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# **Narration in Pre- and Primary School**

## **A Recourse for Language Development and Multilingualism**

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An increasing number of children in Western countries are taught through a second language in school. Research mainly in Australia has shown the importance of developing knowledge-related language skills, academic school language, among all students through schooling. These language skills are necessary for success in different school-subjects later on in school. This is particularly important for L2-students who are less likely to meet this type of language outside school. In this article is argued that the development of academic school language needs to start already in pre- and primary school and that narration could provide necessary linguistic challenges and simultaneously including diversity in classrooms. By listening to stories, oral and written, and by getting opportunities to tell stories of different type, children exercise skills that are typical for academic school language.

Keywords: narration, multilingual education, multiliteracy, diverse classrooms, academic school language

### **1 Introduction**

Language is central to school education and the relations between students' development of language and school knowledge is complex. It is impossible to imagine one without the other. The situation in school education is particularly challenging for those students who are faced to school education through a language that they do not yet master at a level equal to their classmates, which is the case for many children who are socialised through another language in their homes than the official language used in schools. Research in second language acquisition has emphasised the necessity of acknowledging the role of language in school, not only in the case of L2-learners but for all children.

When children arrive at pre-school<sup>1</sup> they are expected to have developed basic language skills. Through schooling they need to develop advanced language skills in what may be called the academic knowledge-related school register. Students learn school knowledge while they learn the language that constructs the knowledge. The importance of considering relationships between language and learning in school education has been stressed by researchers drawing on theories by Michael Halliday (1993, 2004) and Roger Säljö (2000). Halliday's *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, SFL, provides tools for analysing the role of language in education. Säljö stresses the importance of considering language holistically, as socially and culturally situated practices.

Most studies in this area have focused on the role of language in different school subjects in the later years. Research has shown that the use of language differs from subject to subject and has pointed out that students also need to learn these different language types. Less attention has been paid to early years of schooling and particularly to pre-school. In these years, subject language has not yet reached a level where there is large difference between different subjects. In this paper focus is on the role of language in learning in pre- and primary school.

The aims of this text are to discuss narration, that is the telling or retelling of something, as a tool for language development in the early years of schooling in preparation for later education and to discuss narration as a tool for diversity and multilingualism in classrooms. Narration is here used both following the traditional linguistic definition: "any sequence of clauses which contains at least one temporal juncture" (Labov & Walesky, 1967) and following the socio-narratological definition of narration as created in interaction between people and as a tool for interaction (Klerfelt, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper pre-school is used for the preparatory school year in Sweden before the primary school, for children of about six years of age. The notions *students* and *school* are used for both pre-school and primary school in the text, that is the years that involve children of six to thirteen years of age.

## **2 Language development and schooling**

Students' development from the everyday language of homes to the advanced knowledge-related language of schooling, has been studied by among others Derewianka (2004), Hammond (2006, 2008), Heritage, Silva & Pierce (2007) Gibbons (2006, 2008), Johnston & Hayes (2008), Macken-Horarik (1996), Schleppegrell (2004) and Wong-Fillmore & Snow (2000). They have shown how students' construction of knowledge and language may benefit if they are scaffolded by teachers who are aware of the role of language in education.

The necessity of both being exposed to the target language, input, and of getting chances to produce it oneself, output, has been stressed by among others Merrill Swain (2001). She also stresses the importance of pushed output, that is that students are stimulated to produce language on a level that they do not yet master. This follows Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development, ZPD, which is the linguistic zone where the learner may produce language with help from somebody else, such as a teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). By scaffolding students to produce language on a slightly higher level than the one mastered, teachers may promote language development among students. What children can do today with language with the help of somebody, they may be able to do on their own in the future.

### ***2.1 Developing diverse registers***

The development of language should not be understood as linear. Rather students need to develop a variety of language registers. A complex society, such as contemporary Sweden, demands that the inhabitants have access to a multitude of registers for different aims and situations. Students need to develop creative linguistic skills and to be prepared for dynamic and continuous change. Cope & Kalantzis (2000) pointed out that we are multimodal in the

creation of meaning and that people need skills in moving between different medias and languages. The flow of information in today's society demands that we actively can sort, adapt and arrange information on different levels to value and meet what we experience. The inhabitant needs to be both co-structor and co-creator in the world he or she is in. This means that students need support through schooled education in developing different types of linguistic registers. Caroline Liberg (2003a) talks about people being *language creators* instead of *language users*. She has put attention to the importance of developing multimodal literacy, which includes different modes of reading and writing such as electronic literacy, the use of pictures, film, music and drama.

