

Dalarna University

This is a published version of a paper published in *Language and Education*.

Citation for the published paper:

Wedin, Å. (2010)

"A restricted curriculum for second language learners: a self-fulfilling teacher strategy?"

Language and Education, 24(3): 171-183

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500780903026352>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:du-11176>



<http://du.diva-portal.org>

A restricted curriculum for second language learners – a self-fulfilling teacher strategy?

Keywords: classroom interaction; academic language; curriculum; engagement; challenging pedagogy.

Number of words: 6,544 (7,108 including references, out of these 1 128 are translations in transcriptions)

Introduction

An increasing number of students all over the world attend schools where instruction is given in another language than the one they speak in their homes. In Sweden this is the case for about 15 % of the students, for whom Swedish is a second language. In some schools, the second language learners, L2-learners, in schools make up 90-100 % of the students. This means that Swedish simultaneously is a goal and a tool for their learning in school. Immense research has stressed the need to focus on language for the curricular learning of these students. The tradition of modifying the curriculum for second language learners, L2-learners, has been challenged by among others Gibbons (2006, 2008), Schleppegrell (2008), Hammond (2006, 2008) and Johnston and Hayes (2008). They argue for an alternative where schooling include both high-challenge and high support for L2-learners.

Johnston and Hayes (2008) argue that in many schools in culturally diverse and disadvantaged areas a “safety zone” is created by teachers through a combination of a logic of practice and a logic of justification work, which simultaneously restricts the students’ opportunities to achieve high proficiency. By presenting less challenging curricular content to students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, teachers actually restrict the quality of the learning environment for these students and their opportunities to school success.

In this article, classroom practices from two classes in primary school in Sweden, followed in a longitudinal study, are analysed. The general aim of the study was to study relations between second language development and subject learning among L2-learners. The focus of this article is on relations between interaction patterns, curricular knowledge and student engagement in the classrooms.

Theoretical basis

The theoretical perspectives of this study are drawn from theories by Vygotsky (1978) and from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1993, 2004; Halliday & Hasan 1989). Vygotsky argued that language and knowledge develop simultaneously through social interaction. This means that learning is considered social in nature and that knowledge is considered constructed in the interactive process of learning. The well-known Vygotskian theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is central in a supportive environment for learning, as is the notion of scaffolding. Students get support that enables their learning and their development of language through scaffolding from teachers or individuals that are more proficient. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) highlights the role of language in learning and provides tools for the analysis of the construction, rather than transmission, of knowledge. This means that SFL provides tools for analysing the role of language in learning, which is particularly relevant when the learning of second language students in school is analysed. SFL is also concerned with the ways language function in meaning-making in specific contexts, such as classrooms. Central notions in SFL are genre and register.

Research from Australia and USA has emphasised the importance of development of academic language, the school register, through schooling (Scarcella 2003; Schleppegrell 2004, 2008; Hammond 2006; Gibbons 2006, 2008; Bailey 2008). When children begin school they have developed the types of language that are used in the context of their homes and their environment, what may be called everyday language (Gibbons 2006). In school they need to develop language that is used to express knowledge in different school subjects. This language has been described by among others Cummins as cognitively demanding and decontextualised (CALP) (1984, 2000). Scarcella (2003) presents the following linguistic school proficiencies: reading reports and reviews, taking notes from lectures, write critics, summaries, commented bibliographies, reports, case studies, research projects and investigating essays. While ordinary conversation may contain vague choices of words and formulations, academic contexts demand higher levels of correctness and exactness in language use. According to Schleppegrell (2004), academic language is characterised by logical connections, lexical density, grammatical metaphors and coherence. This puts high demands on school education to provide all students with opportunities to develop these competencies. The development of the school register, academic language, should not be seen only as acquiring more language but rather as “a functional diversifying, an expansion of the learners communicative repertoire” (Baynham 1993:5).

Macken-Horarik (1996) refers to three main domains of language, the everyday, the specialised and the reflexive. The first type, everyday language, is mainly oral and serves pragmatic functions, getting things done. The second, specialised language, is more like writing and is acquired through schooling. She argues that this language is mainly static and conservative but is a necessary prerequisite for the reflexive domain. Hammond concludes that students are required to function in these domains as they move through school (2006). She also claims that students should encounter these contexts already in the early years of schooling. This means that children should meet and have opportunities to use both specialised and reflexive language.

