

Mona Lansfjord

Good  
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and  
Writing  
Skills

FOR  
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## Summary

The aim of the study is to describe why some teachers are especially successful in their teaching of reading and writing during the first three years of school. In this detailed study 20 teachers were selected, all of whom had achieved good results teaching reading and writing over a long period. They came from five classes from years 1 and 2, three classes from year 3, three non-graded classes with no specific age groups and four classes with mixed age groups. 12 percent of the pupils had a different mother tongue. In seven classes there was no special teaching, whilst in the others there were only limited needs for this.

The teaching factors studied are based on a descriptive model from the IEA, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, project, *Reading Literacy*. The instruments used in the study were questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The teachers selected had all been working as teachers for an average of 26 years, and most of them had been working at least 10 years in the same school. The teachers stated that their main goal in teaching reading was to create on the part of the pupils a desire and interest in reading, and in terms of writing, their primary goal was to create interest and enjoyment in writing. The goals for reading and writing fall into two groups, the first is characterised by rules/structure and the other by openness. Most teachers represent a balance between both approaches, with a tendency towards openness. No particular reading method dominates, instead combinations of

different methods are used based on the needs of individual pupils. The most common reading and writing activities are reading aloud and silently, learning letters/sounds and writing closely related to reading.

The teachers enjoyed working together with the children, they feel secure in their role as teachers and with their strategies. They combine purposeful teaching with great flexibility in planning and implementation. From the very first year, pupils plan their own work and take responsibility for their own work tasks. The teachers carefully follow up each individual pupil's performances in reading and writing. In some classes pupils participated in the evaluation. Most teachers gave homework related to the needs of individual pupils. In many cases informal methods for diagnosing reading and writing skills are used. Most teachers were, however, hesitant over using formal diagnosis.

The teachers have a broad contact network and co-operate both with teachers at the same level and other levels as well as with teachers in child care. They regard co-operation with parents as highly important. All co-operation aims at furthering the learning of the individual pupil. The teachers also exhibited in their planning, features from both groups typifying rules/structure and openness. They plan and create good conditions for the work and give pupils the opportunity to develop their own ideas and at the same time take responsibility for their implementation.

The personal qualities and attitudes of teachers, such as openness, flexibility and their involvement with pupils and in the work as a whole, exerts a strong influence on the atmosphere in the classroom and hence pupils' attitudes. Pupils learn how to learn and take responsibility for their own learning, whilst teachers are strongly committed to each child's acquisition of knowledge through the world of reading and writing.

The teachers reflect on their teaching and relate it to the pupils' learning and development. The didactic perspective plays a prominent role: Both what pupils learn and how they learn is important.

Research in the area continued after the conclusion of the project in 1994. Results show that the description of the good teacher of reading and writing also holds true in terms of findings presented in recent years.

# 1

## Portrait of the good reading and writing teacher



Every teacher and pupil knows that it is not easy to learn without having a feeling of desire, interest and enjoyment. To be able to feel like a writing and reading human being is revolutionary and joyful; the world expands, treasures in literature and a delight in reading, all add new dimensions to life. The individual's own ability for self-expression is important for growth and development. A classroom with many books, where pupils discuss, tell stories, read and write, listen to each other and in different ways share their experiences with each other is a truly creative environment. Developing the use of language is to develop as a person and gain a better understanding of the surrounding world. How does a teacher work in order to meet such demands? One answer to this question is provided in the project *Good reading and writing*, which in a concise form presents a portrait of the good teacher of reading and writing.

The teacher

is secure in the teaching role and has found his/her own way of working

reflects over teaching in relation to pupils' learning and development

plans and co-operates with pupils, colleagues and parents

exploits events in the surrounding world and in the classroom to make the teaching more relevant and interesting

puts clear demands on and follows up each pupil's progress in reading and writing

is positive and solves problems as and when they occur

does not regard the class as demanding in terms of resources, but as typical of the age group

is open to changes

Teaching

strikes a good balance between rules/structure and an open attitude to reading and writing

takes as the starting point pupils' own experiences and interests

combines traditional methods of learning to read using an LTG approach (interactively recording pupils' experiences and using this as a basis for developing reading skills) which takes the pupil and not the method as the starting point

develops reading and writing skills by creating the desire to read and write

creates delight and interest in reading by means of e.g. reading projects, thematic reading and reading aloud

classroom atmosphere is good when everyone is totally involved and has positive attitudes

provides a good working atmosphere enabling pupils to concentrate on their tasks



In their relationship to pupils

**the teacher puts the individual in the centre and takes as the starting point each individual's level of development**

**the teacher has an open attitude to her learning**

**the teacher is able to inspire pupils to feel responsible and proud of their work**

**the teacher steers the pupils gently and firmly towards goals**

# 2

## The status quo



Some years have elapsed since the project was implemented and still there is a lively debate on pupils' reading and writing skills; accompanied by a stream of new publications, articles and important scientific findings in the area. The long-term teaching goal in reading and writing of the teachers participating in the study, is that pupils should become reflective readers and writers.

In the Reading and writing commission's final report [SOU 1997: 108], Roger Säljö in a penetrating analysis of the art of reading and writing refers to the current state of teaching in the school. He shows the complexity of reading skills and that in no sense are they a one time learning process for all, since different reading situations impose different demands. For this reason, he states it is not possible to compare reading skills today with e.g. those in the 1880s, since life in today's society is so much more complicated and places different and greater demands on its citizens. Not until the 20th century did school children in the elementary school need not just to be able to read, but also to understand and interpret texts. An important difference today is the increasing demand attached to writing skills: all the machinery of contemporary society is based on the ability of its members to communicate in writing. He describes the development of teaching methods in reading and writing in the western world and emphasises the concept of »literacy« as an expression of people's ability as readers and writers to »structure,

approach problems and analyse the surrounding world«. His analysis is very close to the long-term goals of the teachers in the project in terms of teaching reading and writing.

Another interesting link to the project is Frøydis Hertzberg's plenary lecture at the conference *Svenskans beskrivning* 22 (Description of Swedish 22) in Lund on October 18-19 1996. She describes current research on writing didactics in general terms and shows how some researchers reach surprising conclusions about the difficulties in teaching writing as well as the opportunities existing at different age levels [HERTZBERG, 1997]. She reports George Hillock's discussion about two types of knowledge, factual knowledge (»what« knowledge) and process knowledge (»how« knowledge). The former is knowledge that can be formulated in terms of language, whilst the latter is tacit and is defined as the knowledge which makes it possible to »put into practice the what knowledge«.

Thereafter the discussion is about the relationship between content and form in language teaching. She also refers to Breiter's views on the development of the written language:

1. Gradual differentiation of text from speech
2. Development of the ability to alternate between the two systems
3. Mastery of the specific conventions of written language
4. Acquisition of an objective, explicit language independent of context
5. Management of written style and written genres

Based on these statements above discusses the relationship between form and content in teaching writing and states that the explicit teaching of form leads to learning only under the following conditions:

- Inductive teaching methods are used
- Teaching is close to the pupil's level
- Focusing on form is connected to work on texts where content is also important

- There is alternation between pupil participation and teacher led activities
- Teaching of form comes after or at the same time as free reading of authentic texts
- Teaching is carried out in a co-operative climate between pupils and teachers

Hertzberg deals with the same area as the teachers in the project when they are describing their work on both form and content, formulated as the opposition between rules/structure and open attitude. Based on Hertzberg's views, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the project's portrayal of the good teacher of reading and writing is clearly in line with her viewpoints on writing.