This development of extended registers should start already in pre-school. The highest priority for learning in pre- and primary school is usually on literacy, learning to read and write, but this is not enough. Students need to develop general language skills and this needs to take place in oral forms as long as students have not yet developed advanced literacy skills. Some students develop efficient reading and writing skills early on in school. These students then get access to advanced language through reading and they get opportunities to produce advanced language themselves through writing. Other children, however, take a long time to develop efficient reading and writing. They then run the risk of not being exposed to advanced language until the later years of primary school. This means that they will not have had a chance through schooling to develop the language they will need for learning in different subjects, if they have not been exposed to advanced language orally. This is particularly a risk for students who study in a second language that they have not developed to the same level as their class-mates. If early literacy education takes place through a language that they do not yet master, as is often the case in Sweden, they run the risk of being late in developing advanced literacy skills and thus of being less exposed to advanced language. As

they are also less likely to meet this type of their second language in their homew, they may be unfavoured several times.

## ***2.2 Narration in language development***

One important type of linguistic skill that is particularly important in pre literacy and emergent literacy stages is textual skills, that is competence concerning whole texts, in expressing and understanding long thoughts, both written and oral. This includes rules for how language is organised in longer units so that the message becomes understandable for the receiver, and also skills in showing temporal relations, relations between protagonists in the text, in creating cohesive and coherent texts and in focusing the text so that what is important stands out. This also includes strategies for distancing what is narrated from actual events and experiences, the use of third person instead of first, the use of past tense, lexical density, and strategies for references and theme. This means that children need to exercise narrative structure, description and to have an outside perspective. As narration is a form of text that children start to use early, it is particularly relevant for the exercising of these skills.

Pauline Gibbons argue that schooled education needs to provide a bridge between the everyday language of homes and the knowledge related language of schooling (2006). The oral monologue, when somebody expresses an extended cohesive thought, may constitute such a bridge. In the monologue the types of language that students will meet in literacy and in different school subjects, are exercised. The importance of using narration in the work with children in pre- and primary school has been shown by Eriksen Hagtvvet (2002). She studied the linguistic demands that literacy put on children. She particularly stressed that it is important that children develop skills in using a decontextualised language and in using language to govern actions and to solve problems, as well as opportunities to talk for a longer period. Nauc ler (2004) showed that children that had developed narrative skills before school

showed a higher level of reading comprehension in grade four than their classmates who had less developed narrative skills before school start<sup>2</sup>. Also Liberg (2003b) stresses the importance of offering students in pre- and primary school opportunities to interact around texts that offer chances to express such things that are not normally expressed in everyday language. These linguistic skills are not only important for literacy acquisition, but generally for the linguistic development that students need as a preparation for the learning that is expected to take place in different subjects later on in school.

### ***2.3 Narration as early extended texts***

Narration is particularly useful for the development of textual competence as it is a linguistic function that children start to use early. Even the small child may narrate. Hatch (1978) showed how child language is developed so that children go from so called *vertical structures* to *horizontal structures*. The infant expresses her- or himself with help of the adult, or someone more experienced, scaffolding her or him through questions and extensions of what the child says. We can look at the following constructed example:

Child: Puppy  
Adult: Is it your puppy?  
Child: Puppy sleep  
Adult: Is the puppy going to sleep now?  
Child: Bed  
Adult: I see, so the puppy is going to sleep in the bed  
Child: Puppy sleep bed

This example shows how the child starts with single words which gives an interactional pattern that in writing is expressed vertically, hence the expression *vertical structure*. Through the scaffolding by the adult the child arrives at an extended expression, a clause, which is written horizontally, thus a *horizontal structure*. What we see in this example is an early form

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<sup>2</sup> Grade four in the Swedish school system includes students of 10-11 years of age.

of narration. This way adults or elder children may scaffold toddlers and small children in kindergarten and nursery school in their development of textual competence.

The importance of promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom of the early years of schooling has been stressed by researchers such as Liberg (2003a) and Anne Haas Dyson (1993, 1997), drawing on ethnographic research by among others Heath (1982, 1983), Street (1984, 1995) and Barton et al (2000). Liberg refers to the notion of *polyphony* (flerstämighet, Dysthe 1996) when she claims that the information rich society of today demands that children develop skills in multimodal meaning making and develop strategies to move between different media. Children are participants and co-constructors of the medial text-worlds they are included in. She refers to Street when she compares traditional language use in schools with verbal linguistic colonisation of the individual. In many cases in the early years of schooling, a narrow-minded view of language development of schooling which is often even more restricted, with a focus only on exercising reading and writing skills.

#### ***2.4 Language use in diverse classrooms – a case study***

In an earlier study I studied the development of language and knowledge among students in pre- and primary school in a diverse setting in a Swedish town (Wedin, 2008, 2009, forthcoming). Two classes were followed during three and a half year, one from pre-school to grade three and one from grade three to six, that is students of 6-13 years of age.