Students' linguistic development through school may be described as a development from ordinary contexts to university contexts (Schleppegrell 2004) or as going from conversations that involve exchange of objects, here and now, to conversations that involve exchange of information, there and then (Gibbons 2006). The challenge for teachers and schools is to create bridges between everyday language and academic language. For students from other linguistic backgrounds than the monolingual Swedish, who are expected to learn the linguistic base, the everyday Swedish, while they simultaneously are expected to use this language to acquire both the school register, academic Swedish, and curricular knowledge in different school subjects, this is of course particularly challenging. The importance of challenging and supportive classrooms have been emphasised by among others Derewianka (2004), Gibbons (2006, 2008), Hammond (2006, 2008) and Johnston and Hayes (2008). Johnston and Hayes used day-diaries to analyse taken-for-granted classroom practices of classrooms where many students came from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. They found that teachers modified the curriculum in different ways in these classes, claiming that this was necessary in such difficult classrooms. Johnston and Hayes concluded that the teachers practised high control in classrooms, both considering curricular content and learning procedures, while students' engagement generally was low. This served to create a zone of relative comfort while restricting the quality of the learning environment. Learners were rather spectators than participants and co-producers in the learning process.

The positive outcome of supporting teachers on using high challenging content by actively scaffolding students, combined with explicit language training through content teaching has been shown through research in Australia (Gibbons 2006, 2008; Hammond 2006, 2008; Derewianka 2004) and California (Schleppegrell 2008).

Methods and approaches

This study was carried out between 2005 and 2008. Two classes in primary school were followed for three and a half year of schooling, one from preschool to the end of grade three, which means that the students were between six and ten years of age, and the other class from standard three to the end of standard six, i.e. students of nine to thirteen years of age. As is often the case in Sweden, the students spent the years from preschool to grade six in one school. Grades seven to nine they will spend in a school that receives students from several schools.

The study has an ethnographic approach and classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers were carried out during the period. Artefacts, such as written materials, were also collected during the study. The material consists of more than 350 hours of classroom observations and about half of the time has been audio-recorded. All students and the involved teachers have been interviewed every year and the recorded material has been transcribed.

The school was situated in an area with a high rate of socio-economically disadvantaged families and the movement of children in and out of the school has been high. Approximately half of the students are not monolingual in Swedish. In the lower class, totally 17 students have been in the class during the study, and 13 have followed the class during the whole time of the study. In the higher class, totally 26 students have been in the class but only 10 have spent grade three to six in the class.

The classes

The lower class, here called P-3, has had three teachers during these years. A preschool-teacher, Lilian, was their teacher during the preschool year. In grade 1-2 the teacher was a teacher for junior levelⁱ, Maria, and in grade three the teacher was a teacher for intermediate level, Anna. Maria was the teacher for the higher class, 3-6, when they were in grade three and in grades 4-6 they had John, an intermediate level teacher. Apart from these teachers, there were also special needs teachers and extra resource teachers that joined the class or trained some of the students individually. All the teachers are experienced but none have education in conditions for second language acquisition among children or in the role of language in education, not even the teachers of Swedish as a second language. Some of the multilingual children also had classes once a week in their mother tongue. No mother tongue teacher had teacher training. Apart from the educated teachers, also other persons without teacher training served as assistants from time to time in the classes.

Language and learning in the classrooms

My general aim at the outset of the study was to study relations between the development of language and knowledge, with a focus on second language learners. What I found in the classrooms was talk that was not much connected to curricular knowledge. Instead focus was mainly on procedures such as what tasks should be done, how they should be done and in what order. What characterised the classroom interaction was chatting and friendly intercourse between teacher and students. Most time in classrooms students worked individually or in small informal groups with tasks of different type. These tasks were commonly related to reading, writing and mathematics and mainly took the form of exercises of discrete skills. In the lower grades this could be drawing lines between numbers, words or pictures or colouring patterns of different work sheets or exercise books. Also in higher grades most tasks were connected with work sheets and exercise books but also with projects related to science or social science. Generally, the tasks were not cognitively demanding, neither in the lower nor in the higher grades. Reading and writing was usually involved in the tasks but mainly as single words or short sentences. Only the fluent readers spent time to read or write extended texts during my observations. Poor readers generally used time allocated for reading and writing whole texts to chatting, walking around, changing books, going to the toilet and similar activities.

I will first give four examples of the types of interaction that was predominant in the classroom-interaction in the classes. These examples have been chosen because they are of the types that are most common in the classrooms. One thing that these examples have in common is the lack of clear borders, concerning type of interaction, the topic and the interactants. In the first example from preschool, the teacher is talking about caterpillars that the children keep as a project together with grade three students. She walks round the class with jars with caterpillars on a tray. Every jar has a sign with names of students and of the caterpillars. Some parts of the interaction have been omitted, which is marked with (...). These parts contain inaudible talk where some of the students speak at the same time.ⁱⁱ

Example 1

L: Ja vet ni vad vi sk jag jag tror att jag gör så här att jag sätter namnen utåt och så går jag runt med brickan så ska ni få titta lite

E1: Ja

(...)