Kerstin Odelberg has investigated how teachers look at children's development in reading and to what extent teachers' views are important in developing children's reading skills. She draws a distinction between two categories of teachers, those who are skill oriented and those focussing on the pupil as a person. The former considers variations in children's reading skills as different phases in reading development and her view is that children need regular active support from the school as well as stimulation from parents. Teachers prefer co-operation with pre-school teachers and consider that children's work situation is manageable. She sees it as her responsibility to teach all the children, including those facing difficulties in reading and writing. The person oriented teacher believes that children's personality, their talent and maturity is vital in learning to read, as well as the child's own »willingness to make an effort«. The right moment for learning to read is determined by a state of readiness to learn to read and also attendance at school, factors that are regarded as difficult to influence and are more the responsibility of the family and the pre-school rather than the school. For this reason children should remain in the pre-school until they are »ready« for school. Children with difficulties in writing are regarded as particularly demanding in terms of resources, however, this is not really the responsibility of the class teacher.

There is a clear difference between these teacher categories. The skill oriented teacher expects that all children have the desire to learn how to read and write, and can get the help they need.

Learning to read is not, in the first instance, regarded as strenuous or requiring self-mastery on the part of the children. The pupils are regarded as equals and jointly responsible for the learning process, for which the teacher takes active responsibility. The person oriented teacher on the other hand, sees her role as a teacher more as nourishing and guiding the child than being a pedagogical work leader, thus running the risk that the child will not get sufficient pedagogical guidance while the teacher is waiting for the child to become more mature. In this way the teacher is not taking full responsibility for pupils' learning to read and write.

This picture of the good teacher of reading and writing, the skill oriented teacher described by Odelberg, can also help to explain the results of the project. These criteria are very much in line with Odelberg's description of the skill-oriented teacher.

In a third study Caroline Liberg (1998) clarifies current research into the didactics of reading and writing. Traditionally reading is regarded as decoding a text which is processed into understanding, whilst writing is seen as recoding thoughts into written text. The better the coding works, the clearer the understanding. Caroline Liberg shows that reading and writing are multi-faceted activities which are not easily described. She gives examples of how children learn to read and write on their own and through this attain an awareness of language. She regards learning as a process of understanding, in which coding techniques are developed. The further development of reading and writing takes place through the interaction between understanding and coding, with different paths for different individuals. Children who learn reading and writing under these conditions are likely to be successful in their future development. Children who learn to read and write through formal decoding develop »a superficial understanding«, the pattern of which can be difficult to break. Here, Liberg challenges special methodological principles based on decoding since they do not create a deeper understanding of the text.

Caroline Liberg refers to Bengt Nerman, who distinguishes between active creation of sentences and understanding-oriented reading in contrast to mechanical loyalty to literalism. He considers that by actively reading and writing in a dialogue with the text, the reader enters into a world where questions are raised and answers given by:

- using the text and making something out of it
- living with and in the text and allowing it to express itself through the reader
- seeing the text as something that allows human experience to be shared
- encountering the »new« which gives rise to excitement and the exchange of experiences
- reformulating on the basis of earlier formulation.

Caroline Liberg draws the conclusion that the school must teach different methods of reading and writing by:

- reading and writing dynamically, in a dialogue with the text
- reading and writing statically
- learning to mechanically read and write without a genuine understanding of reading and writing.

In developing her thinking, she shows that reading and writing is best learnt through a combination of different techniques and that this can start at an early stage. She also maintains that those pupils who have not achieved a fair degree of success, have not received appropriate support related to their learning profile and that 2-3% of the population have a language handicap in terms of dyslexia/dysgraphia or alexia/agraphia, which require special learning strategies.

The descriptions given by Odelberg, Nerman and Liberg are vital and of great interest for the project *Good reading and writing*, since they confirm many of its conclusions. Common criteria of the good teacher of reading and writing are flexibility and variety, working in situations as close to reality as possible, taking account of the pupils' individual development, co-operating, creating an enjoyment of reading and writing, and not least important aiming to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

# 3

## The background and nature of the project



One of the school's most important tasks is to teach all children to read and write. In the knowledge society of today and tomorrow, it will become increasingly important to have effective reading and writing skills. Unfortunately pupils leave the compulsory school with insufficiently developed reading and writing skills, at the same time as further education, working life and society are becoming increasingly demanding in terms of higher levels of competence.

Children start school with a well-developed awareness of language, and during the initial years at school the majority learn to read and write. With the help of the teacher they develop impressive skills in a relatively short period of time. Most children appear to learn many other things by being in stimulating environments. It is as if knowledge and skills are absorbed through an osmotic type of process, which seems to be external to some pupils, at least in terms of the ability to write. For this reason, children more than others need a perceptive supervisor, able to explain and help them maintain focus [LUNDBERG, 1984].

The author, Olof Lagercrantz, in his book *On the art of reading and writing* describes his observations and memories from the considerable experience he has accumulated from the world of reading and writing.

»What actually happens when we read and write? The eye follows black letters on white paper from left to right, over and over again. And the experiences of other human beings, events, nature and thoughts, which another person imagined, either recently or a thousand years ago, come to life in our imagination. It is nothing short of a miracle, more impressive than taking and growing a seed from the graves of the pharaohs. And this takes place all the time.« [LAGERCRANTZ, 1985]

Learning to read is for many pupils a result of systematic teaching. Teaching effectiveness is shown to have a significant influence on how well pupils learn to read. Attentive teachers who are able to support the meta-cognitive strategies of their pupils have rich opportunities to help them overcome initial obstacles on the way to acquiring reading and writing skills [LUNDBERG & LINNAKYLÄ, 1992].

The same condition applies to learning to write. The writing process covers much more than being able to write individual words correctly. Skills at higher levels, e.g. writing sentences, paragraphs and texts are also a part of this. In addition, the writer should be able to express thoughts and ideas as clearly as possible. In order to provide guidance to pupils learning to write, teachers need detailed knowledge and insight into the processes involved in reading and writing.

A good teacher of 9 year olds is, according to the IEA study *Reading Literacy*, a female teacher with many years of experience in teaching, a person who reads a lot of fiction and non-fiction. Good teachers give their pupils opportunities for self-directed silent reading in well-supplied libraries and discuss books with their pupils and make sure their interests influence the choice of texts in the teaching.

A pupil centred approach focussing on strategies for understanding texts does not preclude a good teacher from sometimes working with a decoding oriented method.

Naturally, many factors are involved in determining how successful a pupil is in reading and writing, and no particular factor can be singled out as the most important. What is important is i.a. the



child's home environment. Different research results show the importance of early stimulation in using language. Reading aloud, playing with rhymes and jingles as well as reading tales and stories often amuse children and create a good relationship with adults at the same time as they develop the child's language and prepare them for reading.

It is impossible to get a clear understanding of to what extent and in what way a child's language is stimulated at home. Each teacher taking on a beginner knows very well that the stage children have attained in their language development is very different. They come to school with different »luggage« and are not identically equipped to learn to read and write. From a statistical point of view, 2-3 pupils in each class have problems in reading and writing that require special methods to bridge their difficulties. *For some teachers the difficulties these pupils face will not develop into major problems, instead they seem to be able to help their pupils by-pass the obstacles. One goal in the project is to study what it is that makes a teacher successful.*

# 4

## The aim of the project



The aim of the project is to define and describe how it is that some teachers achieve success in teaching reading and writing during the pupils' early school years. The overall task is to define and analyse factors that are important for sound development in reading and writing for all children. The starting point is to study in detail a number of teachers, who over a period of years have handed over classes where all children have acquired good reading and writing skills.

The project is limited to teaching and classroom perspectives. The study focuses on the methods specific teachers use to solve problems and manage the task of giving their pupils optimal opportunities to learn reading and writing; in a nutshell how they plan and implement their teaching. In many good classrooms, school work is run in such a way that each pupil performs optimally, however, the project has been deliberately limited to a small number of classes. As a result, it is possible by means of in-depth studies to document how teaching is carried out and demonstrate the

attitudes and ideas influencing teachers' working methods. The aim is to find common factors, as well as the unique characteristics of the classrooms selected, factors which may be regarded as being of benefit in learning good reading and writing skills.