Approximately half of the students had Swedish as a second language or a multilingual background. The study had an ethnographic approach with participant observation and interviews as main research activities. The material consists of more than 350 hours of classroom observations and about half of the time has been audio-recorded. Artefacts of different types, such as students written texts, written teaching materials and written materials of other types, were also collected during the study.

The results from that study showed that classroom interaction in these classrooms consisted mainly of short talk-turns. Most of the speech was fragmented with frequent repairs and overlapping speech. Only at few occasions did teachers address the whole class, usually 10-20 minutes at the beginning of the day and perhaps once more during the day. Also at these occasions teachers seldom held monologues or expressed long thoughts and the occasion when individual students talked for an extended while were even fewer. In many cases the teacher gave an expression of trying to talk individually with many pupils at once, while students were occupied with different things and the focus on the teacher's talk was weak. We can see this in the following example from a sharing-time (Swedish: *samling*) at pre-school where the teacher gives an instruction for a game<sup>3</sup>:

L: Vet ni vad idag tänkte jag att vi skulle leka en liten annan lek	T: Do you know something today I had planned that we would play another small game
E1: Ska jag (ohörbart) med mina armar	P1: Should I (unhearable) with my arms
E2: Louise vet du mina armar har dött (elever pratar)	P2: Louise do you know my arms have died (students are talking)
L: Hör ni den här leken heter (flera barn talar samtidigt)	T: Now you listen this game is called (several students are talking at once)
L: Vänta ska ni få höra	P: Wait I'll tell you
E3: Jaha den	P3: Oh that one
L: Den heter charader är det nån som har lekt charader nån gång?	T: It's called charades is there someone who has played charades sometime
E4: Ja hundra gånger	P4: Yes hundred times
L: Ja det var det jag tänkte (flera barn talar samtidigt)	T: That was what I thought (several students talking at once)
E5: Jag har inte ens lekt den	P5: I haven't even played it
L: Ja då är det så här idag har jag en massa lappar här som det står saker som man kan göra på och då så får var och en sen komma fram till mig och så komma fram läsa så får man läsa det här lilla ordet som står här nej och om du inte kan läsa så ska jag	T: Yes then it's like this today I've got a lot of pieces of paper here on which there are written things that you can do and then each one of you will come up to me and then come up read then one can read that little word that is written here no and if you can't read then I'll
E6: Jag kan inte läsa	P6: I can't read
L: göra det för dig och sen får du göra det som står på lappen sen får dom andra barnen	T: do that for you and then you may do what is written on the paper then the other children may
E7: Ja vet	

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### <sup>3</sup> Transcript

The transcript does not include full stop and follows standard spelling norms except for where the pronunciation differs clearly from standard Swedish. Capital letters are only used to mark the beginning of a turn and names. Inaudible talk is marked XXX. Teacher's talk is marked T and pupils' talk is marked P. Talk in somebody else's turn is shown like this:

här lilla ordet som står här nej och om du  
E6: Jag kan inte läsa

A short pause is marked ...

L: Ja gissa vad gör du  
 E8: Å man ska gissa vad man gör  
 L: Nu gäller det att ingen  
 E9: Louise  
 L: Ja  
 E10: (ohörbart)  
 L: Ja precis nä  
 E11: Jag har inte lekt den  
 L: Nej du har inte lekt den leken då blir det första gången  
 E12: Aa pangen  
 L: Sch när du vet svaret Arin (tillsägelse) när du vet svaret så upp med handen  
 E13: Ta bort den där (pekar på en låda med ljus som användes i början av samlingen)  
 L: Och så får all så så att många hinner fundera lite ska vi prova?  
 E14: M  
 E13: Jag kan ta bort den  
 L: Mm då ... ska vi börja då  
 E13: Jag kan ta bort den  
 L: Tycker du att vi behöver ta bort hela lådan?

(E13 skjuter lådan med ljusen åt sidan)  
 (Elever skrattar)  
 E2: (fortsätter att prata om sina armar i tröjan)

P7: I know  
 T: Yes guess what are you doing  
 P8: Eh one should guess what one is doing  
 T: Now the thing is that noone  
 P9: Louise  
 T: Yes  
 P10: (unhearable)  
 T: Yes exactly no  
 P11: I haven't played it  
 T: No you haven't played that game then it'll be the first time  
 P12: Oh the pang  
 T: Hush when you know the answer Arin (reprimand) when you know the answer then raise your hand  
 P13: Take that away (points to a box with candles used in the beginning of the sharing-time)  
 T: And then all so that many will have time to think for a while shall we try?  
 P13: M  
 P13: I can take that away  
 T: Mm then ... shall we try then  
 P13: I can take that away  
 T: Do you think that we have to take the whole box away?  
 (P13 puts the box with candles away)  
 (Students laugh)  
 P2: (continues to talk about his arms inside his sweater)

In this example the teacher talks about her topic, which is the game charades. Meanwhile some children talk about other things, such as what somebody is doing with his arms inside his sweater. The teacher switches between talking about her topic, giving reprimands and answering individual students talking about different things. The talk gives the impression of a nice chat, an occasion of small talk, but the focus on the content, on the game itself, seems to be low.