L: För då tror jag att ni kan se

T: Yes now you listen we wi I I think I'll do like this I'll put the names outwards and then I'll walk around with the tray so that you can have a look

E1: Yes

(...)

T: 'cause then I think you can see

(...)
 L: Vet du vad sätt dig ner nu då och så tar ni det lugnt vi gör så och så ställer jag den på ja vad heter din då (...)
 (...) tänk nu på att den står nej så ta det väldigt lugnt de kanske sover nu och vill ha det så skönt men titta i burken här har den börjat och spunnit jättemycket titta
 E: Vad är det för nåt?
 L: Ja den spinner nät liksom som den som den e som den ska rulla in sig i sen och så byter den skinn om ett tag eller
 E2: Min heter Skuggan
 L: Skuggan då ska vi se var vi har Skuggan här är Skuggan den har också spunnit jättemycket ser du det (...)
 L: Vad heter din då?
 E3: Det är det jag inte vet
 L: Skal vad heter din Sara
 E4: Puttelina
 L: Puttelina var det här (skratt)
 E4: Det var du som hittade på namnet
 L: Här titta har de vuxit nånting då?
 E5: Min har vuxit
 E6: Titta på (ohörbart)
 L: Jaha vad heter din då?
 (...)
 L: Bara titta
 E4: Lilian de rör sig inte
 L: Nej de kanske har sovstund nu
 E4: Vad är det där lilla för nåt?
 (...)
 L: Ella Spider
 E7: Ella
 L: Ella var det så?
 E7: Ja
 L: Varsågod där och Arin du var också borta undra vad din kan heta då vilken fadder har du?
 E9: Reza och Aldin
 L: Reza och Aldin är det nån som vet vad Reza och Aldin döpte sin till?
 E10: Ja Simson
 L: Simson tack tack för det
 E9: Simson

(...)
 T: Now you listen and then you take it easy we do like that and then I put it on yes what's the name of yours then (...)
 (...) now remember that it stands no there take it very easy they may be sleeping now and want to have it nice but look in the jar here it has started to spin a lot look
 P: What's that?
 T: Yes it spins a net sort of that it that it eh that it will roll itself in later and then it changes skin in a while or
 P2: Mine is called Shadow
 T: Shadow let's see where we have Shadow here is Shadow it has also spun a lot do you see that (...)
 T: Well what's yours called
 P3: That's the thing I don't know
 T: Shell what's the name of yours Sara
 P4: Puttelina
 T: Here we've got Puttelina (laugh)
 P4: You were the one who gave it the name
 T: Here look have they grown anything?
 P5: Mine has grown
 P6: Look at (inaudible)
 T: I see what's yours called then?
 (...)
 T: Just look
 P4: Lilian they don't move
 T: No they might have sleeping-time now
 P4: What's that tiny thing?
 (...)
 T: Ella Spider
 P7: Ella
 T: Ella was that it?
 P7: Yes
 T: There you are and Arin you were also absent wonder what yours can be called who's your friend?
 P9: Reza and Aldin
 T: Reza and Aldin does anyone know what Reza and Aldin named their?
 P10: Yes Simson
 T: Simson thanks thanks for that
 P9: Simson

The talk consists of short turns. The teacher demands “the floor” here and there (*vet du vad/Now you listen*), that is she demands that all children listen, although most of the time she interacts with individual children. The knowledge presented is about caterpillars, that they roll themselves into cocoons that they have spun and that they shed skin. However, the teacher does not take the opportunity to use specialised language for example the notions of *cocoon* and *shed skin* instead of *net* and *change skin*¹. In this example the focus is rather on

¹ The teacher uses the Swedish *byta skinn* instead of the more specialised *ömsa skinn*.

names of the caterpillars and who they belong to, than on supporting children's learning about caterpillars.

In the next example, the teacher in grade three, Anna, who had received the class only a few weeks earlier, sits with individual students checking how far they have come in the study kit *Pilen* (The arrow) before she will let them start working with it. Here she sits down with two girls.

Example 2

E1: Och här ska jag börja

L: Ha ... då ska vi se så du har så det här har du inte jobbat nånting av än så länge och här och hur brukar ni göra då tar ni dom i tur och ordning?