The evaluation carried out by the National Agency has shown that it is easier to change the organisational level of the school than the form and contents of teaching:

»Generally, teaching is thought to be far removed from the ideals set out in the curriculum: an educational environment where pupils are active. Lgr 80 (Curriculum for compulsory school) distances itself from a one-sided traditional approach to teaching. And yet this is just how it appears to be. Traditional desk-bound teaching, both in the form of pure lecturing interspersed with questions from pupils, occurs in at least eight out of ten classes each day. Group work or exploratory work occurs every day in just ten percent of all classes.«

This is confirmed by the Kärrqvist (1996) which shows that the goals of LGR 80 in terms of developing an exploratory way of working are not being fulfilled. Such facts are disquieting, but do create at the same time great interest in how teachers succeed in fulfilling the intentions of the curriculum, specifically in this case the initial phases in learning to read and write.

The following questions form the basis of the project:

- What links are there between thinking and language that affect the teaching of reading and writing?
- In what ways can the teaching of reading and writing be described from different theoretical perspectives?
- How has thinking on the teaching of reading and writing been reflected in the syllabi?
- What methods exist for teaching reading and writing in the early years?
- How do teachers organise, plan and implement their teaching?

# 5

## Theoretical framework



The theoretical framework and starting-point for selection of instruments and working method is based on a model that groups together a number of crucial teaching factors in a manner that is easily comprehensible.

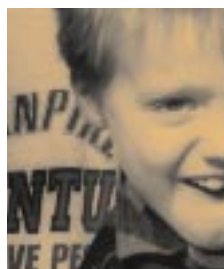
The framework comprises three main concepts that influence the development of reading and writing, namely, *teaching conditions*, *teacher characteristics* and *teaching orientation*. A number of important factors are placed under these headings. They cover such factors as, class size, the length of time a teacher has taught in the class, number of pupils with a different mother tongue, textbooks, teaching aids and classroom environment. Teacher characteristics cover gender, education, experience and interest in reading and writing. A large number of headings are used to describe teaching orientation, for example, diagnosis and teaching oriented to understanding and decoding. Teacher-pupil co-operation is related to pupil participation, whilst reading and writing are related to pupils' interests. Teacher tasks are dealt with, under the headings *teacher-led instruction* and *reading aloud to pupils*. All results are linked together as important factors in the study of the development of reading and writing skills.

Undervisningsbetingelser	Proximal Teaching conditions
Lärarkaraktistika	Teacher characteristics
Undervisningsinriktning	Teaching Strategies
Undervisningsresultat	Teaching Outcomes
Klasstorlek	Class size
Undervisningstid	Teaching hours
Elever med annat hemspråk	Pupils with 2nd language
Klassrumsmiljö	Classroom environment
Utbildning	Education
Erfarenhet	Experience
Kön	Gender
Läs- och skrivvanor	Reading and writing habits
Attityder till läsning och skrivning	Attitudes to reading and writing
Tidsfördelning	Time allocation
Gruppindelning	Grouping
Läxor	Homework
Förståelse-avkodningsinriktad undervisning	Understanding-decoding oriented teaching
Diagnoser	Diagnosis
Uppmuntran till läsning och skrivning	Encouragement of reading and writing
Elevmedverkan	Pupils' participation
Läsning och skrivning utifrån elevernas intressen	Reading and writing from pupils' interest perspective
Lärladd undervisning	Teacher-led instruction
Högläsning för eleverna	Reading aloud to pupils
Läs- och skrivutveckling	Reading and writing development

The model comes from the IEA project *Reading literacy* (LUNDBERG & LINNAKYLÄ, 1992), and also covers writing factors.

# 6

## Scientific background



In order to provide a theoretical basis for the project *Good reading and writing*, different aspects regarding learning to read and write are presented in the following theoretical summary. These are based on research from different disciplines, as well as from curricula and literature with a practical orientation. They also illustrate such questions as children's thinking, theories and methods of learning to read and write, syllabus requirements in terms of teaching, the teacher's organisation and planning of work and role as a leader.

## Learning to read and write

### CHILDREN'S THINKING AND LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

The work on bringing about change in the school must come from a clear awareness of how the selection of teaching content is made, and how this affects the teacher's thinking on methodological approach and organisational change.

Traditionally, didactics focuses on issues concerning selection of content and teaching method. In the future, research into how pupils learn may, however, form an integral part of a didactic perspective and increase our knowledge of how pupils learn. Reflecting on the content of teaching, not only provides teachers with insights into the pupil's relationship with the subject matter or the structure of the subject matter itself, but can also provide the basis for making decisions on methods. It then becomes essential to develop the pupils' understanding by encouraging them to reflect on how specific contents can be interpreted and understood, how contents can be structured as well as encouraging them to reflect on their own learning. The teacher directs the pupils' thinking towards a meta-cognitive level within the three areas i.e. how they and others think about content, structure and learning. It is thus a question of drawing children's attention to vertical learning, learning at different levels of generality. Marton (1977) distinguishes between three types of competence that can be used to determine pedagogical goals, specifically, skills, knowledge and understanding. By skills he refers to how one acts, and by knowledge what one knows about phenomena which in some sense are understandable. Understanding refers to the ways in which the pupil perceives knowledge about phenomena.

Views on children's thinking have been influenced by Piaget's theories and his method of explaining why children fail to understand what adults say. They lack the cognitive structure of adults and are thus limited by their own ego-centricity. If we take as the starting point that a child can understand different perspectives when reaching a certain age or level of maturity, this will have the effect of modifying our ideas of what children should learn. As a consequence language, communication and learning then become less important. Vygotsky, on the other hand, views children's thinking and communication with the surrounding world from a different perspective. In his opinion, language ability is dependent on cultural factors and conditioned by the environment and society. A living language is developed in a dialogue between children and adults.

Wood (1992) presents three different ways of looking at learning; as exemplified by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, advocates of distinct theoretical approaches, and he presents and discusses the didactic consequences of their ideas.

»Whilst Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner all emphasise how essential purposeful activity is for learning and development, they provide three different pictures of social interaction and teaching. The same is true of their predictions of the effect of culture and social experience on our thinking. Piaget recommends that we search for what is culturally universal in various stages of development. Vygotsky and Bruner invite us to recognise that there are different ways of creating pictures of the world which are related to cultural factors and how children are educated and brought up.« [WOOD, 1992]

**Their views on teaching and learning differ, but they have certain points of departure in common. Learning to read and write provides the individual with new language functions and the prerequisites for analytical thinking. It is thus essential to regard thinking as the foundation of language development. When children's thinking is taken seriously, the confidence they feel in their own abilities is considerably enhanced.**

»In Vygotsky's view, proficiency in reading and writing results in children developing more explicit and objective theories about language, and furthermore helps them develop their self-discipline when planning, directing and assessing their own writing. Being able to write well requires an ability to adopt other people's perspectives, empathise with their way of thinking and linguistically imagine situations which in 'real' conversations are taken for granted and regarded as self-evident. This is something that requires a great deal of work.«

**Arnquist (1993) considers that Vygotsky's and Piaget's theories have much in common. For instance both share the view that the child develops in interaction with its environment:**

»Both theories emphasise the interaction between heredity and environment, but differ in that Piaget emphasises heredity whilst Vygotsky highlights the child's language environment. Both theories also show how language and the development of cognitive skills are inter-connected with each other.«

**Success in learning to read and write depends on how children are introduced to and guided in developing their skills. This does not happen automatically by giving children the opportunity to use their imagination without restriction. Nor does it happen by**



forcing them to concentrate and listen to facts that somebody is trying to get across to them. Teaching children to learn is more a question of them understanding certain aspects of reality through their own thinking. In the USA there is great interest in developing »effective thinking« with programmes that instruct children in the principles and rules of thinking. However, effectiveness is enhanced by involving children directly in active thinking.



Another way of developing children's understanding is to encourage them to reflect on specific contents of their own understanding, on the structure of the contents and on their own learning. Studies of reading from a child's perspective are exemplified through research that deals with how children at pre-school and lower compulsory school levels perceive what reading is and how learning to read occurs. It shows that pre-school children's perceptions of what reading is vary. What is essential in learning to read is the child's awareness of the written language. Children who know why and how people read have a natural advantage. Similar research has been presented by Francis (1982), who has carried out a number of case studies to illustrate children's approach to the written language and thus to reading and writing. She analyses how children understand their experiences of reading and writing and

the development of their skills in learning to read during the early part of their schooling. The whole point of reading is that children understand why they are learning to read.