In the following example from grade three the teacher switches between topics. Some of the topics are her own and others are students' initiatives.

L: Ja så åt dom nästan ingenting då fick dom ingen pasta som ni gör som kommer när ni har a är det vid Ramadhan ni har fasta?  
 E1: Ja  
 L: När ni har fasta så lång period och nu är det så för för ... alltså vi gör ju inte så idag men förr i tiden  
 E2: Du kolla in  
 L: Hanna (tillsägelse) förr i tiden så gjorde man så då fastade man från och med idag man åt inte alls och så drog magen ihop sig jag vet inte om man får äta

T: Yes then they barely didn't eat anything so they didn't get any pasta as you do when comes when you have a is it at Ramadhan that you fast  
 P1: Yes  
 T: When you have fast a long period and now it's like that for ... that is we don't do that today but in the older days  
 P2: You check out  
 T: Hanna (reprimand) in the older days they did so then they fasted from today they didn't eat at all and then the stomach contracted I don't know if you may

mindre och mindre och så åt man lite ända fram till dom hålla på i 40 dagar och sen så skulle komma vadå? Vad kommer om 40 dar?

E3: Jultomten

L: (leende) Nej inte tomten Anna

E4: Påsken

L: Påsken ja det blir påsk

E5: Om 40 dar

L: Det blir påsk ja så nu och från och med igår var det fritt fram att äta semlor varje tisdag firar vi med fast i Sverige har vi blivit så konstiga så vi har nästan semlor direkt efter jul ... fastlagsbulle kan det heta också det var ju fastlagssöndagen nu du Hanna har jag fått tag på dig här så så var det med det så från och med nu och framåt då väntar vi på påsken och då kommer ni ihåg att var Gerd här och berättade för er om om Moses förra året ... eller glömde hon det så hon ska komma i år?

E6: Nau

E7: (ohörbart)

L: Hon var sjuk ja hon ska prata om ... om Jesus och hans liv ... som vi också håller på med lite grann och det betyder att ... påsken kommer ganska tidigt i år i slutet på mars början på april och ibland kan den komma nästan i slutet på april och då måste vi ha några fyller Hanna år då? Då måste vi ha nya vakter här då vi kan se vilka ... jag (småprat i klassen)

L: Har kvar vi tar några namn så ser vi vad det kan bli ... Zahra och Amir

E8: Zahra och Amir

(Elever skrattar)

Amir: Jag vill inte bli

E9: (till kamrat) Ge mig nu ge mig nu

L: Darin kan du dra

(Darin kommer fram till kalendern och drar så att dagens datum kommer fram)

L: XXX ja var är Isabella

(småprat)

L: Men är det så många som har fått ordet fritt

E6: Nau

L: Vet du vad Amir dra bordet bakåt så Zahra kan gå där ... XXX vad är det för veckonummer

E10: Åtta

E11: Sju

E12: Åtta

E13: Hundra

L: Vad var det för vecka

E14: XXX

L: Men jag frågade Zahra

E15: Tvåtusenfem

eat less and less and then ate you ate little until they continue for 40 days and then there'd come what? What comes in 40 days?

P3: Father Christmas

T: (smiling) no not father Christmas Anna

P4: The Easter

T: Easter yes there will be Easter

P5: In 40 days

T: There will be Easter yes and then now from yesterday it was ok to eat hot cross buns<sup>4</sup> each Tuesday we celebrate with but in Sweden we have gone funny so that we nearly have hot cross buns after Christmas ... Shrove Tuesday bun it may also be called now you Hanna I got you here now that was that so from now and onwards we wait for Easter and then did you remember was Gerd here and told you about about Moses last year ... or did she forget it so that she will come this year?

P6: Nau

P7: (unhearable)

T: She was ill yes so she will talk about ... about Jesus and his life ... which we also are occupied with a little and this means that ... Easter comes quite early this year at the end of March beginning of April and then it may nearly come at the end of April and then sometimes we need some is Hanna having her birthday then? Then we need some new monitors here then we will see who ... I (small-talk in the class)

T: Have left we take some names then we will see what it may be ... Zahra and Amir

P8: Zahra and Amir

(students laugh)

Amir: I don't want to be

P9: (to mate) Give it to me now give it to me now

T: Darin can you draw

(Darin comes up to the calendar and draws until the date of the day is shown)

T: XXX yes where is Isabella

(small talk)

T: But are you all free to speak at the same time

P6: Nau

T: Do you know Amir draw the table backwards so that Zahra may walk there ... XXX what is the week number

P10: Eight

P11: Seven

P12: Eight

P13: Hundred

T: What week is it

P14: XXX

T: But I asked Zahra

P15: Two thousand and five

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<sup>4</sup> A type of buns typically eaten at Tuesdays during lent in Sweden.