E2: Man får ta den här om man vill

E1: Man får ta vicken man vill

L: Så du väljer vilken du vill

E1: Ja men jag och Helen brukar ta så här

L: Det brukar ni

E2: Vi brukar ta så XXX den dära

E1: Fall det är nån som har kanske L1 då kanske vi tar L2

L: Jaha mm det här kan vi ... väl så när jag tar det in då vet ni vad ni ska göra

E2: Ibland om det är så att man inte fattar då XXX

L: ja då behöver ni bra så då vet ni så då är ni klara att sätta igång

E1+E2: Mm

L: Ja då e men jag tror inte vi gör det idag för jag har inte rullat in dom här Pilenlådorna som vi har utan då kan det vara lämpligt för dig att du skriver din veckobok idag

E1: Vad ska jag göra då?

L: Då är det handstil för dig

(...)

L: M då Fanny kan du gå och hämta din pärm där du har e din ditt Pilenjobb så ska du och jag titta på Pilenjobbet

E3: Vänta jag ska göra så här

L: (tittar på en teckning ritad av en elev) Vad gör dom här gubbarna då Abdul Aziz?

E4: M dom gör e pingis

L: Leker dom pingis?

E5: Nej inte pingis men tennis

L: Är det tennis?

E4: Ja tennis

E6: Var ligger gröna lådor?

L: Em va gröna lådor ... s håller du på med Pilen nu?

E6: Ja

L: Ja men du skulle inte börja med Pilen vännen utan du skulle skriva skrivstil

E6: Jaha

P1: And this is where I should start

T: I see ... then we'll see so you have so this you have not done anything of so far and here and how do you usually do do you take them in order?

P2: You can take this one if you want

P1: You can take whatever you want

T: So you choose the one you want

P1: Yes but I and Helen we usually take them like this

T: You do

P2: We usually take XXX this one

P1: If someone has got L1 then perhaps we take L2

T: I see mm this we may ... I suppose so when I take it in then you know what to do

P2: Sometimes if you don't understand then XXX

T: yes then you have to good then you know so then you are ready to start

P1+P2: Mm

T: Yes but I don't think we'll do it today because I have not rolled these Arrow-boxes in yet that we have so it may be suitable for you to write your weekly book today

P1: And what am I going to do then?

T: Then it's handwriting for you

(...)

T: M then Fanny you can go and get your binder where you keep your Arrow-work then you and I will look at the Arrow-work

P3: Wait I'm going to do like this

T: (looks at one of the student's drawing) What are these fellows doing Abdul Aziz?

P4: They do e ping-pong

T: Do they play ping-pong?

P5: No not ping-pong but tennis

T: Is it tennis?

P4: Yes tennis

P6: Where lie green boxes?

T: Em what green boxes ... s are you working with Arrow now?

P6: Yes

T: Yes but you were not supposed to start with Arrow love but you were supposed to do hand-writing

P6: I see

This interaction consists mainly of questions and answers. In this case the questions are authentic, that is the students are the knowers, they have got information that the teacher wants. The type of language used is everyday talk with frequent repairs. This study kit *Pilen* (The arrow) was used throughout the school, from the second term in grade one to the end of grade six, and the importance of this work was emphasised by all teachers. The study kit was claimed, by producers and by teachers, to develop students' linguistic skills, which in reality was written Swedish. It consisted of cards and worksheets that students were supposed to work through following a fixed order. The exercises were only aimed at training discrete skills out of context, such as putting indefinite article before a noun or joining different halves of sentences to form complete sentences. Reading and writing consisted of single words or short sentences. Writing was mainly copying from the cards. During this work students worked individually except when they were required to play a game. These games had the design of a competition where the one who first reached a certain goal, such as getting five dots, won. Students were not explicitly required to talk during these activities but of course they chatted and asked each other about different tasks. The tasks generally did not require cognitively advanced thinking and as the tasks were of a type that rather tested their skills, the students did not get many chances to produce language of their own through these activities.

In the following extract, from standard three, the teacher is instructing the students for the afternoon's work when one of the students initiates talk about the thermometer.

Example 3

L: Vi har lite rester kvar sen förmiddan ... så jag lägger alla kort här
 E1: Anna ska man in ska man inte ta upp
 E2: Vilken är det XXX
 E3: XXX kompis eller vad är det
 L: XXX kompis ja ta ut termometern menar du jag la jag la ut den i morse men innan ni kom in i klassrummet så hade solen hunnit lysa på den ... så att den visade åtta grader varmt och så varmt är det ju inte ute idag hur kan vi veta att det inte är åtta grader varmt ute idag David?
 E4: Det är snö ute
 L: Det är snö ute ja hur skulle hur kändes snön nu när vi var ute
 E5: Den var
 E6: Den var isig
 L: Isig hap ... em kan det vara åtta grader varmt då
 Emma: Det skulle jag Det skulle jag ju säga
 L: Varför det inte ville du säga det Emma?
 E: Nej
 L: Varför kan det inte vara åtta grader varmt när snön är så isig?