According to Smith (1971) learning to read and write takes place in a predetermined sequence which is based on the idea that reading must be simplified for the child to understand it. Learning is understood to be essentially linear and is gradually built up by association to finally form a coherent whole. In opposition to this theory is the fact that certain children learn to read without anything being simplified. These children have sufficiently complex experiences to be able to understand the reading process.

#### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

Children who are learning to read and write must make themselves understood outside the immediate situation or context in which they use speech. They must also discover a series of often irregular relationships between the structure of the spoken and written language. According to Vygotsky (1962), proficiency in reading and writing enables children to develop more explicit and objective theories concerning the structure of language. They also develop their self-discipline and are capable of planning, guiding and assessing their own writing. Being able to write well requires, in fact, an ability to see reality from the perspective of others, to put oneself into their thinking and from a language point of view imagine situations which in conversation are taken for granted.

Also the spoken and written language make different demands on children in other ways. Researchers from different disciplines have illustrated how children learn to read and write by using descriptive models taken from, among other fields, psychology, philology, pedagogics and sociology. Certain researchers have focused on the process of learning to read and write [LUNDBERG, 1984], whilst others view it from a developmental perspective and focus on learning to read and write from the viewpoint of different theories [ARNQUIST, 1993]. Others again specifically study the development of reading and reading comprehension [SUNDBLAD, ET AL 1983]. In recent years research into learning to write has attracted a great deal of attention [DYSTHE, 1987; ELBRO, 1990].

Using the writing process as a starting point, there has been growing interest in studying more closely the process of learning to write [STRÖMQUIST, 1987; GARME, 1988]. Writing as a thinking process and its significance for learning is strongly emphasised by researchers. However, best outcomes are achieved when writing is integrated with speech in a deliberate and well-planned way:

»My findings in the case studies showed that although writing is a powerful tool for learning per se, it gains even more learning potential when used interactively with talking and when the teacher consciously plans for and scaffolds such interaction.« [DYSTHE, 1993]

Certain researchers study how children simultaneously acquire the ability to read and write. Others see different levels and find that children often use different strategies when reading and writing. Children learn to speak and write through different processes, but the difference between the spoken and written language is not as great as many wish to claim. Lundberg shows how children through learning to read are able to transcend the immediacy of the present and understand contexts of increasing complexity.

»In a more fundamental sense, writing gives children a lever which they can use to detach themselves from the functional prison of the immediate situation, and from a new level of reflective awareness, observe not only their own language but their own thinking processes, social relations and, in essence, reality as a whole. This is the mental revolution that starts when children first learn to read.« [LUNDBERG, 1984]

Knowledge of language is significant for learning to read [LUNDBERG, 1984]. This involves acquiring a new language repertoire, transferring the register of the spoken language to the written. It requires insight into the structure of language, from a phonetic, phonologic, syntactic and semantic point of view as well. By using language children learn to read and write. For this reason, it is necessary to create language »space«, where children together with adults are able to develop their ability to read and write.

Liberg shows how children approach the written language by reading and writing in different ways and through trial and error. She distinguishes between a grammatical and an effective way of

learning. The former means that the child reads by pronouncing its way through the text and so understands spoken form more than content. The latter is linked to the text and provides the child with the opportunity to use its own experiences and thinking to create understanding and enjoyment. Similar principles apply to writing:

»The child's first encounter with the art of reading and writing occurs through other people. Adults read and write partly for their own purposes and partly together with the child about subjects that interest the child. This is discussed both in connection with reading and writing itself, and also in other situations. The child gets the opportunity to experience the meaningfulness of reading and writing.«

One can also study how the child learns to read and develops different reading strategies. The process passes through different stages such as pseudo-reading when the child believes it can read, logographic reading when the child reads word-pictures in certain contexts, alphabetic reading when the child reads the letters and finally orthographic reading when the child also starts to understand the context. Further development leads to creative and critical reading, at the same time as the ability to read becomes increasingly less dependent on context and the child as a result is able to assimilate the text independently.

In writing too, children use different methods to improve their ability at different stages in their development, such as scribbling, playing with written words, rows of letters, pictures as spoken language, exploratory writing and finally conventional writing.

Sundblad et al 1983 emphasise psychological reading comprehension and introduce the concept of pre-understanding. They view the development of reading and writing as occurring simultaneously in a continuous process that has its origins in speech development. With the ability to read and write, the child acquires new functions and new opportunities to enhance its competence:

»Reading is not, as has been previously believed, a separate ability, on the contrary, it forms a natural part of the entire language and communicative context. Consequently, learning to read is a natural extension of a developing language ability.«

Learning to read and write can also be seen as a continuous process in language development from speech to reading and then writing. Accordingly, the epistemological approach and viewpoint are more important than the method used. The cognitive process is of great importance. On the basis of this, Sundblad presents a reading development scheme consisting of 23 points, 10 of which describe basic reading development.

In this model reading comprehension is essential; a factor which other researchers have also emphasised. One way of capturing the elusive magic of writing and reading is to work with linguistic-philosophical and philological concepts such as the text world and satellite texts. With the ability to both read and write, pupils can compose their own texts in a more constructive way, and detach themselves from the immediacy of the satellite text. In the text world, this experience can be reflected on and through verbal communication be shared with others. In this way the text world is brought to life, irrespective of whether the pupil has created it through writing or experienced it through reading.

Linguistics is even more clearly linked to cognitive theory, when reading development is described in language terms and interpreted by means of a scheme. The text is then understood from the perspective of pre-understanding and is linked to a network of general, organised knowledge. It is abstract and subconscious, which provides scope for imagination and creativity when interpreting text.

#### THE TEACHING OF READING AND WRITING IN PRACTICE

Descriptions of learning to read and write are usually linked to a variety of different methods. Traditionally the teaching of reading, which has developed over several centuries, has had a special status, whilst the teaching of writing has often played a subordinate role. However, the latter has been given an increasingly improved status in the school as a result of teaching starting to cover the whole of the writing process.

The teaching of reading is carried out by means of different ways of approaching the individual word directly or via its sound, letters and syllables. The phonic method and word-picture method are the most common in Sweden. There is also a variant of the former,

known as the Swedish method, which means that certain letters are selected during the initial stages of learning to read. This has evidently had an influence on the content of reading theories and created a specific methodology for the initial teaching of reading. Over the last few decades, speech-based reading, Ulrika Leimar's »Look and Say« method LTG, has had the greatest impact. The starting-point is the child's own experiences and ideas. Speech provides the foundation since it is the first language competence. Language development is viewed as a whole, and children's cognitive and conceptual development form the basis for selecting content in the initial stages of learning to read and write. When pupils are learning to develop a working method for learning, teachers become more like coaches than teachers. The method covers different phases that occur in discussion, writing, reading and language exercises which are adapted to the ability of the individual pupil.

The phonic method and the speech-based reading method (LTG) can be described using learning theories and represent two different approaches. The first, which is rooted in behaviourism, goes from the smallest part to the whole and can be described as »synthetic«, whilst the cognitive LTG speech-based reading method takes the opposite approach, from whole to parts and is analytic [LUNDBERG, 1984]. No specific method of learning to read is superior to any other. The best results are probably achieved by means of interaction between several different methods [STAHL & MILLER, 1989]. However, only a small part of the variance in pupils' reading skills can be attributed to the learning method adopted [LOHNES & GRAY, 1972]. What is of greater importance in the majority of cases is the amount of time invested in the teaching. However, for certain pupils one method may be preferable to another.