In this interaction the teacher talks about several things. She starts by talking about the fast before Easter, mixed with topics such as Ramadan, hot cross buns, the date for Easter, Moses and Jesus. Then she switches to ask about the week number. In between she reprimands individual students. As in the previous case, the students are quite unfocused and talk about other things. Also in this example the talk consists mainly of short phrases with frequent repairs and interruptions.

Most of the time in these classrooms, students work individually with different tasks that are given by the teachers. Some of them, mainly boys, sit in their desks and work individually while others, mainly girls, sit together in twos or threes but usually still working individually. During the work students chat with each other. In the grades 4-6 students are sometimes arranged in groups that are expected to carry out a task together, often in the form of a small project. In the following example from grade four, a group of six students are looking for information about the Swedish island Öland. One of them, E3, is writing down what she is told by the others to write while E1 reads from a book about Öland. This is supposed to be presented to the others after a certain time.

E1: Em ... (läser) högsta höjd XXX 57 XXX m ee största bredden på Öland är cirka 20 ... kilometer och Ölands största längd är 130 km

E2: Antal invånare

E3: Den den största höjden på Öland

E2: Största höjden?

E3: Ja

E2: Den störs em

E4: Em kan inte nå utav oss skriva em frågor

(Tjut i bakgrunden)

E3: Så

E1: Men det gör vi hela tiden

E2: M

(Tjut)

E3: N där var det störs höjd

E1: Ja em den största höjden är ...

E3: 57

E1: Ja 57,4

E3: (skriver) komma 4 meter över havet

E1: Ja em punkt ö

E2: Em punkt ö punkt h punkt happ

P1: Em ... (reads) the highest point XXX 57 XXX m ee the greatest breadth of Öland is about 20 ... kilometres and the greatest length of Öland is 130 kilometres

P2: Number of inhabitants

P3: The the highest point of Öland

P2: Highest point?

P3: Yes

P2: The highest em

P4: Em can't one of us write em questions

(a howl in the background)

P3: So

P1: But that's what we do all the time

P2: M

(a howl)

P3: N there it was the highest point

P1: Yes em the highest point is

P3: 57

P1: Yes 57.4

P3: (writes) dot four metres above the sea level

P1: Yes em dot a

P2: Em dot a dot s dot well

E4: Em antal invånare XXX ja men det där har vi XXX

E5: Kalmar e de e

E3: E deras län är Kalm Kalmar

E1: Öland Ölands län vänta Ölands största län landskap vänta Ölands största län

E5: Ja

E3: Nej vänta Ölands län

E1: Ölands län heter Kalmar

E3: Ja det blir bra

P4: Em number of inhabitants XXX yes but that we have XXX

P5: Kalmar is that is

P3: E their county is Kalm Kalmar

P1: The county county of Öland wait the greatest county landscape of Öland wait the greatest county of Öland

P5: Yes

P3: No wait the county of Öland

P1: The county of Öland is called Kalmar

P3: Yes that'll be fine

Also in this case the talking consists of fragments or short sentences with frequent repairs.

The main talking is done by P1-3 who are girls while the three boys, P4-6, are not much involved in the work but occupying themselves with other things, such as looking around, walking around, taking something out of the desk and so on.

Most of the occasions when teachers addressed the whole class, he or she gave instructions about a task or student's work during the rest of the lesson. This is the case in the following example from grade six where the teacher is explaining the construction of a stick in a plastic material, in connection to the work on the history of the Vikings:

L: (fortsättning från småprat) som man hängde på varan XXX ... och då ser man ... kanske namnet kanske Mia äger

E1: Aa

L: Aa

E2: XXX

L: E vad det står på den här det får ni lista ut så småningom ni ska få runraden ni kommer ihåg att det fanns flera olika ni ska få den en som man använde då ... en som man använder då XXX teckensraden så att ni ser också hur man tecknade dom olika ljuden och sen vad man ska ha den till det e vet ni kanske ... märka ... nånting

