of classroom climate and classroom activities. I am aware of the difficulties in interpreting results from research in this field, as the degree to which the researcher succeeded in controlling confounding variables may differ between studies (Hattie, 2007). Of course, many aspects are confused in the classroom. For example, well-qualified teachers may be assigned high-achieving students, or the resources in a school may reflect the socio-economic environment in the residential district in which the school is located.

Recent research, employing large-scale statistical methods, indicates that the effects of teacher characteristics are not a major source of variability in students' early literacy achievement. Some results indicate that 3-16 %, or no more than 8% may be accounted for as a presumed teacher or classroom effect (Byrne et al, in press; Nye, Konstantinopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). However, other researchers take the view that teachers play a crucial role in many aspects when accounting for classroom achievement. Darling-Hammond (2000) found that the proportion of well-qualified teachers was the strongest predictor of state-level achievement in reading, when SES-factors and language status were controlled for. If tuition is to be individualized in accordance with the children's different conditions for learning, the

teacher's knowledge of teaching methods has been observed to enable flexible instruction in high achieving classrooms (Langer, 2001). Mosenthal and colleagues (2004) in their observations of effective teachers say they "were expert in managing a complex set of literacy activities operating simultaneously and including teacher-directed group-work, independent reading and writing, and work at learning centres" (ibid, p 358). Skilled teachers seem to adapt their methods, strategies and follow-up procedures to the students' needs in a flexible manner (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Evidently teachers' methodological tool-kits for teaching literacy develop over time. Accordingly, teacher experience in terms of number of years working as a teacher, is another well-documented discriminator between high- and low-achieving schools (Elley, 1994; OECD, 2001).

In an overview by Ferguson and Womack (1993) the importance of knowing the subject matter, and knowing how to teach the subject matter, was compared among newly graduated teachers. Ferguson and Womack found that didactic skills were more important than knowledge of subject matter. However, knowledge of both subject and teaching methods presumably interact to form the best competence. Teacher education programmes with a strong emphasis on teaching reading have proved better at enabling new teachers to construct high-quality text-environments (International Reading Association, 2003). To sum up, there is evidence that teacher competence, defined by experience and education, as well as knowledge of teaching skills, is linked to student achievement levels (Gustafsson & Myrberg, 2002).

Another important teacher characteristic is the ability to teach students strategies for reading comprehension. Teachers who are especially focused on teaching strategies for reading comprehension may counteract a phenomenon labelled the fourth grade slump (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). Studies from different parts of the world indicate that reading progress reaches a plateau as the children leave the elementary school years behind them. In particular, this plateau in progress is found in schools in low SES areas (Hattie, 2007; Brozo, 2005). Several studies indicate that the difficulties with cognitively more demanding tasks encompassing syntactically more complex academic language, with a higher degree of less frequent vocabulary from unknown content areas, appears to be socio-economically dependent (Bishop, Reyes, & Pflaum, 2006; Chall & Jacobs, 2003). According to

Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) the fourth grade slump may also be explained in part by the lack of work with school-based oral language development during the stage when the children are occupied with learning the mechanics of reading. To develop an academic language, the students need to practise both written and oral language, in order to meet with the higher demands made on language competency in the later grades. In particular, this applies to students who do not gain such competency in the home environment.

The home environment

Socio-economic indicators such as family income, parental occupation and parental education are factors linked to children's literacy outcomes on both group and individual level (Raudenbush, Cheong, & Fotiu, 1996; Yang, 2003; Adams, 1990: Rutter & Maugham, 2002; Stanovich, 2000). That high SES students outperform low SES students is a repeated result with a long history and it is a pattern still valid today (Coleman, Campell, Hobson, McPartlant, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Raudenbush, Cheong, & Fotiu, 1996; Rutter & Maugham, 2002; Fredrickson & Petrides, 2008). For example, since the number of independent schools started to increase in the 80´s, Swedish studies have shown that the polarization of schools has increased significantly, both in terms of achievement levels and an inequitable distribution of students of different socio-economic backgrounds (Myrberg & Rosén, 2006). In the case of reading research, socio-economic background appears as a stronger predictor of reading performance than does language background (Skolverket, 2003; Van der Slik, Driessen & de Bot, 2006).

In addition, aspects of the home literacy environment affect parent-child interactions and the acquisition of spoken language, as well as the children's emergent literacy development (Hart & Risley, 1992). Aspects, such as early literacy experiences (Heath, 1983; Sénéchal & LeFèvre, 2002), and home literacy resources (Collins Block, Gambrell & Pressley, 2002; OECD, 2001), are conditions important in early literacy development.

Sénéchal and LeFèvre (2002) studied the linkages between literacy activities at home and the development of pre-school emergent literacy, and later literacy development in school. Important is that joint reading of children's books was not sufficient to provide the

children with letter knowledge and early decoding skills. The children who gained such skills had been actively guided by an adult or an older sibling in the act of shared book reading, to direct their attention to letters and sounds. Hart and Risley (1992) examined a cross-section of American families. By observing the amount of time the parents spent with their children, and the quality of communication between children and parents. In their study they found that parents in low SES families spent less time with their children. In these families there were also fewer attempts to enhance verbal development and the communicative acts were of poorer quality. In addition, the communicative acts consisted of negative epithets to a greater extent, as compared with the high SES families where children were more often encouraged to develop their language.

However, according to Elbro (2001/2004) socio-economic background factors may not be as decisive on an individual level as one might think. He claims that the total social background of the school class plays as great a role as the individual home environment. Elbro argues that the parents' expectations that their children were rapidly going to learn to read and write, raised the level expected of the whole class. This expectancy level may also influence the amount of joint reading the parents do with their children.

Adams (1990) describes those newcomers in school, who do not know whether to read from the left or the right side of the page, and who have no idea why one should read newspapers or books at all. Those children come from homes where emergent literacy was not encouraged.

> These homes are best identified by neither income, social class, parental education, nor race but by values and styles of the social communities to which they belong. Children from these homes [with a poor literacy environment] not only miss the literacy coddling of their parents but grow up in a larger environment where reading and writing are peripherally valued activities (Adams, 1990, p 87).

Obviously, all parents do not have the same opportunities to support their children's learning. Social networks, access to social capital, preferences and values shape children's conditions for learning in school, positively or negatively. For students with cultural capital that differs from knowledge, abilities and codes that are legitimized in

school, reading failure is more prevalent. This is an effect not only linked to the individual, but also referred to as a contextual effect in terms of residential segregation (Cummins, 2001; Garner & Raudenbush, 1991).

According to Snow and colleagues (1998), there are five major circumstances in the home environment, which have a major impact on reading achievement. Firstly, the parents' own attitude towards reading. Secondly, the parents' expectations of their children's reading achievement as expressed by the parents' involvement in their children's reading acquisition and development. Thirdly, the type and the amount of reading material parents provide for their children. Fourthly, the degree of interactivity between parents and children in terms of joint reading, and fifthly, the parents' verbal interaction with their children.

Stanovich (2000) expresses similar ideas by the use of the principle "organism – environment correlation". According to Stanovich, this relationship works in both directions such that "[o]rganisms not only are acted on by their environments; they also select, shape and evoke their own environments" (p. 185). The children, who read a lot and the poor readers, choose leisure time activities and friends in different ways. Through such choices, the poor readers contribute to constructing their print environment so that it becomes poorer, and can not contribute to their reading development in the same way as environments do for the skilled readers. Stanovich describes how children's literacy environments vary, starting by describing children advantaged in reading:

> Such a child is an advantaged organism because of the superior environment and genotype provided by the child's parents. The parents similarly environmentally and genetically advantaged, are more likely to reside in a community which provides the "concentration of pupils" that, via the independent effects of school composition, will bootstrap the child to further educational advantages. Conversely, disadvantaged children are most often exposed to inferior ability composition in the schools they attend. Thus, these children are the victims of a particularly perverse "double whammy" (p. 187).

Obviously, the pre-school and school contribution to children's reading acquisition and literacy development, is fundamental when the conditions for literacy development in the home are hampered.

Reading competency levels also tend to drop during vacations, in particular where the home literacy environment does not provide sufficient stimulation to sustain reading ability (Frazier & Morrison, 1998). Hayes and Grether (1983) found that the gap between high and low achieving students in reading and word knowledge, increased more during vacations than it did during the period spent in school (see also Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996). Whereas children from middle-class income families may show slightly higher reading scores after the summer vacation, the loss is significant for children from low-SES families (Burkham, Ready, Lee, & LoGerfo, 2004). These findings illustrate the socio-developmental patterns embedded in schooling, that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

To sum up, it is very important for schools to pay attention to the divergent needs and the prerequisites students bring to school from the home. A supportive classroom environment and competent teachers can compensate for a less favourable literacy environment at home. In addition, a supportive relationship between the home and the school is a recurring feature characterising schools with high achievement levels in reading (Thomas & Collier, 2002). The relationship between home and school is even more important when it comes to schools with student bodies with diverse language backgrounds.

So far the phases in reading development and the phonological, syntactic, and semantic dimensions in literacy development have been described, primarily by use of studies of children learning to read in their first language. Factors such as the classroom environment, the teacher's role and aspects of the home literacy environment have also been described. From now on, there will be a stronger focus on second language learners, and the question of whether bilingualism has any effect on reading development will be highlighted.

Becoming a bilingual reader

Does bilingualism affect reading development? It seems like bilingualism may have both positive and negative effects on literacy acquisition and it is important that teachers know how bilingual learners acquire literacy. International, comparative studies show that particular attention should be paid to L2 learners´ literacy acquisition, as they lag behind in a number of countries (OECD, 2001, 2004; Otterup, 2005). To view such results as context-embedded is also important, as pedagogy and socio-economic conditions, amongst other aspects, may vary across countries and schools.

Bilingualism and multilingualism

There are several definitions of both bilingualism and multilingualism, and the concepts as such, may be perceived as relative in nature (Mackey, 1970). In this thesis, a definition inclined towards function rather than competence, is employed. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) a bilingual individual can be described as a person who uses, or is able to use, two languages to express what he/she wants and to meet the demands of society (p. 94). However, today the term multilingualism is being used as an overarching term including individuals who use more than one language (Otterup, 2005). In this thesis multilingual and bilingual are used interchangeably.

Bilingualism and reading development

It is not possible to give an exhaustive review of all the aspects influencing L2 learners' literacy acquisition within the limited space given here. Therefore, some differences between monolinguals and bilinguals in how underlying abilities and basic skills may influence L2 learners´ reading development will be highlighted.

Understanding the symbolic concepts of print

The process children undergo when they gain insight about how to retrieve meaning from print is thoroughly researched (Adams, 1990, Stanovich, 2000). However, research focusing on the processes underlying reading acquisition with respect to the effects of bilingualism, is still relatively rare. Concepts of print and sound vary depending on the different languages and each language has a unique writing system. Therefore, reading processes can be affected in different ways for bilingual children (Bialystok, 2002, 2007).