#### THE TEACHING OF READING AND WRITING IN LGR 69 AND LGR 80

The curricula from the 60s to the 80s deal with the teaching of reading and writing both in detail and in general terms. In LGR 69 (Curriculum for compulsory school) reference is made to widely used methods. In the syllabus for Swedish, guidelines are provided under the heading, Preparatory teaching. Among other things, testing is recommended since pupils come to school with different levels of knowledge:

»Since those starting school show great differences in this respect, well-planned preparatory teaching with general language-enhancing practice is essential. The teaching should aim at improving the pupils' readiness to read, and prepare the word and phonic analyses that serve as the basis for the reading methods generally used. As far as possible the occurrence of reading and writing difficulties should be prevented.« [LGR 69]

**The method of learning to read presented here can essentially be described as a phonic method:**

»For a child taught according to the reading methods generally used in Sweden, learning to read means being able to combine language sounds with the corresponding letter notations, being able to connect these sounds with words and understanding the content of the words and sentences read.« [LGR 69]

There are explanatory notes on the curriculum in each subject and detailed examples are given for teaching reading and writing. LGR 80 does not mention the teaching of reading and writing, it simply refers to on-going research. The commentary material, *Read*, deals instead in considerable detail with the teaching of reading and writing and recommends the LTG speech-based reading method. This is because it uses the pupils' experiences and develops each individual pupil's language ability, and thus corresponds to the general intentions of LGR 80:

»The intentions, knowledge, interests and expectations of the reader and writer play a major role in determining the outcome (reading comprehension and writing of texts respectively). Once again, LTG, speech-based reading has many advantages over traditional methods used for teaching reading and writing. Content based reading and writing have a natural place in LTG's speech-based reading method, unlike teaching of reading and writing that is largely based on formal exercises.«

In a summary of important research the commentary material refers to such researchers as Ragnhild Söderbergh, Jan Anward, Åke Edfeldt and Ingvar Lundberg. Sundblad's reading development scheme is also mentioned and its correspondence with Ulrika Leimar's ideas on language development is emphasised. As part of such an approach, Sundblad and Allard assert that learning to

read and write must be linked to language function and usage and be related to the whole personality of the pupil:

»To consciously and in every conceivable way demonstrate the usefulness, function and purpose of written language, so that learning to read becomes the concern of each pupil.«

In the syllabus for Swedish (1988), it is asserted that initial teaching of reading and writing should be based on the experiences and knowledge of the pupils. Literature is given additional importance and text comprehension is emphasised. No recommendations regarding methods are made. However, an analytic approach is hinted at when it is suggested in accordance with the LTG speech-based reading method that words from children's own texts should be used:

»The learning of sounds and letters is facilitated if it is linked to the texts that the pupils are reading or create themselves in class.«

There are clear differences in the wording in both the curricula and in the syllabus for Swedish. In LGR 69 it is asserted that the phonic method is the one most commonly used. In LGR 80 the question of reading methods appears to be controversial and is treated in the commentary material. Philological, psychological and pedagogical research are used to legitimise LTG speech-based reading methods. In the 1988 syllabus for Swedish, general recommendations are made, but no specific methods are mentioned. Teachers have received a wide range of recommendations over the last few decades. In addition, the world of research has advanced different ideas, all of which have been reflected in lively debates in the mass media and the specialist press. This must have felt confusing for some teachers, but at the same time many will have found it inspiring. Not until the 90s has there been any evidence of a greater degree of openness in the discussion on methods.

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LEARNING OF READING AND WRITING

Reading is primarily a culturally based technique which is to be learnt with the help of teaching and extensive practice. Many



factors influence the learning process which, for a variety of reasons, may be more demanding for some children than for others. What is essential is the child's motivation, language and cognitive development, language awareness, emotional state and the ability to concentrate. Mogens Jansen (1991) attempts to see reading from an ecological perspective and maintains that the goal for teaching reading is no longer being attained. A few generations ago, it was possible to imagine what the outcome from the teaching of reading would be, but not today when the world is changing at such a rapid pace. Over a short period of time, there has been a change from the simple reader to a greater variety of reading material in different kinds of media.

»In reading instruction today we can hardly achieve more than keeping the aim of daily teaching in view and then – in our teaching – lay down the rails immediately before [and while] the train is moving.«

Reading competence has traditionally been regarded as something the majority of pupils have acquired by the end of their third year at school. After this it was assumed they were able to use their reading skills on their own in all teaching situations. However, extensive research shows that the difference in reading competence between good and poor readers is far more complex. The development towards more conscious and autonomous reading requires teaching support for the majority of pupils.

When children first start school, there is already a wide gap between those who are best and worst prepared for attending school [DONALDSON, 1979]. For instance the IEA study, *Reading Literacy*, clearly shows that parental book ownership is a decisive factor for pupils' success in reading. The entire cultural and social environment impacts on the activities of the school, which in itself is nothing new, but how can the gap be bridged early on? If nothing is done, it will widen further. The range in reading ability among second year pupils places great demands on the individual teacher, if she is to satisfy the pupils' various needs. Some hold the view that it is already too late to remedy this when children come to school, or that nothing can be done for those lagging behind unless there is direct intervention in the home. Other researchers are not convinced by these arguments.

The task of the school is to enable pupils to become better readers in a variety of ways and at the same time enjoy the pleasures of reading. Libraries have a prominent role to play here, and co-operation with library staff provides pupils with practice in making use of their various services. Over the years teachers have developed a variety of ways for exploiting fiction in their teaching.

Encouraging pupils to read and choose their own books are common. The same applies to dramatisation, reading aloud and oral narratives. In this way the child's imagination is stimulated and the experience intensified. At the same time children receive an idea of narrative structure (story-grammar), and knowledge they can use when telling and writing their own stories. In an era when oral narrative has been pushed into the background, it is an important alternative.

Children acquire the skill of reading in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of success. For some it is easy, for others it is a slower process, and for some it seems virtually impossible. According to the report *Livlina för livslångt lärande* [SOU 1989:114] children who find learning easy are in a virtuous circle and those experiencing difficulty in learning are in a vicious circle where they face an uphill struggle.

Consequently some of the most important preparations for learning to read are the efforts to make children aware of the spoken language, not just helping them use it better, but also to notice how they use it [LUNDBERG, 1984].

»Greater prominence must be given to bringing out the phonological aspect of language from the child's cognitive subconscious. Some efforts have been made recently to stimulate the child's phonological awareness as early as in pre-school. Language games, rhymes and jingles have been used. The aim has been to prepare children to learn to read and write through play. There is much evidence to show it is possible to stimulate phonological awareness in a structured and deliberate manner and that such stimulation has positive effects on learning to read and write. A gentle transition of this nature to the written language can prevent the occurrence of vicious circles.« [TAUBE, 1987]

## Teacher characteristics

It is possible nowadays to argue that the passive transmission of information is unacceptable as a pedagogical concept. Supplying children with suitable material, and assuming that learning occurs through adult assistance and involvement, is not a credible alternative either. Neither a teacher's knowledge of her subject, nor her enthusiasm and confidence in the pupils' ability are in themselves sufficient to match up to the requirements of teaching today. What is required nowadays of teachers is more specialised expertise in different fields; they must adopt a more offensive attitude in conjunction with an ability to adapt their methods to modern reality; all of which presupposes great sensitivity on the part of the teacher to the pupils' situation. Teaching in accordance with curricula and syllabi is in itself not sufficient. Teachers must also take social responsibility and try to realise the wider goals of society [ARFWEDSON, 1992].

»Today it is important to bring about social equality, eradicate prejudice, protect the environment and compensate for shortcomings in the material and socio-cultural environment. Teachers of the 'cognitive school' are also expected to have a good command of the 'psychology' of their subjects as well as have insight into the psychology of development and learning. It is only by means of such knowledge that they can diagnose the needs of the individual and [once these have been identified] do something about them.«

Ulrika Leimar sees the teacher as a leader of work in the classroom, so that the pupils themselves learn how to learn; which may well appear to be an overwhelming task. Despite this many succeed in their work and achieve good results. For this reason, it is important to spotlight the many different competencies of the teacher quite apart from those involving management and organisational skills. Like everybody else, teachers develop and change through their daily work.