E1: Märka varor nä

L: Märka era varor eh jag gjorde ett hål i den här innan ... så att man kan sätta in en ring nu blev den här för stor nu blev den här spetsig och så blev den lite vass och jag ska visa hur man kan göra för att slippa spetsarna e bokmärke det funkar bra men då missade jag en sak den blev lite välvd den är inte riktigt platt när man tar ut dom här ur ugnen sen så kanske man kan pressa den lite grann då kan man ha den som bokmärke ... och e sen ni som sitter nära ser att det är nåt mer här

E1: Mmm

L: Vad är det här

E2: XXX ja

L: Har ni sett på runstenarna att det finns såna här

T: (continued from small talk) that you hung on the XXX ... and then you see ... perhaps the name perhaps Mia owns

P1: Aa

T: Aa

P2: XXX

T: E what is says on this you may figure out in a while now you will get the runic alphabet do you remember that there was many different you will get one that they used then ... one that they use then XXX the alphabet so that you see also how one drew the different sounds and then what one will use it for that e you perhaps know ... mark ... something

E1: Mark goods no

T: Mark your goods eh I made a hole in this one before ... so that you may put in a ring now this one was too big now it became xxx and a bit sharp and I will show you how you may do to escape the points e bookmark that works well but then I *missed* one thing it became a bit vaulted it is not really flat when you take them out from the oven then you may perhaps xxx it a little then you may have it as a bookmark ... and then e then you who sit close see that there is something else here

P1: Mmm

T: What is this

P2: XXX yes

T: Have you seen on the rune stones that there are

A: Ja  
 L: djur där och det ser ut som ormar  
 E3: Fast det är typ drakar  
 L: Ja är det det  
 E3: Ja men det är typ drakar  
 L: Man kallar det för run stensdjur bara man vet inte riktigt vad som menas vad det är för djur men e i alla fall finns det huvuden och svans och så nån sorts och här sitter det ... (En elev kommer in, försenad) nu kommer bollspelaren också han har egen klocka XXX ... så här stor var den när jag började

E1: Ja men det där är ju papper  
 L: Det här är papper och det här är  
 E3: Hur fick du den liksom färg blev den bara bränd liksom  
 L: Jag tänkte att jag skulle berätta det där nu  
 E4: XXX ja  
 L: Så här ser krymp plattan ut som ni får och ni ska få en varsin sån här som ni ... klipper ut ... som mall

E3: Måste man ha den så där  
 E1: Kan man inte  
 L: Sen använder man alltid det finns en blank sida och en matt sida och det är på den matta sidan man ritar och målar  
 E3: Måste man gör ha e den dära

E2: Yes  
 T: such animals here and that they look like snakes  
 P3: But it is sort of dragons'  
 T: Yes is it  
 P3: Yes but it is sort of dragons  
 T: They call them runestone animals but they do not actually know what is the meaning what type of animals it is but anyway there are heads and tails and sort of and here there is ... (One student enters the classroom, late) now the ballplayer comes also he has got a watch of his own XXX ... it was this big when I began  
 P1: Yes but why that is paper  
 T: This is paper and this is  
 P3: How did you get it how did it sort of get colour was it only burnt sort of  
 T: I was going to tell you about that now  
 P4: XXX yes  
 T: This is the way the shrink lamina looks like and you will have one each of these that you ... cut out ... as model  
 P3: Do you have to have it like that  
 P1: Can one not  
 T: Then you always use there is a glossy side and a *mat* side and it is on the *mat* side you draw and paint  
 P3: Do you have to do have e that

In this example the teacher talks a few longer sequences which include some sub-clauses but still the language has low complexity. The language used is on a basic level except for some specific terms that were not explained, such as *vaulted* and *glossy*. Specific words connected with the time of the Vikings, such as *rune*, *rune stones* and *runic alphabet*, had been explained earlier. The example gives the impression that the students do not focus much on listening but rather on asking questions.

All these examples are quite typical for the oral interaction that took place in these classrooms. As literacy work also mainly consisted of exercising separate words or short phrases, pupils did barely get any opportunities to develop textual competence at all, neither to meet texts of that type nor to produce it. Those students who had achieved high literacy skills met longer stretches of text in reading and writing. It was also mainly those students that got opportunities to extended talk sometimes, such as when presenting a project for the others.

However, the majority of the students were seldom exposed to whole texts, either in written or oral form, and the occasions when they got the opportunity to produce extended talk were few.

Teachers demanded that the students write whole texts but only a few of them actually produced texts of more than one page even at the end of form five. Nearly no one of the students who had another mother-tongue than Swedish did that. Thus most students got very few chances to exercise the textual skills that they will need to master later on in school.

### ***2.5 Narration in diverse classrooms***

Anne Haas Dyson has studied some classrooms where students own diverse cultural resources from homes and peer related spheres are included (1993, 1997). In these classrooms with children of 4-8 years of age, children's voices from earlier experiences are included and children get opportunities to express their voices about the future through narration.