Different writing systems represent spoken language differently. This is an insight that the child eventually will arrive at, irrespective of the nature of the script, whether alphabetic or non-alphabetic. In a transparent alphabetic script like Finnish or an opaque script like English the orthographic transparency may affect the learning of the phoneme-grapheme structures in different ways. Japanese learners focus on the syllabic structure of words and notations for consonant-vowel combinations. For Chinese learners the semantic elements are in focus, although phonetic elements are also included in the script. In other words the correspondence principles differ across different writing systems. However, being acquainted with different languages may facilitate the knowledge that the visual forms represented in the script are representations of linguistic features (Bialystok, 2002, 2007). The invariance of the representations is one such concept of print that comes more easily to bilinguals (Bialystok, Shenfield, & Codd, 2000). In studies of the concepts of print, children were exposed to a word-size task based on the alphabetic principle that long words are made up of more letters than short words. The task was intended to measure the awareness of correspondences between forms and referents, and a majority of the bilingual children actually did better than the monolinguals. Thus, the conclusion was that bilingualism in itself did not disadvantage the bilingual children with regard to understanding the concepts of print (ibid.).

Oral proficiency

Oral proficiency is another prerequisite for reading acquisition in general. The idea that children must be able to speak the language before they can learn to read it, lingers among many educators (Limbos & Geva, 2001). According to Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998)

"…the postponement of formal reading instruction is appropriate until an adequate level of proficiency in spoken English has been achieved"(p. 11). Verhoeven (1991) found L2 oral proficiency to be the most prominent factor for positive reading development in the L2 children when studying Turkish children in The Netherlands (see also Nielsen, 1998). Miller, Heilmann and Nockerts (2006) found that oral proficiency and reading development were also related between the first and second language, in this case Spanish and English. The strongest linkages, however, were found between reading and oral proficiency in the same language, and lack of oral proficiency in the home language was emphasized as an important indicator for detecting and preventing language-related problems in school.

According to Snow and colleagues (1998), basic reading skills in the first language transfer quite easily to the second language. However, the conditions for reading acquisition in the first language vary considerably due to differences in the educational systems. Whether reading should be taught before an adequate level of oral proficiency is reached, is a debated issue. When teaching preliterate children to read in a language they do not speak at all, the risk of those children becoming word-callers, who decode without comprehension, can not be overlooked. On the other hand, a delay in reading proficiency may have serious effects on the children's schooling in general, as it may take up to two years to acquire conversational language proficiency (Cummins, 1981). Some findings even indicate that reading skills may promote oral proficiency (Anderson & Roit, 1996; Barrera, 1983). Even after several years of schooling, the levels of oral proficiency skills necessary for academic learning, may be substantially lower among L2 learners (Biemiller & Slomin, 2001; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003). As the access to the low-frequency vocabulary found in written text is vital in enhancing the development of an academic language repertoire, the issue of an academic language register should be considered from the start, according to Cummins (2000). Thereby an early start for reading acquisition is also implied.

In multicultural classrooms children's communicative activities constitute an important foundation for further language acquisition (Axelsson, 2001; Anstey, 2003; Gibbons, 2002; Lindberg & Skeppstedt, 2000). Teacher initiations which stimulate the students to produce comprehensible output, also create opportunities for the students to stretch their language capacity beyond everyday small talk

(Gibbons, 2002). According to Gibbons, genuine communication which is contextualized and meaningful to the students, creates the conditions for optimal progress in literacy and language development.

According to Geva (2006) teachers often tend to attribute L2 children's difficulties in reading to impaired oral competency. The prevalence of specific reading difficulties is similar in both L1 and L2 learners with regard to word recognition, pseudo-word decoding, phonological awareness and rapid naming. Therefore such assumptions can have devastating effects for L2 learners with impaired reading, as early interventions needed to improve reading acquisition may be delayed.

Phonological awareness and decoding

Phonological awareness does not seem to be strongly dependent on oral proficiency (Geva, Wade-Woolley, & Shany, 1997; Verhoeven, 1994). According to Chiappe, Siegel, and Wade-Woolley (2002) measures of phonological processing were not found to discriminate between first and second language children, but the same measures did discriminate between poor and average readers from both language groups. Phonological awareness seems to predict early performance in word-reading skills for L2 learners, in a similar way as is found for monolingual children (Geva, 2006). There are also findings which support the idea that phonological awareness transfer across languages (Durgunoğly, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993; Wang, Perfetti, & Liu, 2005). Thus, bilingualism in itself does not seem to affect the development of phonological awareness (Bialystok, 2002, 2007).

The act of decoding is believed to be more language-specific than the phonological ability, which is believed to be more deeply rooted in more general cognitive mechanisms (Bialystok, 2002, 2007). Certainly, phonetic discrimination can be very difficult for L2 learners in the initial stages of language acquisition (Gibbons, 2002). Such findings imply that bilingualism may have effects on the development of decoding ability, depending for example on differences in the degree of transparency between different alphabetic scripts. A beginning reader in the L2, with impaired phonological ability, may thus encounter even greater difficulties in learning to read if the writing system of the L2 is opaque. However, Droop and Verhoeven (2003) found that two years of formal reading instruction diminished

the gap between L1 and L2 learners' decoding skills, thus pointing out instruction as yet another factor which can influence bilingual learners' reading progress.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is a predictor of reading comprehension, not only for L1 learners, but even more so for L2 learners (Reichenberg, 2005; Beck & McKeown, 1991). Oral proficiency, and semantic competence in particular, becomes vital when the phase of cracking the code is passed, and reading for meaning dominates (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The phenomenon of the fourth grade slump described earlier applies to a large extent to L2 learners. Even when decoding has been automatized, limitations in oral proficiency, vocabulary and morphosyntactic skills have been found to hamper L2 learners' reading comprehension (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003). Syntactic sensitivity, such as the ability to predict the next word possible in a sentence, may also vary considerably between L1 and L2 learners. Chiappe and Siegel (1999) found that L1 readers scored higher than L2 readers on measures of syntactic sensitivity, which of course contributes to the difficulties in comprehending texts. L2 learners' morphosyntactic knowledge has been found to be an important predictor of reading comprehension after two years of schooling, even though the L2 learners' reading comprehension also drew heavily on their vocabulary knowledge (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Verhoeven, 1990).

There is great individual variation in L2 learners' vocabulary when they start to learn to read. The L2 learners' vocabulary was found to vary between 2000 and 7000 words, as compared to fluent L1 readers' vocabulary of 10 000 to 100 000 words (Grabe, 1991). Comparative studies show that the individual variation in the learning rate of reading acquisition is larger among L2 readers than among L1 readers (Bialystok, 2002, 2007). According to Geva, Wade-Woolley, and Shany (1997) the individual differences in reading ability within one particular language are larger than the variance due to monolingualism and bilingualism. The important point is that vocabulary is believed to develop individually for each language (Bialystok, 2002, 2007; Carlisle, Beeman, Davis, & Sparim, 1999).

When it comes to oral influence on acquisition of literary registers, again a language-specific tendency is found concerning literary language gained from reading story books, for example. According to Bialystok (2002, 2007) there may be a cumulative effect on literary competence if bilingual children have story-book experience in two languages, as they gain competence within each linguistic form. However, Bialystok (2007) concludes that "if mastery of the literary register is learned individually for each language encountered in print, then, at least for this background skill, bilingualism will confer no special advantage (or deficit), as the relation with literacy acquisition is language-specific" (p, 56). To conclude, vocabulary is certainly closely related to reading comprehension, and the fact that the development of vocabulary as well as literary registers seem to be language-specific also creates an important condition for the teacher to consider.

Concluding remarks on the role of bilingualism

Firstly, opportunities to use the language and the child's language experiences in general affect reading development for L2 learners. Such opportunities may vary substantially depending on the degree of residential segregation, for example. Secondly, attention has to be paid to the development of oral competency in reading instruction, to make sure that the students establish both sufficient oral and written language competency to enable command of the language varieties used in school.

However, the role of bilingualism per se may be described as both facilitating and impeding L2 learners' reading development (Bialystok, 2002, 2007). In studying three aspects of bilingualism and reading; oral proficiency, understanding of the symbolic concepts of print, and meta-linguistic awareness, Bialystok found that the effects of bilingualism concerning the understanding of the symbolic concepts of print, seem to be supportive for reading. When it comes to oral proficiency the effects of bilingualism are predominantly negative for reading. For the establishment of meta-linguistic awareness, the effects of bilingualism are dismissible.

To sum up, the acquisition of reading competency shows substantial similarities in monolingual and bilingual children, but bilinguals' oral development must not be overlooked. However, one should keep in mind that the ability to link morphemes and graphemes

does not automatically transfer into reading for personal purposes (Nicholson, 2000). If this was the case, all children who were able to decode, would develop automatically into teenage and adult readers. However, this is not the case, which implies the additional need to look at factors more indirectly connected to the technical side of reading. In particular, socio-economic, cultural and social factors need to be observed in relation to literacy development. When these factors are paid more attention, the autonomous view of literacy needs to be augmented by theories with a stronger focus on how such factors affect the individual's literacy and language development in a broader sense. Such perspectives will be described in the following chapter.

Broader perspectives on L2 children's literacy development

As reading for personal purposes strongly connects to factors related to learning in a more general sense, a broader perspective including socio-cultural perspectives on reading was employed to build an understanding of how bilingual children's reading and learning may be enhanced and/or impeded. Thus, the stronger focus on L2 learners also led to a shift in perspectives on reading, to including factors on a societal level. Examples of such factors are residential segregation and the varying socio-cultural conditions for becoming a reader, or for becoming a successful student in command of the school codes. In other words, inequity on a structural level may underpin both how students are treated and how they will perform in school. The deficit discourse, where L2 learners are seen as members of a collective suffering from deficits, is the backdrop for many L2 children's experiences in school (Lahdenperä, 1997; Parzyk, 1999; Runfors, 2003, Torpsten, 2008). The Four Reader Role Model, which is described below, emphasizes the pragmatic aspects of the development of literacy skills and aims at taking into account such environmental influences which children and teachers both have to deal with. The point made is that the autonomous view of reading needs to be complemented by the aspects encompassed by the ideological view of reading, in order to create a fuller understanding of the factors affecting students' reading development.

Understanding reading from an ideological point of view of reading

In order to position myself in the field of reading theories so that an ideological view of reading is accommodated without repudiating the research focusing on the technical aspects of reading, I have used The Four Reader Role Model described by Freebody and Luke (2003). The Four Reader Role Model, describes the reader in the roles of the decoder, the text user, the text participant and the text analyzer. It provides a model for literacy where the social and cultural aspects of

literacy practices are emphasized just as much as the technical side of reading.

The Four Reader Role Model is not founded on the idea of one universal method, or one proper scientific theory (Freebody & Luke, 2003). Instead, this model aims to provide a sort of trial-and-error approach to literacy and literacy education:

> for weighing, critiquing and balancing the claims of arts and sciences of pedagogy and literacy education. It does not set out to refute or disprove scientific claims about, for example the efficacy of phonics instruction, or the need for comprehension instruction, or the developmental significance of explicit knowledge of grammar. Instead, it sets out to situate and use these and other claims to, both against each other and within a framework that asks how and in what ways the practices and 'roles' yielded by such models might together make up a literacy that is viable and powerful in current economies, institutions and cultures (Freebody & Luke, 2003, p. 56).