### THE TEACHER AS LEADER

Many studies have focussed on the teacher's ability to lead and allocate work. Classroom management and teaching become two sides of

**the same coin, states Ogden (1993). He describes some of the attitudes essential for teaching, among others, respect for the pupil.**

»Even though teachers in certain situations have to show their authority, they must be able to view the situation from the perspective of the pupils. They must act in such a way as to create confidence. Confidence is established through personal contact and fair treatment of pupils.«

**As a rule, a good working atmosphere in the class is a prerequisite for teaching; at the same time, good teaching can create a good working atmosphere.**

**A good working atmosphere is not something static. It is dependent on the teacher's ability to strike a delicate balance between showing care and setting limits, between stimulating and making demands on pupils, between providing structure and granting freedom. Gifted classroom managers are not necessarily more skilful at dealing with problems once they have arisen, but attempt to prevent this from occurring through planning, taking initiatives and involvement. But classroom management is also a question of intervening or acting in problem situations, preferably in such a way that a good working atmosphere is restored and contact with the class maintained.**

»There are many indications that teachers who combine friendliness and authority create classroom environments providing the best conditions for learning, particularly if they give clear signals of the sort of behaviour they expect from the pupils. However, these reactions contribute to a positive classroom environment only when they are based on positive teacher attitudes.«

**For teachers to be able to help pupils develop the ability to read and write, other factors also have to be taken into consideration. The professional teacher should also be capable of seeing different opportunities for adapting teaching to the needs of the individual pupil.**

»In our view, it is important that the teaching profession has, among other things, insights into the basic theoretical assumptions underlying different methods, and is able to select just those elements that are most appropriate for a given situation.« [SOU 1989:114]

A study of the class management of teachers in 50 primary schools in England shows that the teacher can create or re-establish a good working atmosphere in a class in different ways [MORTIMORE ET AL, 1988]. It is a matter of taking the initiative, creating a group feeling, and right from the start being able to get the attention of the class.

Other research into effective class management shows that the structure of the class is established at the same time as rules and procedures are drawn up and developed into routines. The social climate of the classroom can be predicted by observing teacher behaviour at the very outset [EMMER ET AL, 1981]. Effective classroom managers use the first days and weeks to establish as much contact as possible and set up the necessary control mechanisms. They plan and think through the type of problems that may occur and have a plan prepared for their solution. During lessons the class receives the teacher's undivided attention, which is mainly directed at the class as a whole. The pupils are given the necessary information but are not overburdened by this [OGDEN, 1993].

These teaching strategies are one aspect of professionalism in teaching. Polanyi has described what he considers makes up the expertise of the professional teacher, namely, tacit know-how, personal know-how and integrated know-how [ENKVIST, 1993]. He also develops his thinking around the concepts of proficiency and competence and finds three aspects:

»One is theoretical know-how, which is not necessarily accompanied by practical know-how. Skill, in contrast, is capacity without reflection. Competence, on the other hand, is practical know-how combined with reflection.«

When applied to Swedish conditions, Polanyi's terms cannot be covered by individual words; but must instead be described rather than translated. One element of teaching professionalism is an ability to integrate theoretical reflection with practical action in teaching situations. Teachers must be able to combine knowledge of the subject, pedagogics and method and develop throughout their entire professional lives. According to Polanyi's definition, professional teaching expertise is an element in a tradition of tacit knowledge.

The teacher participates in two processes. The first and visible part of the work involves having the ability to lead it with insight.

The second process occurs at an internal level; where the teacher is continuously re-evaluating her expertise and experience in order to develop competence for meeting new teaching situations.

#### THE EFFECTIVE AND GOOD TEACHER OF READING AND WRITING

The IEA study, *Reading Literacy*, has studied teacher characteristics, in particular, teacher's training, experience, gender, reading habits and attitudes to the teaching of reading and writing [POSTLETHWAITE & ROSS, 1992]. An example of a good teacher in reading portrayed in the study is a female teacher with many years' experience of teaching. She has accompanied her pupils right from the start, and has thus had the opportunity to observe how their reading skills have developed over time. Of importance in stimulating the pupils' interest in reading is the teacher's own interest in reading both fiction and non-fiction, since she is then providing the pupils with a more individual study programme and is able to vary the learning situations. The teacher's choice of strategies has also been studied, for example, selecting a method for learning to read, reading aloud, encouraging pupils to read, pupil involvement in choosing books and using the library.

»The good teacher gives the students many opportunities to do independent, silent reading in a library which is richly stocked, and she often holds discussions with the students about the books they have read.«

[LUNDBERG & LINNAKYLÄ, 1992]

The good teacher uses different strategies when teaching. Particularly important is the connection between the treatment of the literature that is read and the pupils' own experiences and how their thinking develops:

»During reading lessons, the children are guided to interact actively with the text by relating their own experiences to what is read, by making predictions of upcoming events during reading and by making generalisations and inferences.«

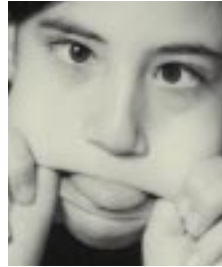
These teachers retain their freedom as they are not committed to any particular method of teaching reading, phonics teaching or

understanding-teaching, with understanding as a basis. The former is the equivalent of the phonic method and the latter some form of LTG speech-based reading method. Teachers do not feel tied to any particular method but choose the one that best suits the individual pupil.

The pupil-oriented approach, with a clear focus on strategies for understanding, does not prevent the good teacher from using phonic elements now and then in her teaching to meet particular pupil needs or when unknown long words like names are encountered.

# 7

## The study



In order to fulfil the purpose of the study, and describe teachers who are particularly successful in their teaching of reading and writing during the first three school years, 20 teachers were selected who over a period of many years had handed over classes where practically all the pupils were able to read and write. They are distributed among five classes from years 1 and 2, three classes from year 3, three non-graded classes and four classes with pupils of different ages. Twelve percent of the pupils have a different mother tongue. In seven of the classes there is no teaching for pupils with special needs; in the remaining classes this need is limited.

The teaching factors that were studied refer to a descriptive model used in the IEA project, *Reading Literacy*. The instruments used in the study were questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S READING AND WRITING AND GOOD TEACHERS

The teachers selected have an average of 26 years professional experience, and the majority have worked a minimum of 10 years in the same school. The primary goal in teaching reading is to



create enjoyment and interest in reading; and in teaching writing the primary goal is to create interest and enjoyment in writing. The goals for reading and writing have been categorised in terms of two groups, one of which is characterised by rules and structure and the other by openness. The majority of teachers represent a balance between the two groups, with a certain tendency towards openness. They do not work with *one* single reading method, but combine different methods, in accordance with the needs of individual pupils. The most common activities in the day to day teaching are reading aloud and silently, learning letters/sounds and writing closely connected to what has been read.

The teachers get on well with the children and enjoy their work in school and feel secure in their teaching roles and with their strategies. They combine purposeful teaching with great flexibility in planning and implementation. As early as the first year, pupils plan their own work and take responsibility for their own tasks. The teachers carefully follow up each individual pupil's performance and progress in reading and writing. In certain classes pupils participate in the evaluation. The majority of the teachers give homework based on the needs of each pupil. They are doubtful about the use of formal diagnosis, but use informal diagnosis for reading and writing.

The teachers have a large network of contacts and collaborate with other teachers over different tasks in the class, with teachers at the same level and at other levels, as well as with trained personnel in child care. They feel that co-operation with parents is vital. The purpose of all co-operation is to enhance the teaching for the individual pupil. Also in planning and implementing teaching, the teachers use elements of both rules/structure and openness. They create the prerequisites for the work and in addition provide the pupils with the opportunity of developing their own ideas and simultaneously taking responsibility for putting them into practice.

The personal qualities of the teachers, such as, for example, openness and flexibility, their dedicated attitude towards the pupils and their work as a whole, have a positive effect on the classroom atmosphere. This also results in pupil attitudes showing the same balance between rules/structure and openness. The pupils learn to learn and take responsibility for their own learning, and the teachers are strongly committed to each child's acquisition of

knowledge in the world of reading and writing.