Children's experiences and voices are taken seriously in classroom life and children bring their medial experiences of super heroes to the textual world of the classrooms. However, not only are the diverse voices heard through their oral and written narrations but they are also negotiated physically and linguistically through drama performances and improvisations.

Girls, for example, challenge the passive role they are offered by the boys, by actively creating their own plays with alternative female roles as in the following example:

The boys in Tina's second grade class have been writing stories about ninjas and X-men (Lee 1963) to perform in their classroom Author's Theatre. Tina and her best friend Holly (both working-class girls of colour) have been begging for a role in these stories – for a part to play – with no luck at all. Once in a while their peer Sammy includes a girl to be rescued but then he picks Melissa or Sarah, both white middle-class girls. Seldom is *any* girl chosen to be a tough super-hero, a person who saves others, despite the presence of strong women, including women of colour, in the X-men comics and cartoons.

Tina has had it. She and Holly decide to write their own X-men story for classroom performance. "And no boys" she says firmly to Holly, "cause the boys doesn't let us play".  
(Dyson, 1997:25)

By inviting children's own narratives into classroom work, the teachers offered space in the classrooms for these topics and made them open for contestation. Although these culturally diverse classrooms are monolingual and children come from monolingual backgrounds, children bring diverse linguistic registers to the classrooms. Not only do children speak different local varieties, dialects, but they also bring varied schemas for narration to school. By welcoming this diversity to the classrooms, the teachers open for discussion about different "ways with words" (Heath 1984). In one of the examples Dyson gives, a six year old boy performs his story in the Author's Theatre in the following way:

Sat on Cat. Sat on Hat.  
Hat Sat on CAT.  
Cat GoN. 911 for Cat.  
(Dyson, 1993: 9)

The narration shows that he draws on the different spheres he is involved in. His home sphere is represented mainly in the rhythm of the text, which is also expressed prosodically in his performance. The content of the story is a mix of his home sphere, where his dog had been run over by a car some time ago and where his cat now is missing, and his school sphere where a car accident earlier the same morning had caused somebody to call 911. In the picture he has drawn and that is accompanying the written text, four robbers' cars are clearly involved in the drama, something that relates both to the school accident and to his fear that his cat has been killed by a car. His love for storybooks for children, particularly rhythmic ones like *The Cat in the Hat*, is obvious. Dyson shows how his performance in the Authors Theatre also involves the peer sphere when one of his friends expresses his appreciation of the story: "It's sort of like a poem" while another complains "It doesn't make any sense". This opens up for a discussion in class about composition. Dyson also shows that the children's narratives draw on different traditions; oral folk traditions, popular traditions (media) and written school traditions (1993, 1997). The children write multiple worlds through their early

narratives, oral and written. She also shows that students use the musical possibilities of language.

### ***2.6 Multilingualism through narration***

When this is applied to classrooms where children represent a multitude of languages, it is also clear that children's diverse linguistic resources could offer possibilities for the development in classrooms. Students could create multilingual texts in diverse ways, including bringing oral and written texts from homes, writing multilingual texts and exploring languages and scripts through the internet. Newly arrived students could write in their respective language. These texts could then be translated by mother tongue teachers, parents or other multilingual persons and then the texts could be read and discussed in class and exhibited together with other students' written texts. These multilingual texts could be developed into multimodal texts, including audios, movies or web-pages.

Cummins (2006) argues for the necessity of teaching critical literacy for democratic reasons. He shows examples from Canadian classrooms where the creation of what he calls *identity texts* among students, stimulated biliteracy development while simultaneously challenging the exclusion of students' cultural and linguistic capital. In these bilingual texts students used their varied mother tongues together with the dominating school language, English. Hélot and Young (2006) reported from a French school project, where parents were invited to present their culture and language in classes. They found several positive effects, among others that immigrant children started to make their voices heard in French and also an increased interest in languages among all students, both French and students' different mother tongues. Another result was that the inclusion of the L2-students increased in the learning communities of the classrooms.

In this way teachers may create a space for multilingualism and multiliteracy where students' diverse backgrounds constitute a potential for development of both language and knowledge. This demands, however, that teachers create space for the expression of "long thoughts". In classrooms like the one described in 2.3, the dominant part of the interaction, both oral and written, tends to consist of short talk-turns (see also Johnston & Hayes, 2008; Knapp et al, 1995; Warschauer, 2004; Wedin, 2009a and b). Students chat with each other and with the teacher and very little time is spent on extended texts, such as narration. Teachers seldom read or tell things that are extended and the occasions where one student expresses a long thought are few. Sharing-time provides an opportunity for using textual skills through narration, both for the teacher and for students. However in sharing-time of the type that we saw above from the Swedish example, where the teacher tries to give every child a chance to speak, no one may speak long. This means that in these classrooms the opportunities for meeting and exercising extended stretches of talk are few. Thus students' chances to exercise the type of language they will need later on in school are small.