In order to become a reader, the child has to take on the role of the decoder as described above. According to Freebody and Luke this is not the only role that has to be accounted for. There is also the role of the functional text user who knows how to adapt language use and text structure according to the situation, the recipient(s), and the mode of communication. The role of the participant in the meaning of texts is about "understanding and composing meaningful written, visual and spoken texts in ways that connect texts' meaning systems to people's available knowledges", thus making it possible to draw meaningful inferences from those connections (Freebody & Luke, 2003, p. 56). In addition, the role of the text analyzer calls for attention. Analyzing text is about manipulating the text and "understanding and acting on the knowledge that texts are not transparent windows on the world, that they are not ideologically natural or neutral, that they represent particular views and silence others, influence people's ideas; and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel hybrid ways" (ibid., p. 57). According to Freebody and Luke these roles develop in parallel, which also emphasises the early stages of reading with respect to all four roles. Thus, the pre-understanding of what print really is, the purpose of print, and the perceptions of who is invited into the readers' community, all emerge as areas of interest in the early phases of literacy acquisition. In particular, when considering

schooling for children who may be perceived as differing from the main stream, some critical issues emerge. Issues like clarity in communicating the aims and expectations, attention to the different conditions for reading that children have, and attention to taken-for-granted assumptions of students' abilities to perform in school, all gain importance if the negative effects of the deficit discourse are to be counteracted.

The deficit discourse

Discourses in our society affect how second language-learners are perceived, talked to and encountered by their teachers. Access to the school discourse is a critical aspect of L2 learners' academic success. At times L2-learners are treated like a category of students who are expected to achieve at a lower level than their native peers. The deficit discourse is also made visible by the message of limited future prospects for immigrants, which is communicated in textbooks in Swedish as a Second Language (Mattlar, 2008). Mattlar shows that the authors' expectations of the immigrants as portrayed in the text books are low, and it is primarily the public sector which seems to offer a career for individuals of immigrant origin.

Even second language-learners who have the ability to perform well in school, belong to this category of children with a first language other than Swedish. According to Gee (1996), literacy activities in the classroom, such as conversations, stories, essays and so forth are also part of a larger discourse which is more than just language, involving values and viewpoints reflecting power structures in society.

Among educators the deficit discourse is well documented both internationally (Au & Raphael, 2000; Bernard, 2004; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Heat, 1983; Lee, 1995; Meacham, 2001; Shohami, 2004) and nationally, when children with immigrant backgrounds are portrayed as dysfunctional children with special needs (Economou, 2007; Lahdenperä, 1997; Parzyk, 1999; Runfors, 2003; Torpsten, 2008). Teachers even tend to view Swedish as a Second Language as a school-subject, the purpose of which is to compensate for shortcomings (Economou, 2007). Teachers' expectations and demands reflect their view of what they believe their students are able to achieve (Pavlenko, 2002). If teachers believe that L2 children are dysfunctional and primarily in need of remedial teaching, as a result

those children will probably not be given the kind of tuition that will maximize their cognitive development (Cummins, 2007).

Teacher expectations and demands as reflections of discourses

According to the ideological view of reading, literacy activities may not be seen as disconnected from discourses lingering on a societal level. This means that neither the literacy activities in the classroom, nor the teachers are resilient to the power structures at work in our society. The influence of teachers' expectations on the students' levels of achievement is documented in earlier research, primarily examining marginalized learners' school performance such as African-American students in the US (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). In an experimental study Rosenthal and Jacobsson (1968/1992) were the first to describe how teachers' expectations, both high and low, affected performance levels like self-fulfilling prophesies. Although methodological limitations have made the teachers' expectancy-effects difficult to explore in classroom-settings, there is support for the existence of the phenomenon (Brophy, 1983; Kuklinsky & Weinstein, 2001). High teacher expectations as a vital part of the socio-cultural climate of the school are also reported by Thomas and Collier (2002) as being a key predictor of language minority students' academic success.

The level of demands the teachers choose to put on their students, is another critical issue linked to teachers' beliefs about their students' capabilities. In particular, it seems to be of importance that the tasks are cognitively challenging, no matter what language level the students are on (Cummins, 1996, 2000; Gibbons, 2002). According to Cummins (2007) the scope and quality of low-SES students' literacy performance may reflect higher-order thinking, and literary production far exceeding the limits of what it is possible to measure by use of standardized testing procedures.

The reading comprehension problems students with diverse cultural backgrounds may encounter do not only arise because of an insufficient language-level for the task, but may also be connected with a different reading of the world, because of different cultural experiences (Abu-Rabia, 1996; Cummins, 1996, 2000; Lahdenperä, 2004; Reichenberg, 2005). Therefore, it is important for teachers to

have an appreciation of the pre-understanding of their students in order to create an environment where students are able to meet with high demands. However, high demands require adequate tools for learning, and demand the teacher's understanding of how a different cultural background may influence the learning. Demands that are too high may lead to failure. Demands that are too low, with respect to students' general knowledge and capability, may result in the students wrongly identifying themselves as low achievers.

Both students' sense of agency, and their investment in the learning project are seen as dynamic and dependent on their interactions in the surrounding environment (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Therefore, it is important to take into account the power structures which may influence the individuals' conceptions of their potential agency, and of their school investment. In addition, children's self-image and self-efficacy beliefs are dependent on how well they manage the school codes (cf. Cummins, 1996, 2000, 2007).

The academic code and everyday language competency

The environments where language use takes place can be referred to as the context of culture, participating in a class for example. But there is also the context of situation which puts specific demands on the use of language (see Halliday & Hasan, 1985/1989). Each culture encompasses certain expectations and unspoken rules for linguistic behaviours, but the use of language also varies according to the context of situation.

The context of situation is characterized by three major features; field, tenor and mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1985/1989). *Field* refers to the topic of what is talked or written about, *tenor* to the relationship between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader, and *mode* to the means of communication, for example writing or speech. The more context-embedded the communication is, the more cues for comprehension there are. Evidently, those situations which demand context-reduced language require a more complex register, even though the field is the same. Thus, school-language needs to be specifically addressed by educators of L2 learners to empower their academic learning, both content- and language-wise (Cummins, 2000). The development of meta-language is important in enhancing the

insight of written language as discourse styles, together with sufficient command of the script (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002).

Bernstein (1971, 2000) described how ownership of the school discourse, or the academic discourse, may be seen as dependent on social class. He stated that the code-switches between every-day and academic language, favoured children from middle class families, as the language use in those homes was similar to the more abstract and context-reduced language used in educational settings. As school codes often are covert, visible pedagogy, as a means to more equitable education, is advocated by a number of researchers (Anstey, 2003; Au & Raphael, 2000; Cummins, 1996, 2000; Gibbons, 2002; Heath, 1983; Edwards-Groves, 2003). Walsh (1991) describes the situation as follows:

> When students´cultural capital is compatible with that which schools disseminate, educational and life success is thought to be enhanced. However when this capital differs from the prerequisite knowledge legitimized in school, school failure, academic difficulty or problems with literacy are the result (p.10).

L2 learners often acquire an acceptable command of the target language in every-day casual situations. The students carry out classroom interactions with fluency. They possess skills denoted as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (Cummins, 1996). Comprehension becomes difficult when it comes to academic tasks with more complex language, on an abstract level with implicit information, also referred to as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, if the teacher does not realize that the task is way ahead of the students' language level (Cummins, 1996, 2000). Reichenberg (2005) gives account of how teachers even may fail to detect the students' need for support to acquire reading comprehension strategies.

The students need support in order to develop their academic language, as this language variety is not acquired spontaneously (Øzerk, 1995). According to Thomas and Collier (2002) the time required for a student to catch up with his or her peers who are native in the school language, may vary between 4-8 years, if the conditions for learning are favourable. In addition, the influences of the pedagogical environment may affect the learning processes in both negative and positive ways.

Øzerk (1995) portrays the relationship between the every-day language and language as a cognitive tool, as circular. In order to

develop context-dependent, informal, every-day language used in interpersonal encounters on a daily basis, it is important that the language user feels socially accepted in the context where this language is used. In order to develop decontextualized, formal, academic language a development of the every-day language is required. Teaching is needed, to ensure that the student's subject matter knowledge develops, to enable acquisition of academic concepts and academic thinking. This circular relationship also encompasses the relationship between the first and the second language, as well as the relationship between the development of the second language and the subject matter knowledge (ibid.).

By activating the students' existing knowledge about both content and language before reading a text the cognitive involvement is increased. However, learners' identity investment is required and is made possible when attention is also paid to their personal experiences. In this way, the students are given the conditions to enable expression of their identity and their cognitive potentials in their second language (Cummins, 1996).

Linguistic development, cognitive development and code knowledge are described by Cummins (1996, 2000) as main facilitators to ownership of language and one's educational trajectory. In other words, ownership of language is also a question of pedagogy extending beyond teaching the technical aspects of reading.

Future-oriented pedagogy

A key-concept in this thesis is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This implies that there is an emphasis on the potential development of the child, when the teacher, a parent or a more capable peer provides guidance in cases of problem solving, thus also high-lighting the concept of scaffolding.

In this context scaffolding may be exemplified by the process when an adult, a teacher or a peer, with certain techniques such as interactions or questioning, tries to enhance the learner's ability to move further in the ZPD. Examples of communicative approaches in the field of reading, encompassing Vygotsky's ideas, are techniques such as ´reciprocal teaching´ (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) and ´questioning the author´ (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997;

Reichenberg, 2005). Another scaffolding technique to link linguistic and cognitive development is instructional conversation. As defined by Cazden (1988), instructional conversation is "talk in which ideas are explored rather than answers to teachers' test questions provided and evaluated" (p. 54). Interest, meaning, ideas, and involvement are the main principles for these activities (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Through the linkage between old and new knowledge, optimal conditions for the activation of cognitive processes at higher levels, such as analyses, conclusions and summaries can be created. This kind of learning should be compared with the type of skill-and-drill practices, at a cognitively low level, sometimes used in reading instruction, where students practise abstract skills or answer simple closed questions which are not context-embedded. In that sort of learning situation the intended language development may simply not occur (Cummins, 1996, 2007).

Studies on Future Time Perspective have shown that students' conceptualisation of a future professional career is an important predictor of academic success (Peetsma, 2000; Kauffman & Husman, 2004). According to Phalet, Andriessen, and Lens (2004) future goals may enhance motivation and learning, by fostering positive instrumentality and building internal regulation. It boils down to the issues of fostering intrinsic motivation and adaptive learning in academic contexts. Thus, the importance of broadening the frames of reference, and employing a model for reading in accordance with this line of thought when viewing literacy development is further emphasized (cf. Freebody & Luke,2003).

Factors of significance for the L2 learners in the empirical studies

Literature and literacy

The reading of authentic literature can show positive effects on L2 children's literacy development (Au & Raphael, 2000; Elley,1991). Literature based approaches are inspired by a methodology that has gained ground in New Zealand (Clay, 1998). Elley (1991) found that L2 learners acquired the target language more quickly when using book flood approaches, as compared to more traditional methods using audio-lingual approaches. Elley emphasized the role of the children's interest in the texts they were exposed to, the focus on meaning, and the integration of oral and print activities as factors promoting students' L2 acquisition. However, these results must be interpreted with some caution, as different tests were used in different studies. Nicholson (2000) also performed extended comparative analyses of studies describing literature based approaches and phonics-inspired approaches around the world. No substantial differences were found linking reading ability and use of method with regard to average and over-achieving students. In accordance with Elley (1991), he found that literature based approaches favoured interest in reading and motivation for reading, while he concluded that phonics-inspired approaches were more beneficial to poor readers.