The teachers reflect on their teaching and relate it to the pupils' learning and development. The didactic perspective plays a prominent role: both what pupils learn and *how* they learn is important.

When reading and writing, teachers and pupils interact with each other. At the same time that the pupils learn how to learn, they also learn to read and write.

#### THE THREE TEACHING FACTORS

The three factors in the theoretical frame of reference which influence the learning of reading and writing are:

*Teaching conditions*

*Teacher characteristics*

*Teaching orientation*

##### Teaching conditions

Teachers work under widely different conditions. For this reason, different types of class are included in a random sample made up, for example, of classes of varying sizes, classes from large towns and rural areas, and classes from areas with a dense immigrant population and high rates of unemployment. Another significant factor is the wide variation in the resources municipalities from different parts of the country make available to the schools.

##### Teacher characteristics

Studies have demonstrated a connection between teacher, gender, and pupil performance and between teaching experience and pupil success. [POSTLETHWAITE & ROSS, 1992]. But there are probably more subtle, complex factors that can be related to pupils' success. However, the instruments used for collecting information about the teacher are relatively »blunt« and inadequate. Likewise opportunities for observing teachers in the teaching environment are limited; however, without classroom observations, it is impossible to identify what distinguishes the good teacher.

##### Teaching orientation

Each classroom is probably unique in terms of the interaction

between teacher and pupils. As was the case with teacher characteristics, it is difficult to form an opinion about how the teaching is actually being carried out and functions without being in the learning environment. A number of different instruments are used in this part of the study to draw up the picture of the classes participating as completely as possible.

## Selection, scope and design

### TEACHERS AND CLASSES

The teachers were selected from a pool proposed by the local education director of the National Agency for Education. They came from the lower level of the compulsory school and were considered to be competent by their head teachers and colleagues and had for many years handed over classes in which practically all the pupils had learnt to read and write. Of the approximately 50 teachers proposed, 20 were selected for the study. Right from the start, it was noticeable that they showed a high degree of interest in the study as did their head teachers.

The participating teachers, 19 women and 1 man, work in schools from different parts of the country. They are distributed among five classes from years 1 and 2 and three classes from year 3. Also included in the study were three non graded classes and four classed with mixed age groups. The selection method used makes it easier to achieve the desired effect of focussing on the teacher.

Table 1. The number of classes and pupils

YEAR	NO OF CLASSES	NO OF PUPILS
1	5	104
2	5	90
3	3	58
1-2	3	61
2-3	1	20
Non graded classes	3	175
Total	20	508

The 20 classes have 508 pupils, 248 girls and 260 boys. Three classes are age-integrated and the number of pupils in these is larger than in the others. More often than not, several teachers work together in these classes. 59 of the pupils (12%) have a different mother tongue. In two of the large city classes, there are 12 and 9 pupils respectively who have a different mother tongue, which means they require more resources. Only one of the teachers considered that the class needed extra resources because some of the pupils were weak readers.

The teachers had demonstrated success in teaching their pupils to read, and write and over a period of many years had handed over classes displaying good skills in reading and writing. Different kinds of information were collected to illustrate how they worked with reading and writing using the theoretical model described in section 5. Naturally, this only covers a part of all the school-related factors that can contribute to success in reading and writing. Teaching conditions and methods, as well as the teachers' pedagogical approach to the teaching of reading and writing, together with their own reading and writing habits, give a clearer picture of what constitutes a good teacher.

#### THE STUDY INSTRUMENTS

Classroom observations provide one picture of the work in the classroom, whereas pupil performance is measured by means of reading tests and the creative writing they produce. Questionnaires and surveys provide insights into the attitude and approach of the individual teacher. The relationship between teaching factors and study instruments are clarified in Table 2 which describes how the presentation of the findings were organised.

However, the study comprises more factors than those shown in the model. These factors do not impose any restriction on classroom observations and interviews, which are also linked to the findings in IEA's *Reading Literacy* and other research, all of which is presented in *Good Reading and Writing – A Survey of Knowledge*.

Table 2. Teaching factors in relation to study instruments

TEACHING FACTORS	INSTRUMENTS	
Teaching conditions	class size	teacher questionnaire
	teaching hours	teacher questionnaire
	pupils with 2nd language	teacher questionnaire
	classroom environment	classroom observation
Teacher characteristics	education	teacher questionnaire
	teaching experience	teacher questionnaire
	gender	teacher questionnaire
	teachers' reading and writing habits	teacher questionnaire
	teachers' attitudes to teaching reading and writing	teacher questionnaire
Teaching orientation	time allocation	classroom observation
	understanding and decoding oriented teaching	teacher questionnaire – classroom observation
	encouragement of reading and writing	classroom observation
	pupil participation	classroom observation
	reading and writing from pupil interest perspective	classroom observation
	teacher-led teaching	classroom observation
	reading aloud	classroom observation
	co-operation	teacher interview
	teaching	teacher interview
	diagnosis	teacher interview – classroom observation
	homework	teacher interview
	grouping	teacher interview
	parent contacts	teacher interview

# Teaching factors and study methods

## CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

*Time allocation*

*Understanding-oriented – decoding-oriented teaching*

*Diagnosis*

*Encouragement of reading and writing*

*Pupil participation*

*Reading and writing from the perspective of pupil interests*

*Teacher-led teaching*

*Reading aloud*

*Classroom environment*

Whole day visits in the classes, on two separate occasions, provided a good picture of the work in the classes. The observers were three experienced teachers with considerable experience of teacher training and research into how children learn to read and write.

What is of key importance in the classroom observations is the study of the interaction between the teacher and the pupils in the teaching process itself. Only by being in the classroom is it possible to feel the atmosphere there, to observe the enthusiasm of the teacher and pupils and to note the many variations in the teaching; all factors that cannot be easily identified by questionnaires and similar instruments.

Time allocation

It is evident from earlier studies such as *Time on task* [ROSENSHINE & STEVENS, 1984], that the time devoted to reading and writing activities and the teaching of reading is of great significance in developing the pupil's reading and writing skills. However, no quantitative time studies were carried out during observation. On the other hand, the teachers' strategies for getting the students to work effectively and use time optimally were carefully noted.

Understanding-oriented – decoding-oriented teaching

Understanding-oriented teaching is defined as teaching reading with the emphasis on text comprehension, whilst decoding-oriented teaching is more concerned with the relationship between letters and sounds [LUNDBERG & LINNAKYLA, 1992]. However, earlier studies show that selection of reading method only marginally

explains the results of the pupils' progress in learning to read. During observation, interest is focused more on the teaching of reading and writing in its entirety than on individual methods.

#### Diagnosis

Both strong and weak sides of the pupils' must be mapped, if the teaching is to be successful. During a working day the teachers thus carry out a number of informal diagnoses. Those that are criteria-related provide a clearer understanding of what pupils do well and what they fail to manage. More detailed diagnosis can later on further map those pupils that do not achieve the proficiency targets set.

#### Encouragement of reading and writing

Recently acquired reading skills require many opportunities for practice if they are to be developed and become automatic. Many children often go to the library and borrow books and thus create their own reading opportunities. Their reading skills then become internalised and reading becomes enjoyable. They have entered a virtuous circle. On the other hand, the results of the national evaluation of reading show that 30-40% of weak readers hardly ever read for pleasure and that their only reading practice occurs in school. They thus run the risk of ending up in a vicious circle.

#### Pupil participation

Teachers' efforts to involve pupils in the teaching process itself and to listen to them carefully is of great significance, if they are to feel their own learning is important. They should understand that it is possible for them to influence, for example, the themes and reading projects chosen and that at the same time they will be held responsible for implementing this.

#### Reading and writing from the perspective of pupil interests

Weak readers can often feel motivated to read and write when the activities lie within their own field of interest. Their background knowledge will then help them to understand the texts they are reading. It is, of course, difficult to read and understand if the new information provided cannot be related to previous knowledge.