T: We have some leftovers from this morning ... so I put all cards here
 P1: Anna should we no should we not take out
 P2: Who is that XXX
 P3: XXX pal or what is it
 T: XXX pal yes take the thermometer out you mean I put it out this morning but before you arrived in the classroom the sun had already shone on it ... so it showed eight degrees warm and that warm it is surely not today how can we know that it's not eight degrees plus outdoors today David?
 P4: There's snow outside
 T: There's snow outside yes how would how did the snow feel like now when we were out
 P5: It was
 P6: It was icy
 T: Icy I see ... em can it be eight degrees warm then
 P2: I was going to why I was going to say that
 T: Why that did you not want to say that Emma?
 P2: No
 T: Why can it not be eight degrees warm when the snow is so icy?

E6: För e ... m det måste vara minusgrader om det ska vara is

L: Varför det?

E6: Annars blir det kramsnö

L: Ja och annars vad händer vad är det som sker i snön när det blir kramsnö och inte så där isigt

E6: Den den är den är mycket slask mycket slaskigare

L: M ... hur kan det kom vad är det som finns i snön när snön är slaskig

E7: Vatten

L: Och den det vattnet finns ju i snön när snön inte är slaskig också men då är vattnet nånting annat än vatten vad är det so vad vad är vattnet förnånting i snön idag

E8: Is

L: Ja och när det är is i snön och is snön är sådär isigt och hård då vet vi ju att då är det minusgrader

E6: Because e ... m it has to be minus degrees if there is ice

T: Why is that?

E6: In other case we get wet snow

T: Yes and in other case what happens what is it that happens in snow when we get wet snow and not that icy

P6: It it is it is much slush much slushier

T: M ...how can it b what is it that is in snow when the snow is slushy

P7: Water

T: And surely the water is in the snow also when the snow when the snow is not slushy but then the water is something else what is it tha what what is the water in the snow today

P8: Ice

T: Yes and when there is ice in the snow and ice the snow is icy like that and stiff then we know that surely it's minus-degrees

This example is a case when school knowledge is talked about, the thermometer and relations between temperature and water/ice/snow. In this case the topic was initiated by a student.

Language used to express this is not talked about and as in the first example the teacher used everyday language and did not introduce specialised language, for example in the talk about water and ice in snow. Some technical terms were used but without explaining, and words like melting and freezing for example, that would have been relevant, were not used at all.

Questions were of the test-type that is common in schools, which means that the teacher asks questions to test students' knowledge, not authentic questions as in example 2. This means that in this case the "knower" was the teacher.

In grade 4-6, students sometimes worked in groups with projects connected to science or social science. The teacher gave them directions, such as questions to answer, but there was usually an opportunity to choose the topic. In the following example, from spring in grade four, the task is to collect information about one geographical area in Sweden. The following group has chosen to work with the Swedish island Öland. The group consists of three girls and three boys. One of the boys is missing at the beginning of this interaction but joins the group after a while. Generally those who read the book and write are the girls while the boys lack concentration. The students have divided the work among themselves so that the reader, P1, and the writer, P3, are the two among them who are most proficient in that.

Example 4

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

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

E2: Antal invånare	kilometres
E3: Den den största höjden på Öland	P2: Number of inhabitants
E2: Största höjden?	P3: The the highest point of Öland
E3: Ja	P2: Highest point?
E2: Den störs em	P3: Yes
E4: Em kan inte nån utav oss skriva em frågor (Tjut i bakgrunden)	P2: The highest em
E3: Så	P4: Em can't one of us write em questions (a howl in the background)
E1: Men det gör vi hela tiden	P3: So
E2: M	P1: But that's what we do all the time
(Tjut)	P2: M
E3: N där var det störs höjd	(a howl)
E1: Ja em den största höjden är ...	P3: N there it was the highest point
E3: 57	P1: Yes em the highest point is
E1: Ja 57,4	P3: 57
E3: (skriver) komma 4 meter över havet	P1: Yes 57.4
E1: Ja em punkt ö	P3: (writes) dot four metres above the sea level
E2: Em punkt ö punkt h punkt happ	P1: Yes em dot a
E4: Em antal invånare XXX ja men det där har vi XXX	P2: Em dot a dot s dot well
E5: Kalmar e de e	P4: Em number of inhabitants XXX yes but that we have XXX
E3: E deras län är Kalm Kalmar	P5: Kalmar is that is
E1: Öland Ölands län vänta Ölands största län landskap vänta Ölands största län	P3: E their county is Kalm Kalmar
E5: Ja	P1: The county county of Öland wait the greatest county landscape of Öland wait the greatest county of Öland
E3: Nej vänta Ölands län	P5: Yes
E1: Ölands län heter Kalmar	P3: No wait the county of Öland
E3: Ja det blir bra	P1: The county of Öland is called Kalmar
	P3: Yes that'll be fine