Book flood approaches also occur in Sweden. Such approaches are characterized by a multitude of reading materials, illustrated children's books, pre-writing, integrated oral activities, multimodal strategies to create pre-understanding, and authentic communication (Alleklev, 2000; Alleklev & Lindvall, 2001; Axelsson, 2000; Benckert, 2000; Bråbäck & Sjökvist, 2001; Nauclér, 2001; Nilsson & Sandemo, 2001; Obondo & Benckert, 2001). Apparently, the children are given the opportunity to develop in several reader roles, not only that of the decoder (Freebody & Luke, 2003).

One aspect of reading fiction concerns the use of formulaic language, studied primarily in relation to oral language production. A formulaic sequence is defined by Wray (1999) as:

> a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of word or other meaning elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar (ibid., p. 214).

Formulaic language, may be seen as a prospective key to idiomaticity. Formulaic language may offer an explanation to successful language learning, with roots in the cognitive processes involved in acquiring fluency in a second language. In a similar way to which letter strings are processed directly in orthographic reading, language learners seem to be able to retrieve word-string units, stored as formulaic structures, from the long term memory (Ekberg, 2004; Weinert, 1995; Wray, 1999). It is assumed that economisation, and reduction in the processing effort, in by-passing the grammatical processing route otherwise employed, both speeds up the production and allows the speaker/writer to allocate the effort needed to process utterances, to where it is most needed. To my knowledge, the ways in which the reading of fiction and the formulaic sequences found there, might affect language proficiency has not been extensively researched.

It is important not only to consider the individual act of reading, but also the joint construction of multiple meanings. According to Bull (2003) students are capable of dealing with "complex ideas in a meaningful way" (p 158) at a very young age, as long as the content is approached in an appropriate way so that the children can understand it. This conclusion implies that the pedagogy of the teacher is very important. Bull refers to research on Australian six and seven-year-olds working with dragons and dinosaurs. The children successfully learnt to identify and differentiate between genres, such as fiction and non-fiction and they succeeded in making multiple readings of both illustrative and written text. They were also sophisticated enough to understand how different viewpoints underlay the message delivered by different texts, and how the genre in turn affected the structure of the texts.

Discussions of texts and negotiations of meanings is one way of making language input comprehensible (Long, 1983). Features such as comprehension checks, and confirmation checks as well as requests for clarification, characterize this interactive learning. In particular, dialogues and small group conversations on meta-linguistic issues have been observed to enhance students' comprehension and language awareness (Gröning, 2006; Lindberg, 1996/2005; Lindberg & Skeppstedt, 2001). The strong focus on interpersonal, interactive work, when using fiction as working material, makes the classroom climate central to successful learning (Axelsson, 2000).

Teachers' own interest in literature is an aspect of literacy development which has largely been neglected in research. However, there are indications that pleasure in reading fiction seems to develop in classrooms where the teachers can communicate their own genuine interest in reading literature (Fletcher, Parkhill, Greenwood, Grimley, & Bridges, 2008).

Being able to explicate what the task is, how it is to be carried out, the purpose of the task, how it is going to be assessed and how further learning may take place are all important aspects of teaching. This applies to both literacy and other classroom activities. In particular, this applies to classrooms with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such aspects may seem evident to the teacher, but may be covert to the children. Further aspects of this will be presented in more detail below.

Making invisible codes visible

Classroom organisation and teachers' effective management strategies may significantly raise students' motivation to read (Fletcher et al, 2008). Explicit instructional talk, a contextualized classroom structure with defined content, processes and outcomes, and a clearly expressed learning focus are described as key components in creating an inclusive classroom (Edwards-Groves, 2003). The topic of this section is what makes an effective teacher, with particular respect to L2 learners.

Multicultural learners are often dependent on scaffolding. When teachers in a liberal way assume that all students share similar opportunities for learning in school, trouble may arise (Kubota, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2004). Students may be left in a void, lacking

guidance towards acknowledged, appropriate behaviour in educational settings and also towards the competence levels required in school (Mannitz & Schiffauer, 2004; Sawyer & Kamali, 2006; Siegel, 2006). The teacher is the person who can explain the purpose of tasks and behaviours, how things are to be carried out and how actions and performance may be assessed to create a platform for further learning. This is not only an issue about clarity in structure; it is also an issue about clarity in teacher's language use (Edward-Groves, 2003; Gibbons, 2002).

In short, pedagogy encompassing visible goals and explicit instructions which make learning evident, contributes to creating conditions for children with diverse backgrounds to learn on similar terms to children who come from a background where the Swedish school codes are encountered and implemented at home (Edward-Groves, 2003; Gibbons, 2002). In particular, this applies to reading comprehension. Positive impact on reading achievement levels was found when teachers were trained to give explicit instruction on strategies for reading comprehension, including students' monitoring of their own strategies (Fletcher et al., 2008).

Another aspect of visible school codes regards the evaluation procedures. According to the Processability Theory (PT) the biological/ cognitive developmental trajectory of language processing can be described as five hierarchical steps taken one at a time in a certain order, ranging from word-level to full complete clauses (Pienemann & Håkansson, 1999). In order for the learners to *produce* structures, they must be able to *process* the structures relevant to each stage that they are at. However, the language produced may not be used correctly according to the norms employed by native speakers. A teacher familiar with these stages of development knows that such "incorrect" utterances may actually indicate progression. They will also know the potential language level of the student and the pedagogical activities that may be relevant. The use of dynamic assessment procedures has gained attention as a means to promoting L2 learning (Benckert, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Gibbons, 2002; Rosander, 2005; Shohamy, 2004). One assessment procedure which builds on the view of second language learning as a dynamic process is performance analysis, where the learner's testing of hypotheses on the structure of the target language makes up the performance profile of the different stages in the interim language

development. As opposed to testing procedures primarily focusing on mistakes made by the learner, performance analysis pays attention to both correct use and also to deviances from correct use of the target language. It is most important to describe what the learner knows, in order to guide both teacher and student towards further activities, making use of this platform of already acquired knowledge (Bergman & Abrahamsson, 2004).

Not only lack of clarity, but also adults' lack of understanding of cultural circumstances can impede children's achievement and how this may work in practice will be illustrated in the next section.

Lack of inter-cultural sensitivity – an example

The way in which literacy patterns from the home environment can impede learning activities in a Swedish school is described by Nauclér (2003) who provides an illustrative example of how lack of inter-cultural understanding may hinder children's literacy development. The interactions of eight Turkish and seven Swedish families, the preschool-teachers and the children were observed during shared reading. The aim of the study was to examine the relationships between the children's early language socialization, and their later reading proficiency in grade 4. Several of the Turkish children were skilled story tellers, and had active knowledge of a more advanced story-grammar than the Swedish children. In spite of a large vocabulary, described as a reliable predictor of reading comprehension, problems in reading for learning were manifest in the Turkish children. Even though these children were as proficient decoders as the Swedish children, their reading comprehension was impaired (cf. Taube & Skarlind, 1997).

As in Heath's (1983) classic study, the researchers found divergent interactional patterns in the Swedish and the Turkish families. On the one hand, the Turkish mothers told their story and their children adjusted to the passive listener's role. The Swedish mothers on the other hand, involved their children as co-creators of the story, creating links between the content of the story and the child's own experiences. In preschool, the differences between the two kinds of interactional patterns became even more distinct, when the preschool-teachers guided the interactions with the Swedish children according to the norms employed in Swedish classrooms. The prevalent way of asking

questions, an Initiation-Response-Evaluation pattern, was prominent; one question – one correct answer. This is a pattern repeated later in school, in text books and tests. In interacting with the Turkish children, on the whole the preschool teachers left the children in their role as passive listeners. The researchers' conclusion was that communicative patterns practised in preschool, may contribute to the children's later reading proficiency, and that the lack of code knowledge impaired the Turkish children's reading development. Similar conclusions were reported in a study of preschool teachers' interactive patterns with children by Obondo and Benckert (2001).

To sum up, the conditions for learning in school may be dependent on communicative patterns acquired at home. Therefore, the mission of creating bridges between diverse cultural settings in the home environment and the activities carried out in school, seems to be of great importance for the creation of equal conditions for the school success of all Swedish children.

THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES

In search of the environmental factors linked to high achievement levels in reading, and in trying to understand how these factors worked, the following research questions were pursued; which student, teacher, teaching, and classroom characteristics discriminate between over-achieving and under-achieving classes, when SES and language background are both accounted for? How were a classroom climate and a classroom discourse created to promote reading achievement in a smaller sample of over-achieving classes? How did successful students describe and explain their academic success? Evidently these questions also reflect the shift in focus, the shift in perspectives and the shift in methods that took place during the completion of this thesis. Thus, the summaries of the empirical studies have their starting point in the autonomous view of reading in the first study, followed by the other two studies where the perspectives on literacy were broadened and the focus was narrowed down to predominantly multicultural classes.

Study one

Damber, U., Samuelsson, S., & Taube, K. (2008). Differences between over- and under-achieving classes in reading; teacher, classroom, and student characteristics. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Aims

Since earlier research indicates a substantial linkage between SES and language background on the one hand and reading achievement on the other hand, in particular at school level, the focus in the first study was to explore factors influencing reading achievement beyond SES and language background (Scarborough, 1998).

The initial study had two aims. The first aim was to identify classes which were performing at higher and lower levels in reading than those which would be expected with regard to the students' socio-economic

and language background. The second aim was to find student, teacher, teaching and classroom characteristics which could be linked to classes over-achieving in reading.

Participants

Target classes were selected from a data-base of reading comprehension test results, results from teacher questionnaires and student questionnaires from large-scale studies of reading achievement conducted in 1997, 1998, and 1999. This initial study was limited to school year three as the focus was on the class teachers who see their students in all subjects. Data had been collected from a total of 1092 grade three classes, including 25 552 students in Stockholm, Sweden and their teachers. These data were now used for secondary analyses (see Taube & Skarlind, 1997).

To select target classes matched for socio-cultural factors, the average number of books in the home was used as an index of socio-economic status at the class level. This index was validated by statistics from 1997-1999, describing the percentage of families with an income of more than 360,000 Swedish Kronor a year in each of the 14 city districts included, and the percentage of inhabitants within the same area with at least post-secondary level of education (USK, 2007). The correlation between income and level of education was .84. The correlations between average number of books and income and educational level were .56 and .68 respectively. As the level of education may be seen as a more reliable index of SES, the correlation of .68 between the number of books and the level of education indicated that the number of books in the home could be used as a reasonable index of SES.

The regression between the number of books at home and the average class performance in reading comprehension in the whole sample of 1092 classes was calculated. Classes with positive residuals above the 85th percentile were selected as over-achievers (n=163) and classes with negative residuals below the 15th percentile (n= 163) were selected as under-achievers. As the estimates of family income and educational level were significantly higher in the over-achieving classes a twin-matching procedure was performed to control for differences in SES. After matching for the number of books at home,

educational level and family income, 119 over-achieving classes and 119 under-achieving classes were obtained. At this point in the research process 119 over-achieving and 119 under-achieving classes were also compared *without* controlling for SES and language. After the twin-matching procedure described above, there was still a significant difference between over-achieving and under-achieving classes with regard to the proportion of children not native in Swedish. Therefore, a second twin-matching procedure was performed, to make sure that the over-achieving and under-achieving classes were well matched on all measures of SES and language. This resulted in a final sample of 94 over-achieving and 94 under-achieving classes.

Method

A paper-and-pencil test, with a maximum score of 26 points, measuring reading comprehension of narrative prose, expository prose and documents, such as a map and a school timetable was administered by the teachers. The tests had been distributed to the children during lessons. The students also took a word reading test, but as there were severe ceiling effects, this test was excluded.