However, when using narration in the diverse classroom, there are a few things that should be put attention to. Research about how mainstream teachers understand minority students' narrations, has put attention to the need for teachers to be aware of different narrative styles in different cultures (Cazden et al, 1985; Heath, 1983; Nauc ler, 2004; Nauc ler & Boyd, 1994). In Heath's study children from black American working-class backgrounds had developed advanced narrative skills in their homes, skills that were not recognised by school teachers. Cazden et al showed that the narrations by children from black American backgrounds tended to be organised in styles that teachers from white backgrounds had more difficulty in interpreting. Nauc ler & Boyd and Nauc ler showed that the high proficiency in narration among children with Turkish backgrounds in Sweden was not recognized by the pre-school teachers from monolingual Swedish backgrounds. Nauc ler & Boyd also showed

that this resulted in teachers offering less demanding oral tasks to these students, such as questions that only demanded simple answers, while majority students, whose earlier experiences were more similar to the teachers own, were asked questions of types that demanded more developed answers. In all three cases teachers perceived students from minority backgrounds as less intelligent and with lower capacities. This shows the importance of creating awareness among teachers regarding what people do with language.

### **3 Discussion**

Narration, as a form of text that children start to use at an early age, provides a useful tool both for the important development of textual skills and for the promoting of multiliteracy and multilingual development in the diverse classroom. Through narration students may get necessary opportunities to meet and develop extended texts and to exercise linguistic skills that they will need higher up in the school system. Narration may also enable students to express their lived experiences and to actively create their space in school, by involving experiences and knowledge from their homes and peer-life in classroom life.

However, as was shown in the Swedish case, this demands that teachers organise classroom interaction to include longer talk-turns. As in the example presented by Dyson (1993, 1997) teachers need to create space for the expression of longer thoughts and for children to express themselves in ways that include long talk. This also demands that formal language training of distinct skills should be exchanged for whole language use, promotion of long talk-turns and extended reading and writing. The use of the Author's Theatre in the classrooms studied by Dyson not only provided children with such a space, but also constituted a base for discussions in class about narrative styles and composition.

Children may be given room for oral narration in pre-school and space to perform these narrations as well as to discuss them. This may be done during sharing time but not if

teachers try to give every student an opportunity to express her- or himself at every single occasion, which in reality often means that those children who claim space are given, while children who do not claim space are not provided that. Instead a few children could be provided space each time, preferably with some time for preparation. In pre-school they may be asked to bring a favourite thing or prepare to tell the class about a favourite activity. Early narratives may be about something the child has experienced and been involved in. In these early stages the teacher will need to scaffold their narration by asking strategic questions. This would offer the other children an opportunity to exercise attentive listening, something that was clearly lacking in the Swedish examples above. By discussion in class, the different spheres that children are involved in may be negotiated in school and become part of the children's creating of identities in the school setting. This includes the different linguistic, cultural, social and ethnic identities that students bring to school.

The oral stories may be combined with pictorial stories that often precede written ones. Children's drawings may be provided with written text by the teacher, and teachers may turn children's oral stories into written form.

Sharing time could also be used for sharing written texts. Children can read their texts aloud, or having them read by someone else, and having them discussed by the class. This gives the child opportunity to perform and to receive evaluation on their texts. Positive response gives children support and motivation while suggestions on how the text, or future texts, could be developed further, gives them ideas and stimulation for development. This also offers opportunities to negotiate different narrative styles, formal aspects of texts as well as questions of content and composition.

Language awareness is in the Swedish discourse usually taken to denote children's awareness of phonetics and basic grammatical rules in language but language awareness of the type that is recommended here, demands that both teachers and children create awareness

about different languages and about different ways to use language orally and in written forms. This demands, primarily, that teachers themselves develop language awareness, that is that they begin to see the multitude of ways language is used, not least in the type of society that Sweden is today, with multimedia flourishing, a flow of information and with multilingualism rather becoming the rule than the exception, and also that language awareness is created among students.

The inclusion of multiliteracy, involving the different languages and scripts that are represented among the students in the classroom, both orally and written, is important, as is the inclusion of multimodality. Narration may include songs, art and poetry but also music, pictures and films, mainly through digital media. The teacher may use digital media to promote interaction outside the classroom, particularly important for multilingual children who may use Internet and other forms of electronic communication to elaborate on their different languages and literacies.

The inclusion of digital media, multilingualism and multiliteracy in classroom life, also demands that different literacy practices and different ways with words are taken into account by teachers. Thus teachers themselves need to develop critical literacy and also to promote critical literacy among the students.

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