The students seem to be unfocused, particularly those who did not read or write, P2, P4-6.

The level of engagement is quite low. As in earlier examples the talk was of everyday type and consisted mainly of fragments and repairs.

In these four examples from day-to-day classroom life, teachers and students talk around the tasks that students are working with. There is not much focus on content or on the language used to express the content. I will use the tools of SFL, field, tenor and mode to analyse relations between interaction patterns, curriculum knowledge and student engagement.

Mode is about the medium, the language used. What has been recorded is talk but the talk is often connected with written tasks that involve reading and writing. The type of talk is typical for spoken everyday language and is fragmented with frequent repairs and interruptions. Few whole sentences are spoken and there is not much cohesion or coherence, there are few connectors, few sub-clauses and the words are general and seldom specialised. The occasions where someone holds the floor and expresses a long thought or says something that requires a sequence of sentences are few. Also the reading and writing consists mainly of single words or short sentences. Teachers do not explicitly move to the specialised and reflexive domains of language.

Field is used to describe the What of the classroom, what knowledge is expressed through the language. Halliday (1993) and Cummins (2000) describe classroom language as being used to express knowledge about the subject, knowledge about language and knowledge about being a student, about classroom norms. I find that, from the interactions exemplified above, the knowledge that is predominantly expressed in these classrooms is knowledge about norms as talk is mainly about procedures and orders, such as what task to do, how and in what order. Also whole-class interactions led by teachers are usually instructions. Subject knowledge was seldom talked about. In the talks about the thermometer and caterpillars above and in the group talk where students looked for knowledge about the island Öland, subject knowledge was dealt with but unfocused. Generally the engagement around subject knowledge was low. Language was seldom talked about. Occasionally, teachers explained words they used but I did not observe teachers talking about other features of language, such as how different types of knowledge are expressed. I seldom saw a teacher referring to the other languages mastered by students in the class.

When we turn to tenor, the interaction and the relations and roles of those involved, I would describe the classroom interaction as friendly intercourse. There were generally few harsh words or expressions and the intercourse was inclusive. New students who came moving in were welcomed and taken care of. In addition, L2-students who came to the classes and who did not master Swedish well were included and both teachers and students helped them to get on. The borders of who took part in the interaction and who did not, were quite resilient. In whole-class teaching, teachers frequently addressed individual students and interruptions were frequent in all types of interactions. In the caterpillar talk from preschool, the teacher addressed the whole class while she was simultaneously interacting with individuals. In examples 2-4 students moved in and out. This was typical in the interaction in the classes. The roles in the classrooms were quite unclear. Teachers claimed leadership, for example during whole-class instructions, while they still “gave the floor” to individual students that took initiatives to interrupt (Wedin 2009, forthcoming). Also the pattern for who was allowed to interrupt, in what situation and for what reason was unclear. Although there was a warm atmosphere this is not enough. The unclear borders may constitute a problem for L2-students. The fact that those who claim the floor usually also are given, favours these children at the cost of those who do not. This gives some of the students the role of talker and initiative taker and others the role of listener.

The general impression is that the low focus on curricular knowledge, on language and on knowledge about language denies students necessary opportunities for learning, Johnston and

Hayes (2008) describe what happened in their classrooms by using two axes creating four quadrants. The left axis shows teacher control and the bottom axis shows student engagement. The first quadrant, A, low control and low engagement, describes when the teacher loses control or when students' perceptions of what it is all about, differ much from the teacher's perception. The second quadrant, B, high control and low engagement, is what they conclude characterises most of the time in the classrooms of their study. The teachers in the classrooms claimed to be aiming at the third quadrant, C, high control and high engagement. I find that what happened in the classrooms in my case can be fitted into their illustration. In the examples I have shown above, I find quadrant B, high teacher control and low student engagement, is a relevant description of what happens, what Johnston and Hayes call "a resilient survival-mode of teaching" (2006: 116). Teachers organise the work, what should be done, how it should be done and in what order and as in the case of Johnston and Hayes' study, the intellectual demands are minimal. Tasks are low demanding and students are not challenged to extend neither their thinking nor their language. Generally, rules are followed by students but with low enthusiasm. One exception from this pattern was the first term in grade four.