Student and teacher questionnaires were employed, the teacher questionnaire containing a total of 29 questions. Fourteen questions addressed personal data, years of teaching experience, aims and use of teaching methods, assessment procedures, teacher continuity in the class, teacher education, and in-service training. The remaining 15 questions dealt with school resources, and classroom and student related questions, such as classroom climate. The drop-out rate for single questions in the questionnaire was between 1-6% with the exception of one question on parental contact, which had a drop-out rate of 20%.

The student questionnaire contained a total of 31 questions. Background information, literacy events in school and at home, home literacy environment, self-rated reading ability, library visits and activities that compete with reading were enquired about, as well as school conditions, relationships with friends and attitudes towards school work. The student questionnaires were also distributed by the teachers during lessons.

Composite variables were created by using exploratory factor analyses, when the data allowed such a procedure. The remaining questions were treated as single variables.

Mann-Whitney U tests and t-tests for independent samples were used for mean comparisons between the over-achieving and the under-achieving classes. The magnitude of mean differences was estimated by use of Cohen's d as an effect-size measure. Cohen's d estimations below .40 are considered to be small to moderate, and only effect sizes above .40 will be commented upon.

Results and discussion

When the 119 lowest achieving and the 119 highest achieving classes were compared *without* matching for SES and language background, large differences in both family income and educational levels were found. In addition, 47% of the students in the under-achieving classes had a first language other than Swedish, as compared to 12% of the students in the high achieving classes. Only a few teacher characteristics were found to discriminate between over-achieving and under-achieving classes beyond the impact of SES and language background. The teachers stayed with their class during the first three years in school, to a greater extent in the over-achieving classes than in the under-achieving classes. This difference was significant when the classes were matched on SES only, but not when matched for both SES and language. The teachers in the over-achieving classes also had longer experience of teaching. Teaching experience was a significant difference, irrespective of matching procedure (cf. Elley, 1994; OECD, 2001). Finally, teachers' informal parental contacts were more frequent in the over-achieving classes as compared to the under-achieving classes. This difference was significant when controlling for SES, but the significant differences disappeared when the classes were also matched on language background. .

Literacy activities such as drama, book reviews and letter writing to authors were more frequent in the over-achieving classes. More authentic literature was used as reading materials in the over-achieving classes, indicated by the more frequent writing of book reviews in the classes controlled for SES. The difference concerning book reviews disappeared when language background, as well as SES, was

controlled for. In addition, writing letters to the author was more frequent in the over-achieving classes and significant differences were indicated irrespective of matching procedure.

The classroom climate was found to be more positive in the over-achieving classes, both according to the students' and the teachers' perceptions. These observations included perceptions regarding the work climate as well as inter-personal relations, and significant differences were indicated irrespective of matching procedure. Teachers in the over-achieving classes matched on SES rated their experiences from Swedish lessons more positively, but this difference between over-achieving and under-achieving classes disappeared when the classes were matched both on SES and language background. Concerning student characteristics, students in the over-achieving classes were found to engage more in voluntary reading activities, and they estimated their reading ability to be higher. Students in the over-achieving classes also had access to a daily paper at home to a greater extent than the students in the under-achieving classes. Significant differences were indicated irrespective of matching procedure.

The results reveal that factors often connected to reading achievement, did not indicate significant differences between under-achieving and over-achieving classes. The question that emerges is how much the impact of SES and language background accounts for such differences, in particular in relation to frequently debated issues such as teachers' choices of methods, their formal educational background or the distribution of boys and girls in the classroom. However, it should be made clear that no evidence in support of causality can be claimed from these results.

In this study we tried to control for SES and language background by controlling for the number of books in the home, and the presence of a language other than Swedish as the first language. Whilst being well aware of the complexity of concepts like ethnicity and SES, there are reasons to believe that the impact of such factors is often intertwined with other factors, which are not controlled for, and thus still having an impact on the results of the study. Questions about how the children themselves perceived their socio-economic status or their cultural background were not asked, and of course this is a major limitation.

However, teachers' professional experience, teacher continuity and collaboration with the parents, together with literacy activities in the

home such as voluntary reading, may indicate a pattern where competent teachers can find connections between the school and the out-of -school world children grow up in (Langer, 2001). In addition, classroom climate emerged as an important factor in relation to literacy development.

It should be noted that many factors with the potential to influence the differences between over-achieving and under-achieving classes, such as teachers' and students' collaboration and the relationship to the school management, for example, are not included in this study.

It felt important to explore further the relative lack of significant differences between the over-achieving and under-achieving classes, in particular with regard to the teachers' behaviour and activities in the classroom, as years of teaching *did* indicate significant differences between under-achieving and over-achieving classes. Clearly, SES and, in particular language background, appeared as fundamental aspects to consider in relation to reading achievement. This was done in the second study by targeting low-SES multicultural classes successful in reading achievement.

Study two

Damber, U. (2009). Using inclusion, high demands and high expectations to resist the deficit syndrome – a study of eight grade three classes overachieving in reading. *Literacy*, *43 (1),* 43-49.

Aims

The main objective of the second study was to further examine the student, classroom and teacher/teaching characteristics that distinguished over-achieving grade three classes in reading. In addition, questions were also asked about how teachers can assist their students to become good, interested readers. As language background seems to be a powerful factor distinguishing between under-achieving and over-achieving classes, the second study was conducted to further explore low-SES multicultural classes which were clearly beating the odds in reading achievement. The following questions guided the inquiry:

• What student characteristics discriminate between targeted over-achieving classes and the reference classes?
• What teacher/teaching characteristics discriminate between the targeted over-achieving classes and the reference classes?
• What classroom characteristics discriminate between targeted over-achieving classes and the reference classes?
• How was the classroom climate and discourse created, according to the teachers?
• How was literacy acquired and developed in the targeted classes, according to the teachers?

Participants

One low-SES, multicultural district with several over-achieving classes was selected from the same data set that was used in the first study. There were a total of 68 classes in this district and based on the regression analyses performed in the first study the eight over-achieving classes were targeted.

For the statistical analyses a group of 100 reference classes was formed to create a back-drop against which the results of the eight over-achieving classes could be viewed. A twin-matching procedure was employed to ensure that the classes did not differ on the measures of family income, parental educational background, number of books at home, and the proportion of students not native in Swedish.

As a complement to the statistical analyses six informants with relations to one or several of the targeted eight classes during the time of the data collection, were located; three teachers, one librarian, one administrator and one preschool teacher. These informants, all with extended school experience were interviewed in-depth in order to shed further light on what was happening in those classrooms.

Methods

The same reading comprehension test, student and teacher questionnaire as were used in the first study (data collection made 1997-1999), provided the quantitative data in the second study. The analysis of the statistical data was the first step in the process of analyses.*T*-tests were performed to explore mean differences between the target classes and the control classes. Cohen's *d* was calculated as

effect size measures. Results with effect size measures exceeding .50 were taken into account in the analyses.

The in-depth interviews carried out in 2007 were conducted on the telephone and recorded. The interviews lasted between an hour and a half to two hours, on average. A thematically structured interview-guide was employed to tick off central themes, but the dialogue was allowed to spin off naturally with the informant directing the course of the dialogue. Follow-up questions were subsequently asked to make sure that the answers were interpreted according to the interviewee's intentions (Kvale, 1996). In the analysis of interviews I consider the transcription as the initial move. Thereafter the transcripts were reread several times and the excerpts which I perceived as indicators of the central themes in the interview guide were assembled, compared and categorized with respect to their content.

The following step of analysis analyses drew on both interview data and statistical results and employed a theoretical framework based on perspectives on literacy described in new literacy studies, where transformative purposes of pedagogy (cf. Freire, 1970/2007) are included (Freebody & Luke, 2003; Gee, 2001; Street, 1984, 1995). The notions of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978), the concepts of strong/ weak framing and classification (Bernstein, 1971, 2000), Cummins´ (1996, 2000. 2007) theories on second language learners' schooling and critical language theory focusing the deficit syndrome and colour blindness (Au & Raphael, 2000; Kubota, 2004; Luke, 2004) were employed in the final analyses. This theoretical content provided the lenses through which I viewed the categories of data, both qualitative and quantitative, thus shaping the five major themes that gradually emerged. With respect to the statistical data which shaped the first contours of the final picture, I would describe this procedure as deductive/inductive, or with Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994) as an abductive procedure.

Results and discussion

The students' perceptions of peer relations and the teachers' perceptions of their ability to meet demands were more positive in the target-classes. In contrast to study 1, the majority of significant statistical results concerned teacher and teaching characteristics. The teachers were more experienced in these classes. Literacy activities

such as drama, writing letters to authors, and authors' visits were more frequent. The teachers' requirements for extra resources were also lower.

When the interview results were added to the statistical results five major themes gradually emerged:

• *Participation in Reading Communities*. The reading of fiction was the guiding principle for the children's transition into becoming literate. Inclusion and individualization emerged as key concepts, as students could participate, for example using multimodal input and/or expressions and texts on various language levels, according to their needs and abilities. A peaceful and quiet atmosphere characterized the classrooms. Oral activities, including drama, were given high priority (cf. Gibbons, 2002; Miller, Herman, & Nockerts, 2006; Nielsen, 1998). Writing and reading were learnt and practised in parallel, and were highly valued activities (cf. Levin, Patel, Margalit, & Barad, 2002; Liberg, 1990; Silva & Alves, 2003).

• *The Fun Factor*. The teachers' narratives strongly mediated the impression that having fun and feeling at ease were ubiquitous premises for both teachers' and students' work and life in the classroom (cf. Petrovich, Carlsson, Petersson, Hansson, & Ingvar, 2004; Krashen, 1985). Not only the classroom climate, but the work itself was perceived as enjoyable. The students were assigned a lot of fiction to read at home, even during the vacations, something which they did since they enjoyed their homework. This also explains that reading levels did not drop during vacations (cf. Cuningham & Stanovich, 1993; Chall & Jacobs, 2003). As students were assigned tasks aiming to stretch their ZPD and as they were scaffolded to succeed, the joy of expanding self-efficacy, presumably contributed to positive attitudes to the school work (Bruner, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978). The teachers' knowledge of the stages of interim language development, in combination with the use of performance analysis, instead of standardized testing procedures, may have helped the children to feel successful. Thus, the aims for learning were adapted to aims that were possible for the students to reach, according to the teachers' estimations (cf. Bergman & Abrahamsson, 2004; Pienemann & Håkansson, 1999). In other words success was made possible and there is reason to believe that these strategies for success also made learning fun.

• *Collaboration*. A collaborative classroom climate was described by all of the informants (cf. Dysthe, 1996; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). Collaboration among teachers also enabled far reaching individualization in the classrooms. Collaborative teacher work as a premise for creative thinking was also described in the teacher narratives. Collaboration with the parents was emphasized by the informants as a central aspect of successful literacy development (Baker, 2003; Cummins, 1996; Drummond & Stipek, 2004).

• *Avoiding Colour Blindness*. Both teacher-parent and teacher-student communication was characterized by utter explicitness. The teachers' ambition was to make expectations clear. The clarity which characterized both communication, classroom organization and literacy work is described by Edward-Groves (2003) as a premise for the creation of inclusive classrooms. The teachers' scaffolding also included elements such as instruction on vocabulary, grammar and spelling, which were often left to the parents to assist with when home-work was assigned. To ensure that the children received the assistance they needed, this type of feed-back was given in school as some of the parents did not speak Swedish or could not read or write. I interpret the combination of weak classification (thematic work and the use of authentic literature) and strong framing (explicit instruction, explicit structures and clearly defined tasks) in the classrooms, as a smooth way of introducing these multi-cultural students to the Swedish school codes (cf. Cummins, 1996). Thus, language was effectively used as a tool for the empowerment of the students (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

• *Resistance to the Deficit Syndrome*. The teachers expressed faith in their students' capabilities and possibilities. In my interpretation, this reflects a sturdy resistance to the discourse characterized by the view of immigrant children as deficit communicators (cf. Economou, 2007; Lahdenperä, 1997; Parzyk, 1999; Runfors, 2003, Torpsten, 2008). The combination of scaffolding, high demands and high expectations sets a future perspective. The strife to expand the upper limit of the ZPD also reflects a future-oriented pedagogy, with empowerment as one possible outcome.

As a concluding remark I would like to stress that the inclusion of teachers' narratives, definitely added to the results, even though both the qualitative and the quantitative explorations were very small and generalisations cannot be made from them. I also believe that the

employment of a wider theoretical frame of reference, can give rise to conclusions that otherwise would not have been reached (cf. Heath & Street, 2008; Luke, 2004) such as, for example, the importance of the teachers' over-all approaches to their pupils. The over-all approach becomes particularly important in a stigmatized residential area, like the one represented in this study, where the deficit discourse has been demonstrated by teachers (cf. Parzyk, 1997; Runfors, 2003). Another example may be how the empowering qualities in well-structured tuition became visible when seen in relation to a certain social and cultural environment.

Study three

Damber, U. (2009). Reading, schooling and future time perspective: a small-scale study of five academically successful young Swedes. *The International Journal of Learning*, *16*(1), 235-248.

Aims

The primary aim of the third study was to explore how academically successful students perceived their own earlier school experiences, with a special focus on the habitual reading of fiction that they carried out during their elementary school years, and how they related those experiences to their present situation as university students. A second aim was to validate the results of the second study. One working hypothesis was that linkages might exist between future-oriented pedagogy, characterized by concepts like the ZPD and dynamic assessment in the early school years and the students' development of a future time perspective (see Petsma, 2000; Phalet, Andriesssen & Lens, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). More explicit research questions were:

• How were students' elementary school experiences seen ten years after elementary school?
• How were students' elementary school experiences related to the later academic trajectory?
• What other factors were believed to have influenced students' academic trajectory?

• Had the students developed a future time perspective? If so, how did this future time perspective develop?

Participants

Five academically successful students, two men and three women, from one of the targeted classes in the two earlier studies participated. One of the informants in study two provided me with five telephone numbers of former students in one of the classes. I called the numbers and got in contact with one former student who was willing to participate. This student provided me with names of other students who might be willing to participate. All participants were 19 years old and their countries of origin were the following; Vietnam, Bangladesh, Turkey, Eritrea and Syria. One of the informants was born in Sweden, two arrived at the age of one, one at the age of two, and one at the age of three and a half years. Their present fields of study were Economics, Medicine, Pharmacology and Dentistry.

Method

Research on Future Time Perspective (FTP), and the results of the second study formed the basis for the development of a thematically structured interview guide which was used to tick off the themes as the interview proceeded. The informants provided personal data, accounts of their social situation and accounts of their school trajectory, with a special focus on literacy experiences during the elementary school years. They commented upon their use of language(s), their present situation and their future plans. Follow-up questions were subsequently asked to make sure that my interpretations of the informants' statements were in line with their intentions. A simplified version of the Zimbardo Time-Perspective Inventory was used as a guide to enquire about FTP (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; D'Alessio, Guarino, De Pascalis, & Zimbardo, 2003).

The interviews, conducted on the telephone in 2008, took one to two hours and were recorded. As was done in the second study the interviews were then transcribed as the first step of analysis. The interview data were then compared, coded and categorized in a similar manner as in the second study. A similar theoretical framework was employed in the analyses, with the addition of theories of future time perspective. As mentioned, one underlying hypothesis was that future-

oriented pedagogy might promote the growth of students' future time perspective. Thus, a deductive-inductive procedure dominated this abductive analysis of the data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). However, the ambition was to keep the hypothesis sensitive to the data (cf. Heath & Street, 2008).

Results and discussion

The results supported the findings of study two. According to the students' narratives these students and their classmates had already developed into readers and writers during elementary school years. Pleasure, curiosity and interest were described as the driving forces for reading (Axelsson, 2000; Guthrie, 2004; Gibbons, 2002). The students described how reading developed into a personal interest, rather than a school activity and how reading and writing became part of their identity (cf. Dyson, 1997; Liberg, 1990). The females were still devoted readers of fiction, though the males mentioned personal development and career purposes as the primary reasons for their present reading.

The informants confirmed that they had met with high demands in elementary school. They also confirmed that the teachers had high expectations, and that they were supported to be able to meet those demands (cf. Edwards-Groves, 2003; Gibbons, 2002; Mosenthal et al., 2004; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004). Their literacy skills were not tested by use of standardized tests, and all the informants described how they felt acknowledged, trusted and supported (Crawford, 2003; Pavlenko, 2002; Rosander, 2005). For example, support in becoming a confident public speaker through the use of drama was described.

No signs of the fourth grade slump or drops in reading competency during vacations were reported, which was explained by the extensive amount of fiction that was also read at home (cf. Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998).

All informants describe their reading ability as a crucial facilitating factor during their school careers (cf. Cunningham & Stanovich, 1993; Stanovich, 2000). With quite emotional memories, they also illustrated the joy that characterized their first school years. According to these narratives a positive attitude towards schooling was built up (cf. Petrovich, Carlsson, Petersson, Hansson, & Ingvar, 2004; Kullberg, 2004). The teacher as an individual is strongly emphasized as a role

model, and as a person with the potential to inspire and make one feel confident as a student (see Cummins, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Gibbons, 2002).

All informants witnessed to their families' support. They described their parents' wish for them to study further, though it was not mentioned as an external pressure (cf. Phalet, Andriessen, & Lens, 2004). A wish for social mobility was also described, as the informants saw how many of their neighbours were either out of work or struggled hard with jobs that according to the informants did not leave room for personal development.

All the informants described a strong Future Time Perspective (Peetsma, 2000; Phalet, Andriessen, & Lens, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). They described that they knew how to plan their studies and prioritize among different demands, so that studying became effective. A sense of belonging in the academic setting was also described (cf. Cummins, 1996, 2000).

The areas where the informants' statements differ substantially are on the topics of language use and language attrition. On the issue of identification with the target-language group, all informants agreed on that they identified themselves as Swedish, even though the context (being abroad, at home or in the family's original country) could affect how they saw themselves (cf. Verhoeven, 1991). The fact that they grew up with Swedish children's literature was described as one factor which contributed to this identification. The young Turkish woman had begun to read more Turkish literature as an adult, as she had started to better appreciate Turkish with its rich metaphors, with the coming of maturity. The young Vietnamese man described how Swedish was displacing Vietnamese at home, thus most probably indicating how language attrition was on its way (cf. Boyd, 1985). He found it hard to sustain his Vietnamese and reported minimal contacts with the Vietnamese culture. The other informants used their original language primarily when communicating with their parents and when visiting their country of origin. It should, however, be noted that all the informants were bi- or multilingual with a good command of their native language at the time when the test-data were collected in 1997-1999. Being able to communicate when visiting the country of origin was also the primary reason given for keeping the language alive. The informants who spoke Arabic and Turkish also saw career reasons for the use of their first language.

Besides good reading and writing ability, the factors emphasized by the informants as being important for successful schooling were personal relationships, being seen as an individual, and development as a person. With respect to the biological/cognitive levels of L2 development, the age of onset for L2 acquisition probably also contributed to these students' success. The strongest evidence that there might be a critical period for L2 acquisition has been found in research on accents. Age of onset has been found to be the strongest predictor of native-likeness in oral performance, as compared to time of stay and range of use of the L1. In addition, with respect to the development of syntactic processes, the interviewees started to acquire their L2 at an age which was favourable to them (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2006; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003). . As this is a very small study no generalizations should be made, but I believe that there is reason to further examine the relationship between future-oriented pedagogy and Future Time Perspective, as the results obtained here indicate that such a link may very well exist. Questions of reliability and validity in qualitative and quantitative studies will be further penetrated in the discussion which follows in the next chapter.

Discussion

What can we learn from these empirical studies?

The first study certainly made clear that SES and language background do have an impact on reading achievement at a class level. Without controlling for SES and language background the difference between the highest and lowest achieving groups in reading comprehension was substantial. The findings of the first study indicated a strong link between SES and language and reading achievement. Only a few classroom, teaching and teacher characteristics account for differences between over-achieving and under-achieving classes over and above the impact of SES and language. From earlier research we know that SES has a strong impact in accounting for differences between groups, classes and schools. These influences, to a lesser degree also exist at an individual level (Frith, 1999; Scarborough, 1998). These findings raise two important questions: how well do we control for SES and language background when analyzing individual and group differences in literacy achievement, and how much of the research findings reflect SES and language background, rather than teaching and learning activities organised and enacted in a school context?

Apparently there is reason to believe that how SES and language is controlled for will influence the results (see August, 2006). As Levin (1995) points out SES-factors are very hard to eliminate as they appear intertwined with other background and classroom factors (see also Stanovich, 2000). In a study by Byrne and colleagues (in press) classroom effects were explored by using identical twins who certainly share both genes and environment, and thus, differences in the environment were extremely well controlled for. They found that the classroom effect, including a possible teacher effect, accounted for approximately eight percent of the individual differences in reading skill (see also Nye, Konstantinopolous, & Hedges, 2004, for similar findings). These findings are in sharp contrast to other researchers' findings suggesting that the teacher effect is substantial in explaining

individual differences in reading achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Despite the twin-matching procedure employed in the first study, my conviction is that SES and language still influence some of the findings of the study. Whether the number of books in the home is a satisfying index of SES is certainly an issue which could be discussed. In our data, collected in 1997-1999 we found a reasonable correlation between the number of books and the other indicators of SES. Whether the number of books is still a valid index in a digitalized society also characterized by compact living is, in my opinion, an open question.

Some interesting differences appeared in the first study, after controlling for SES and language. For example, the use of authentic literature and the creation of a more positive classroom climate seemed to characterize the over-achieving classes. One additional factor discriminating between over-achieving and under-achieving classes was teacher experience. This result is interesting as only a few other classroom and teaching characteristics seem to influence group achievement in reading in the targeted classes.

Several studies indicate that the choice of method for reading instruction does not make a big difference with respect to reading achievement (Chall, 1983; Nicholson, 2000). The first study confirms such findings. In fact, the links between teachers' and students' literacy activities and reading achievement were very weak in the study. I believe that there is also another aspect which is important in relation to these issues. With what kind of questions is it fruitful to explore classroom life? What if there are subtle, qualitative differences which have an impact, but which can not be fully captured in large-scale quantitative studies? Do not all results from a questionnaire or a standardized test reflect certain social and cultural circumstances, as well as how these circumstances affect practice and inter-personal interplay among and between teachers and students? How much attention is paid to such linkages? I would say none, since as a researcher I end up with a quite simplified description of a very complex weave of factors, when trying to explain patterns of learning and teaching in very heterogeneous groups. A phenomenologist might have raised the objection that the phenomenon of learning, for example, is not described in terms that pay proper attention to the true nature of the phenomenon (Larsson, 1993). Still I have to emphasize the importance of the statistical data as a back-drop against which all

results in this thesis should be viewed as, for example, the patterns of segregation are clearly illustrated by the statistics.