Entering grade four and climbing the school-ladder

What happened in grade four is related to school-structure in the Swedish school-system. It is well known that students experience increased demands when they climb the levels of the school system. One such step in Sweden is between grade three and four, between what was formerly junior level and intermediate level and a step that sometimes becomes too high for some students. This class had a female teacher for their first three years in school, a teacher for junior level. She was familiar to them and the atmosphere was friendly. As is common for junior level in Sweden, teaching was very tangible and focus was on basic reading and writing skills. This means that the L2-students that only mastered Swedish at a basic level, could usually follow the work (Wedin forthcoming). When students reach grade four it is often the case, as it was for these children, that they get a new teacher for intermediate level and that the demands become higher. This concerns also linguistic demands, which affects particularly L2-students. In this case, there was also a change in interactional patterns. In grades 1-3 the L2-boys had been allowed to "take the floor" and had done so frequently. The teacher had not demanded that they listen quietly but had often accepted their interruptions. In grade four the teacher tried to demand them to listen to instructions. The L2-boys then started to actively

show ignorance towards the teacher. We could say that they followed an alternative peer-generated script which for them “became the main business of schooling” (Johnston & Hayes, 2008:119). Their focus during instructions, and also during what was supposed to be individual work, was rather on creating their own social environment and positioning themselves. This took the form of loud comments to peers, throwing pieces of rubber, paper, pencils and other things, mainly on each other but also on other students in the class. This can be compared to studies by Knapp and Shields (1995) and Johnston and Hayes (2008) where “the peer-generated buzz of conversation and physical interaction was the real business of the lesson” (Johnston and Hayes 2008: 118). Using the axes by Johnston and Hayes I would describe this first term in grade four as mainly in quadrant A, low teacher control and low student engagement.ⁱⁱⁱ

Conclusions

The findings from this study resemble the findings by Knapp and Shields (1995) and Johnston and Hayes (2008), who also studied schools with students from predominantly diverse and low-income backgrounds. In all three cases, there are examples of school practices where high teacher control restricts the quality of the learning environment as well as students’ engagement. Johnston and Hayes (2008) argued that the teachers handled perceived problems with “difficult classrooms” by creating a “safety zone” using practices similar to those observed in this study. It has been observed elsewhere that teachers and students in a demanding educational situation construct safety strategies that work to save their faces, such as hiding failure or creating order in classrooms (Hornberger & Chick 2001; Wedin 2004). In this case the choice of the study kit *Pilen* is consistent with teachers’ teaching strategies. This type of materials keep students occupied and students commonly accept the work and thus it helps teachers to organise classroom-work. However, considering the students’ needs, the use of concrete look-and-say methods without tasks involving more abstract thinking and without stimulation for extended language use, such as extended reading and writing, actually denies students any chance of developing what they need in school.

It seems as teachers’ low expectations of these students in combination with the aim that students should succeed in the tasks that are given, constitute a tacit reason why language and cognitive demands are low. It may be that the focus on norms rather than on curricular knowledge is a result of teachers’ perception of the students’ environment, including their homes, as poor and insufficient and that there is a need from the part of the school to discipline the students. I argue that using low-demanding tasks have a self-fulfilling effect as

it creates an environment where students' opportunities to learn are restricted. For those L2-students who do not meet academic knowledge-related language outside school, of the type they will need higher up in the school system, it is necessary not only that they meet it in school, but also that they get opportunities to use it themselves. It is crucial that they are involved in interactions using both the specific and the reflexive registers early on in schooling to enable them to meet the demands of later years of schooling. This is also the case for L1-students who do not meet this type of language outside school.