It is important to note that the first study indicates that teacher competency has an influence on the classroom differences in reading. When considering Swedish descriptions of stigmatized residential areas (see for example Economou, 2007; Bunar, 2001) I find it reasonable to suspect that findings on a micro-level may have linkages to structures of inequity on a macro-level, such as the distribution of low-SES students demonstrated in the first study. Linkages to such structures deserve attention when reading results are analyzed, to an even larger extent than that given in these studies, even if that ambition was present.

One major shortcoming in the first study was that multi-level analyses, which may have shed further light on the relationships between group and individual levels, were not performed. In addition, even though the original sample of classes was quite large, the targeted groups of classes were comparatively small, viewed from a statistical point of view. Still, the groups formed in the study are heterogeneous. Further measures to examine subgroups within the groups were not taken, in order to keep these heterogeneous groupings heterogeneous, as they were seen as manifestations of the "mainstream", which is also the type of group teachers meet in their classrooms. The fact that a single reading comprehension test was used to check reading performance may also be discussed. However, we found that the earlier employment of this test in several similar studies provided evidence in favour of its usability. Another shortcoming is the fact that the reading level of a substantial number of students was quite low. We knew that the targeted students did not study the subject "Swedish as a second language", but to what extent they were able to understand a questionnaire like the one they were exposed to, we do not know. Nevertheless, we find it reasonable to assume that the teachers were able to assist students having problems understanding the questionnaire. This uncertainty about how much of the language in the questionnaire the children understood constitutes a major problem, as I see it. The reliability of the statistical results of the student surveys in both study one and study two must therefore be interpreted with some caution.

The second study intended to let teachers' voices illuminate the statistics. This also meant that a major problem was built into the study

because of the ten-year discrepancy in time between the interviews and the statistical data collection, which negatively affects the reliability of this study. It is also relevant to wonder how the teachers' descriptions of their practice have been affected by, for example, in-service training and/or longer experience of teaching. In spite of these shortcomings I believe that the study gained in validity from this procedure. The teachers described and exemplified their theory of praxis, that is actions that they took/take together with the perceptions, knowledge, values and experiences which in combination with their actions form their teaching praxis (Lauvås & Handal, 2001). The teachers gave an account of how this theory had evolved and how it was enacted over the years. It should be kept in mind that the alternative was to concentrate solely on the statistical data which seemed unsatisfactory. Still, the problem of unsatisfactory triangulation deserves recognition.

To a certain degree one teacher could validate some of the content in the other teachers' narratives, as could comparisons between the narratives and the statistical data. However, it is a known fact that what teachers say they do and what they actually do, are by no means identical. As Lauvås and Handal (2001) describe the relationship between applied praxis theory, "theories-in-use", and formulated praxis theory, "espoused theory", it is common that the way in which the teacher formulates his/her ideal goals for praxis, only partly coincides with the praxis visible in the classroom. In addition, the number of years between data collection and the interviews naturally diminishes the reliability of the teachers' statements, as the teachers were asked to recall their thoughts and activities as much as ten years previously, even if the teachers often chose to illustrate their way of reasoning with more recent examples. For example, observations could have confirmed the narratives in this respect.

Evidently the two first empirical studies would have gained substantially in both validity and reliability from a parallel ethnographic approach, or from a more elaborated mixed methods approach from the time of the first data collection (Ercikan & Roth, 2006; Heath & Street, 2008, Åsberg, 2000). I am also aware of the fact that interviews with teachers in low and/or under-achieving classes would have been a way to shed further light on the research problem, but as I did not hold enough information on who those teachers were, no such attempt was made. In addition, the small size of the sample makes generalizations impossible, at least according to common

quantitative standards, as the samples are neither randomly chosen, nor are they representative of the population (Rudberg, 1993; Kvale, 1995).

However, there are other ways of viewing qualitative results, even if the sample is small. Here, the aim is not to make statements about a population, or to generalize to a larger population. Instead, it is a question of revealing the mechanisms at work in a certain setting, and revealing the features in the data that could give insights into individuals' perceptions (Larsson, 1993). What is portrayed in the qualitative study may also serve as a picture for the reader to recognize their own context or to compare with their own context (Atkinson, 1990). According to several researchers, there is also the aspect of social consequences of measurements to consider, when it comes to validity (Moss, 1995). This view becomes relevant in relation to the present empirical studies, in discussing the question of whether categories created by researcher, may contribute to create collective perceptions of ethnicity, for example (Chanser-Watkins, 2006). In this case such perceptions may have impact on both those who are included and those who are excluded from the category in question. According to Kvale (1995), when viewing validity as a social construct within a scientific discourse, it could involve a conversation about reality. Therefore, when the results of these studies were analysed, one ambition was to raise consciousness about how fruitful conditions for groups of Swedish students, who risk being categorized as students with problems, may be provided. Another ambition was to encourage dialogue between the proponents of different perspectives (cf. Freire, 1970/2000; Quinn Patton, 2002).

The findings in the second study point out inter-relational and classroom climate-related issues as being fundamental for the development and outcome of the classroom activities in these teachers' classrooms (cf, Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie, 2004). The results in the second study are strongly connected to the field of pedagogy. The teachers describe how they created an environment where students could expand their language competency in a broad sense (Dysthe, 1996; Langer, 2001). In addition, the teachers were preoccupied with their students' way of viewing themselves and their future possibilities in the world. Pragmatic aspects of reading were found intertwined with other dimensions of reading such as syntax, vocabulary and phonology, thus linking the literacy events to the variability that

applies to all language domains (cf. Frith, 1999). All communicative situations offer choices, and in addition, in a school context some choices may be more prestigious than others (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002). These students were offered such choices.

According to the teachers, the Swedish school codes were gradually introduced into the classes and the command of reading was emphasized. In these multicultural classes the general approach to literacy was directed by meaning, as described both by the teachers and the interviewed students. However, as the teachers had large tool-kits and long experience, intensive work with phoneme-grapheme connections and decoding skills was employed when this was needed. As I view the results, the Four Reader Role Model applies very well when describing the way the teachers worked in order to promote reading success (see Freebody & Luke, 2003).

The students in the targeted, multicultural classes had good results on the standardized test in grade three. However, I believe there are reasons to discuss the notion of "high results" and, in particular, the discrepancy between what such a result means and how it is used in research versus in practice. A reading test measures reading ability at a certain point in time, in a certain situation. It certainly transmits an impression of the child's reading ability there and then. However, in order to predict future adult reading habits or to examine how reading ability supports academic achievement the degree to which the student develops the flexibility in language use needed for academic achievement must also be considered. It is from this perspective practitioners often relate to reading test results, not as an ultimate result but as a guide to the pursuance of further goals far ahead in the future (Pavlenko, 2002; Shohamy, 2004). Children's conceptions of written language and their metalinguistic insights, both conscious and unconscious, are very important aspects of their development into literate individuals. With Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002) I adhere to the stance that

> "[t]o be ´linguistically literate´ means to possess a linguistic repertoire that encompasses a wide range of registers and genres. Once literacy is part of an individual's cognitive system, it interacts with other components of linguistic knowledge to shape the emergence of its key property /…/ rhetorical flexibility or adaptability" (p. 420).

In the empirical studies some ways of gaining linguistic flexibility were exemplified, the use of drama being one such example. The extensive reading of fiction may also be assumed to have contributed to extending the students' vocabulary and linguistic repertoire. In particular the possible effects of the input of formulaic language from the reading of fiction need to be further researched (cf. Ekberg, 2004; Wray, 1999). Whether there may be linkages between extensive reading of authentic fiction, and flow and accuracy in the students' language production, is a question yet to be answered. As the use of formulaic language predominantly seems to be mastered by learners who interact with Swedish native speakers in naturalistic environments, one presumptive effect of reading a lot of fiction is that it may compensate second language-learners to a certain degree, in classrooms where such interactions are not possible due to the ethnic composition in the class.

The matter of being able to navigate among genres and registers applies in particular to L2 learners as high flexibility in literacy may also enable the necessary code shifts that are crucial to become a successful student (Cummins, 1996, 2000). There is a risk that multicultural learners will be categorized according to the deficit discourse (cf. Runfors, 2003; Parzyk, 1999; Torpsten, 2008). Children who demonstrate a low factual level in reading comprehension in grade three, may very well develop into competent readers further on. Most important is the question of whether the child gets a chance to develop in the ZPD or not (see Vygotsky, 1978). In my opinion, the question of how to make genres and registers accessible to all children is under-emphasized in both research and practice. The children who know how to decode, but still do not develop good reading comprehension in diverse genres deserve attention. Bilingual children are not the only children who may have problems with literacy activities as the question of code knowledge (and reading comprehension strategies) is not only a question of language, but a question which also involves class, gender and other background factors (cf. Frith, 1999).

The third study is a small qualitative study with the aim of highlighting the successful academic trajectories of five of the multicultural students in one of the targeted classes in the second study. The third study also intended to illustrate how findings from both a large-scale quantitative study and findings from a not-

generalizable qualitative study can interact and generate a deeper understanding of the circumstances associated with academic success (Ercikan & Roth, 2006). The interviews were carried out in 2008 and the students were not only asked to tell me about their present situation, but they were also asked to tell me about their memories from the elementary school years. Therefore, it should be noted that the study suffers from the same discrepancy in time between the statistical data collection and the interviews, with the same negative effects on reliability that occurred in the second study. On the other hand, the informants had probably *not* been able to formulate their experiences when they were eight or seven years old as clearly as they were able to as young adults.

Still the students' emphasis on pleasure, curiosity and personal interest, as well as motivation as driving forces for reading over the years, points out fundamental aspects of their literacy development. All five had reached one crucial goal for literacy education as they had developed into reading adults who read for multiple purposes. They had all developed a strong future time perspective and a strong sense of self-efficacy. They had not met with standardized testing procedures, but they described how they were scaffolded and supported by their teachers and by the teachers' ways of preparing them to meet the demands of the classroom, irrespective of their factual language level. They had perceived both expectations and demands in school as high. Drama and oral activities were described in all the narratives as facilitating language development. Of course their literacy competency had contributed to their self-image. This had shaped the way they viewed themselves and shaped their habitus or mental map that guided their perceptions of how they were able to position themselves in their academic field. They also emphasized the support they had received at home, thus also confirming the importance of fruitful cooperation between the parents and the school. The informants reported how they felt their parents' support during the school years, but it should be noted that they related their cracking of the code and their early interest in reading fiction primarily as outcomes of school activities.

The most intriguing question that the findings in the third study raises, concerns the potential link, described by both students and teachers, between future time perspective and the teachers' future-oriented pedagogy (cf. Vygotsky, 1978). The results indicate that in

order to see how different aspects on literacy link to each other, broader perspectives on literacy are called for. In other words both positivist and interpretivist perspectives can contribute to knowledge-building about how academic success is made possible (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The third study illustrates how some individuals actually beat the odds, in particular with regard to their SES and language background. Of course, one might argue that downward status trajectories are common when refugees migrate to a new country of residence, and that these students' academic success may simply reflect the family's former higher socio-economic status. However, such a conclusion would also render the statistical patterns exposed in study one even more solid, with children with a first language other than Swedish being highly over-represented in the group of low achieving classes. The main issue in this thesis is that such patterns can be altered, and that transformative pedagogy may have a role in that process (cf. Bernard, 2004; Freire, 1970/2000). In my opinion, descriptions of success are extremely important in order to counteract a deficit discourse, so that individuals will not be categorized as low achievers due to their residential origin, their accent or the colour of their skin.