The low engagement caused by low cognitive demands and restricted room for initiatives in these classrooms did not stimulate students to engage in learning, which is necessary for school success, particularly for L2-students. Although classrooms are democratic, friendly, caring and inclusive, they may still work to oppress second language learners and students from poor backgrounds, by not offering the linguistic and cognitive challenges needed for school success. This actually denies them equal chances to develop the types of language and knowledge that they need. As Gibbons argues: "The challenge for teachers is to recognise these undemocratic features of hegemonic control, such as taken-for-granted interactional patterns of the classroom, and change them in ways which reposition minority learners" (2006: 67). Johnston and Hayes (2008) argue that teachers need to develop a new kind of professional practice, negotiated interactive learning, which would be positioned in quadrant D in their model, low teacher control and high student engagement. Following Vygotsky's ZPD L2-students need to be geared towards their potential, not towards the actual level of their second language. I conclude that a more reflective and critical approach by teachers is needed as to how language is used in their classrooms.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to the teachers and students who welcomed me into their classrooms and who made my time in class easy. I also want to thank two anonymous reviewers for useful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

References

- Bailey, A.R. (Ed) 2008: *The language demands of school: Putting academic English to the test*. California: Yale University Press.
- Baynham, M. 1993: Literacy in TESOL and ABE: Exploring common themes. *Open letter*, 2(2), 4-16.
- Cummins, J. 2000: *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

- Cummins, J. 1984: *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Derewianka, B. 2004: Rocks in the head. Children and the language of geology. In R. Carter, (Ed) *Knowledge about language and the curriculum* 197-215. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Gibbons, P. 2006: *Bridging discourses in the ESL classroom. Students, teachers and researchers*. London: Continuum.
- Gibbons, P. 2008: "It was taught good and I learned a lot": Intellectual practices and ESL learners in the middle years. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 31, no 2: 155-173.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1993: Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, no 5: 93-116
- Halliday, M.A.K. 2004 (3:rd edition): *An introduction to functional grammar*. (Revised by C.M.I.M. Matthiessen) London: Hodder Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & R. Hasan, 1989: *Language, context and text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hammond, J. 2006: High challenge, high support: Integrating language and content instruction for diverse learners in an English literature classroom. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, no 5: 269-283.
- Hammond, J. 2008: Intellectual challenge and ESL students: Implications of quality teaching initiatives. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 31, no 2: 128-154.
- Heritage, M., M. Silva & M. Pierce, 2007: Academic English: a view from the classroom. In A.R. Bailey (Ed) *The language demands of school. Putting academic English to the test* 171-210. California: Yale University Press.
- Hornberger, N. & Chick, K. 2001: Co-constructing school safetime. Safetalk practices in Peruvian and South African classrooms. In M. Heller, and M. Martin-Jones (Eds.) *Voices of Authority. Education and Linguistic Difference*, 31-55. USA: Ablex publishing.
- Johnston, K. & D. Hayes 2008: "This is as good as it gets": Classroom lessons and learning in challenging circumstances. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 31, no 2: 109-117.
- Knapp, M., P. Shields & B. Turnbull 1995: Academic challenge in high poverty classrooms. *Phi Delta Kappan*, no 76: 770-776.
- Macken-Horarick, 1996: Literacy and learning across the curriculum: Towards a model of register for secondary school teachers. In: R. Hasan & G. Williams (Eds) *Literacy in society*, 232-278. New York: Addison Wesley, Longman.
- Scarcella, R. 2003: Academic English: A conceptual framework. *The University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute. Technical Report* 2003, no1.
- Schleppegrell, M. 2004: *The Language of Schooling*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schleppegrell, M. 2008: Literacy in history: language and meaning. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 31, no 2: 174-187.
- Wedin, Å. 2004: *Literacy practices in and out of school in Karagwe – The case of primary school literacy education in rural Tanzania*. PhdDiss., Stockholm: Centre for research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University.
- Wedin, Å. 2009: Monologen som en resurs i klassrummet. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 13: 4: 241-256.
- Wedin, Å. (forthcoming) Klassrumsinteraktion i de tidiga skolåren – Flerspråkiga elevers språkliga vardag. *Nordisk tidskrift för andraspråksforskning*.
- Vygotsky, L. 1978: *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. London: Harvard University Press.

Notes

ⁱ The Swedish compulsory school consists of nine years, grades 1-9. Traditionally they were divided in three parts, junior level, grades 1-3, intermediate level, grades 4-6, and senior level, grades 7-9. Although this organisation has formally been abolished, the tradition still exists and in this case all teachers had an education according to that system.

ⁱⁱ The transcription does not include full stop. 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:

T: Icy I see ... em can it be eight degrees warm then

P2: I was going to why I was going to say that

ⁱⁱⁱ The outcome of this was that many students moved from the class. A few moved with their families from the area but the most high-performing of these L2-boys and many of the L1-students, boys and girls, were taken from the class by their parents and put in other schools. This continued through standard five so that out of the 23 students that had been in the class in standard three, only ten students were left in standard six. We can say that in this case teacher control was secured by some parents' withdrawal of their children from the class.