To sum up, the findings of the empirical studies established that segregation and inequity are part of the Swedish educational scene, in which literacy acquisition and development takes place. In addition, the relative lack of significant results in the first study indicates that the impact of SES and language background on reading achievement is substantial. The first study pointed out four major areas of interest for future development associated with high reading achievement, beyond the impact of SES. These areas are reading habits and exposure to print, the reading of literature, and work with authentic literature. In addition there is also the classroom climate and the teacher, as long teacher experience emerged as a salient characteristic of the teachers in the over-achieving classes.

These themes were further illuminated in the second study where classroom climate and personal relations were further emphasized. The fun-factor was central and work in the students' zone of proximal development dominated, according to the teachers. The classrooms were characterized by high demands and high expectations, combined with the teachers' clearly expressed trust in their students' capacity. There was a strong focus on literacy with the reader role of the decoder

being extended by elaborating use of, analysis of, and participation in texts by means of drama, for example. In contrast to the 100 reference classes language-experience-based approaches dominated as did the reading of authentic literature and fiction. The classroom work was characterized by strong framing encompassing explicit language use and instruction, in combination with thematic work. The teachers also collaborated with the students' parents, to ensure that the amount the children were reading did not drop during vacations (cf. Burkham et al., 2004).

The five multicultural students in the third study confirmed this description of classroom life, and emphasized the relationship to the teacher as being very important, both as a facilitator and a role model. They also gave evidence of a very strong Future Time Perspective, where their literacy competency showed as one crucial factor. Most importantly, these five students illustrate how positions in school can be altered, so that hope and future prospectives can also develop, even in a "stigmatized" residential area (cf. Bunar, 2001).

Mainstream includes diversity

The students in a Swedish school class, regardless of whether they are L1 or L2 learners, all have different conditions for learning, different socio-cultural backgrounds and different interests, experiences and expectations. They also have different genetic profiles, which means that the underlying abilities required for literacy acquisition are distributed in varied ways (Frith, 1999; Samuelsson et al, 2005). In each and every one of the municipalities in Sweden there are inhabitants with diverse cultural backgrounds. It is important to emphasize that those inhabitants and their children are the mainstream in today's society. The Swedish population is now, and will continue to be in the future, multicultural. The implication is that all teachers must have sufficient knowledge to teach their classes. Such knowledge should include knowledge about L2 acquisition and diversity. This is not only a matter for one particular category of teachers, or for particular classrooms. Children acquire their second language throughout the whole school day and all teachers have to maximise their potential as facilitators.

During my work with this thesis I have also scrutinized my own mono-linguistic perspectives. Not until I met with critical perspectives

during my reading, did I realize that I too contributed to sustaining the deficit syndrome. I see an extended need for education in multicultural issues and L2- related aspects on learning, not only for teachers but also for educational researchers. Categorizing is always a risky business and sometimes we may not even be aware of our own mono-linguistic perspectives, or of the factors which contribute to sustain such perspectives. It is my belief that such awareness should be actively cultivated.

Code knowledge - the academic threshold

The results of my studies point out code knowledge as a very important component of academic success. By code knowledge I refer both to the language used in school and the way of behaving in Swedish classrooms (cf. Bernstein, 1971, 2000; Cummins, 1996, 2000). It is essential for all students to acquire a large and elaborated vocabulary, including a substantial number of nouns and low-frequency words, and it is particularly important for students who do not bring this kind of vocabulary with them to school (Bialystok, 2002, 2007; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003). All teachers need to actively support the development of their students' language in this respect. That L2 learners may lag behind regarding elaborated language is evident. But students who use different varieties of language, depending on urban/rural differences, socio-economic differences, gender differences and so forth, may be just as much in need of this kind of support from their teachers as multicultural learners, if equity is to be the aim for Swedish schooling. In this respect a strong focus on language and reading is not primarily a language issue, but an issue of democracy. Though the concept of class may be defined differently in the post-modern society, the differences between categories of Swedish citizens still remain and need to be paid attention to, particularly so in relation to literacy practice and research. The students in the third study demonstrated how a good command of written and spoken language was an important facilitator of academic success.

The acquisition of academic codes certainly concerns language, but also the codes required for academic success concerning general behaviour in the classroom. My tentative conclusion is that the way the teachers in the second study worked with their students paved the way

for the students to gain access to the school codes. The results of the first study also support the claim that classroom climate, parental contacts, and extensive reading are factors strongly linked to reading success, thus creating the good soil for academic development to grow in. The employment of quite a strongly framed regulative discourse, in terms of strict routines concerning classroom organization, homework, task performance and so forth, led to a feeling of security and also to a high degree of activity among the students, which the students' narratives also confirmed. The teachers' clarity of language helped to bring clarity about what the purposes of tasks carried out were and how tasks were to be carried out (see also Edward-Groves, 2003). This clarity also involved communication and collaboration with the parents (cf. Baker, 2003). In addition, the teachers employed thematic work and used authentic literature rather than school books. In other words, the classification was not that strong. Taking into consideration that Swedish classroom work is often both weakly framed and weakly classified, the students had the chance to learn what was expected of them and how to pursue the learning aims in a Swedish classroom setting. Many Swedish children would most likely benefit from such explicit guidance to the school codes, both children with Swedish and other language backgrounds (cf. Bernstein, 1971, 2000).

A need for mixed methods?

Both researchers and practitioners in the field of reading deal with epistemological dimensions, social dimensions, linguistic dimensions and ideological dimensions. One difference between the two may be that the practitioner does not have the opportunity to prioritize one of those dimensions as they all exist in parallel in the classroom. Therefore, pedagogy offers a choice for research concerning practice, as the frames of reference are wide and a wide range of methods may be used. In the literature review, prerequisites for literacy skills, and their acquisition, are presented both from L1 and L2 perspectives. Furthermore, as far as I can see, there are no serious contradictions between research findings from an autonomous view of literacy and an ideological view of literacy, concerning the establishment of the act of reading. However, there may be different views of how such knowledge is applied in practice. There may also be different views about what the ultimate purpose of schooling is. Is effectiveness the

overall aim, and does effectiveness really mean getting high measurable results to raise productivity for the needs of a market economy? Or is the goal that all students should leave school with a sense of dignity and self-worth even if their results are not outstanding due to genetic circumstances (see Samuelsson et al, 2005) or environmental circumstances which may affect their school trajectory? The answers to these questions may very well affect how schooling is organised, carried out and evaluated.

A lack of dialogue is described in recent studies of Swedish teacher education in relation to how diversity and different theoretical perspectives are handled. Lindberg (2002) talks about parallel monologues and Carlsson (2008) compares those to the parallel tendencies she found in teacher education. "When other perspectives than one's own are highlighted this is often done without comparisons; an additive view stands out. One thing is added to the other without any real integration or comparison. Perspectives are not challenged (author's translation)" (Carlsson, 2008, p 220). In my view, this applies to Swedish reading research as well.

Consequently, mixed methods are needed in the field of reading, in order to bring different perspectives both to questions and answers, and to discover novel ways of finding roads to the future. Using mixed methodologies in order to understand educational phenomena has been advocated by pragmatists since the 1960s. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in the different stages of the research process, or mixed-methodological data analyses can be conducted (Bryman, 2001). This kind of approach allows for both subjective and objective points of view, as well as the parallel employment of both inductive and deductive logic (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). One of the advantages of this kind of procedure would be that researchers with divergent skills and interests could work together, so that proponents of different perspectives would have access to each others' work.

I sense a lack of dialogue between different paradigms in the Swedish field of reading research. Joint projects, where second and first language researchers, or proponents of positivist and socio-cultural perspectives on reading collaborate, do not occur very frequently. When it comes to literacy, Myrberg (2003) published a consensus report which identified items in reading research where proponents of different perspectives on reading have the same view. Still, the connotation of the word consensus may be perceived as an

indication that the conflicts between different views on the pedagogy of literacy acquisition no longer exist (see Hjälme, 1999). Certainly, I do not advocate another "reading war", but the idea of consensus on how to enhance children's literacy in a rapidly changing world has its shortcomings. Divergent perspectives and constructive dialogue where ideas may be challenged and critically scrutinized, seems like a more fruitful alternative. In short, I believe that mixed methods research has the potential both to vitalize research and debate, and to bring people with different scientific perspectives and experiences together in joint trans-disciplinary projects, thereby putting critical perspectives on the agenda which perhaps could pave the way for transformative pedagogy. The issue of diversity also needs to be addressed in "main stream" research, if mono-linguistic perspectives are to be detected and eliminated.

A major part of on-going reading research can be labelled "applied science", which calls for pragmatic perspectives. The present gap between practice and research ought to be bridged. Researchers in the field of applied reading research should not see feed back to other researchers as their sole aim. If research results are not brought back to the practitioners, do we not miss the primary objective of this type of research? To further complicate these matters, practices are always ideologically dependent whether consciously or unconsciously. The question of whom we are to educate, and for what purpose, will always reflect what kind of society we want and what hopes we have for literacy education to be emancipatory and transformative. This means that dialogue, rather than consensus, is the prerequisite for future development.

Further research

In previous research there has been a strong focus on individual differences in literacy acquisition in the normal range, in particular when addressing difficulties associated with literacy development. There is also a tendency to focus on the individual's past experiences to explain those problems. Researchers also need to focus on the possible effects of teachers' future orientation in their work, thus shifting focus to future possibilities, instead of a sole focus on presumptive reasons for failure with roots within the individual. Links between future-oriented pedagogy and the development of a Future

Time Perspective require further research. The fields of development indicated in these studies, i.e; authentic literature to support literacy development, classroom climate, connections between the home and the school, and the teacher's role, will always need further research, as the interplay between contextual and human qualities that are involved is in constant change.

The links between formulaic language, reading and writing need to be further explored. For example, there is no answer to the question of whether extensive reading of fiction may substitute for lack of communicative situations involving both L1 and L2 speakers. The effects of extensive reading of fiction on students' development of formulaic language require further research.

Another rather blank field in reading research is the use of drama to support literacy and oral development. In all three of the empirical studies in this thesis drama is given attention. We still need to answer questions about how the use of drama may be connected to reading comprehension and literacy development and how its use could be associated with other factors important for literacy development.

A lot more research on issues related to L2 acquisition and diversity, also including the role of the teacher, is required. A strengthening of the focus on diversity and second language acquisition in teacher education seems necessary (cf. Carlsson & Rabo, 2008). In Swedish research a greater consciousness of L2 learners' perspectives is certainly called for in general, if the mainstream is to include diversity.

I would welcome increased use of trans-disciplinary approaches, both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the use of mixed methods in the field of L1 and L2 reading. My conviction is that new questions would arise as the result of such projects. I believe that extended cooperation between proponents of divergent theoretical views of reading, including both L1 and L2 perspectives, is paramount in meeting the rapidly changing demands of society today. Collaboration can contribute to finding the answers to the questions of tomorrow and above all, to finding the joint visions for tomorrow. With a vision, as indicated in studies in this thesis, hope is possible…

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