Likewise, it is easier to write about what is familiar than about areas that lie far outside one's own immediate interests. Showing that

they know more about a subject than others in the class can also strengthen the pupils' self-esteem; this illustrates what was mentioned earlier concerning the importance of encouraging children to read and write.

#### Teacher-led teaching

International comparisons in IEA *Reading Literacy* show that pupils in countries with a high degree of teacher-led teaching, perform worse than pupils in other countries. Generally speaking, however, the time was divided between teacher-led teaching and independent work, often depending on the needs of the class for one or the other.

#### Reading aloud to pupils

Studies over recent years show the positive effects that reading aloud has on the development of children's skills in writing [WELLS, 1986]. By listening to stories, they gain rich opportunities to form their own ideas about how stories are constructed (story-grammar). Furthermore, they can experience the distinctive character of the written language, and i.a. its distance to the here-and-now situation. Gradually the children's vocabulary also develops and they grow accustomed to the syntactical differences between the spoken and written language.

#### Classroom environment

The classroom is the working environment for both teachers and pupils. Space is limited as it is intended for many different activities and should provide a work place for everyone. It can be made functional and at the same time pleasant in many different ways.

### TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

The teachers respond to a questionnaire comprising 20 questions in all, many with multi-part questions. No fewer than 29 different alternatives were given, for example, to the question of how often pupils normally have reading and writing activities. They were also requested to select and rank goals for teaching reading and writing on a 5-point scale and to describe their interest in reading and writing. They should also indicate whether they thought their class was representative of the year and whether more resources than



normal were required. Finally class size, the number of pupils with a different mother tongue and the number of pupils with special needs were all recorded.

#### Class size

From an international perspective, classes in Sweden are relatively small. Smaller classes ought to be an advantage when it comes to reading and writing, but the IEA project *Reading Literacy* has not identified any obvious connection between class size and pupil performance. One explanation may be that problem classes, which are seldom high performers, often have a smaller number of pupils.

#### Pupils with a different mother tongue

Learning to read in a language different from the language one usually speaks involves considerable difficulties. The results of the national evaluation show that pupils with an immigrant background in year 2 managed the decoding-oriented reading tests better than narrative texts. The reason is that they are not used to a syntactically complex language. Moreover, they have a limited vocabulary and lack adequate background knowledge. An evaluation of reading skills amongst 9 year olds in Stockholm revealed similar results, namely, that in 10% of the lower performing schools, up to 70% pupils had an immigrant background, more than three times the proportion of other schools. Teachers mention classes which are un-usually resource demanding and which have learning problems and social difficulties [TAUBE, 1993].

#### Training

The questionnaire contained questions concerning the teachers' higher education apart from their teacher training. Among respondents in the national evaluation, 104 out of 152 had no higher education apart from teacher training.

#### Teaching experience and teaching time in the class

Within a profession as multifaceted and demanding as teaching, it is probably impossible to develop professionalism in the space of a few years. For this reason the assumption can be safely made that extensive experience has a positive effect on pupil performance.

The same is true if pupils retain the same teacher during the first three years. Knowing the experience of the teachers and whether the class has had the same teacher over the three years may thus be relevant.

#### Gender

Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) have found that the distinguishing characteristic of successful classes in the IEA project is that they are taught by female teachers. In Sweden, the great majority of teachers at the lower level of the compulsory school are women, about the same proportion (19-1) as in this project.

#### Teachers' reading and writing habits

Both the methods used in teaching and attitudes to the teaching of reading and writing are influenced by the teachers' own reading and writing habits. Postlethwaite & Ross (1992) have demonstrated a positive link between teachers' reading of non-fiction and fiction and pupil performance. A teacher's interest in literature is often transferred to the pupils. Books for reading aloud are selected with greater care and in addition the pupils receive good advice on appropriate literature for their own reading.

#### Teacher attitudes to the teaching of reading and writing

In the questionnaire, the teachers gave their opinions in response to 37 statements concerning their attitudes to the teaching of reading and writing, ranked on a 5 point scale. Differences in approach and attitudes are identified by the selection of statements. They fall into two polarised groups, rules/structure versus open attitude.

The following examples indicate rules and structure:

»When my pupils read to me, I want them to read all the words correctly. All children's reading comprehension mistakes should be carefully corrected so that they can learn from their mistakes. Each mistake pupils make when they read aloud should be corrected immediately.«

**A more open approach is revealed below:**

»Children themselves should always choose the books they want to read. Children should be encouraged to read texts they have written themselves. Children should do more exploratory work to improve their reading.«

## TEACHER INTERVIEWS

### *Co-operation*

### *Teaching*

### *Planning-diagnosis*

### *Homework*

### *Grouping*

### *Parent contacts*

After the second class visit, the observers carried out an interview lasting approximately 1 hour with all teachers, who were asked to answer questions concerning the factors above in school activities.

#### Co-operation

The teachers described the amount of resources available to them, what help they receive from other teachers and how much teaching is carried out in the class by teachers other than the class teacher.

#### Teaching

In the first instance, this is primarily a question of identifying how teachers thought about and viewed their own teaching. The interview questions can also complement the observations made in the classes.

#### Planning-diagnosis

The questions concerned both daily and long-term planning in Swedish, the teachers' own planning and that determined by textbooks.

#### Homework

The findings of the IEA project reveal no connection between expected homework time and reading skill [LUNDBERG & LINNAKYLÄ, 1992], which is surprising in view of the fact that reading practice is thought to be significant in the development of automatic reading skills. It is probably the case that pupils with reading difficulties spend more time on their homework.

#### Grouping

The significance of grouping on school performance has been studied by Stalling & Kaskowitz (1974), who show that the results of weak performing pupils are better when they are taught in small

groups of 3-7 pupils than if the teacher teaches them individually. On the other hand, Barr & Dreben (1991) show that no advantages are gained either from grouping of this kind or by streaming.

#### Parent contacts

Several studies have shown the importance of the home on children's performance at school. In many homes children are stimulated prior to starting school by means of reading and writing activities. The importance of parents in terms of encouraging their children's learning does not decrease when the child starts school, even though many parents perhaps believe that the school is now responsible for the child's learning, in particular the regular acquisition of knowledge. It is possible that they also feel some uncertainty in the face of the school's professionalism. However, it is essential to get parents to understand what a valuable resource they are for their children. Well functioning co-operation between the home and the school enhances the child's motivation.

#### PUPILS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS

The classes taking part have usually acquired good skills in reading and writing, and even though the study does not focus on measuring the pupil's reading ability, a few short, easily administered reading tests were performed. The value of such tests is limited because they only show decoding skill. The writing skills of the classes were examined by collecting samples of writing. The tests below are performed as preparation for a later follow-up study.

##### Reading test 1. Word and pictures

The test comprises 60 words to be done in 10 minutes. Four pictures are given for each word, one of which represents the meaning of the word. The pupils have to draw a line across the picture and mark the point they have reached after 5 minutes. This is to avoid imposing a ceiling in the higher classes.

##### Reading test 2. Word chain test

Word chains are a quick and simple group test for assessing decoding ability and word identification. The pupils use a line to

mark the spaces in a sequence of words that have been joined together into one word. As many endings/beginnings of words as possible should be marked over 3 minutes. The length and number of the words vary.

Pupil production – creative writing

The pupils are free to write letters and stories. Their starting-point is usually their own experiences or current theme work.



# 8

## Reporting results



The average teaching experience of the teachers in the study was 26 years. 16 of them had worked for more than 10 years at the same school and four of them for 25 years.

The teachers decided which types of texts they prefer e.g. articles and books about teaching, history and the natural sciences. Examples of fiction cover both novels, short stories as well as poetry. The teachers seemed to prefer novels and short stories as well as children's fiction whilst the choice of non-fiction was restricted to articles about teaching.

The writing done by teachers was also studied through questions on whether they write letters, letters to the press, newspaper and magazine articles and keep a diary. Very few write more than once a week or more. Four teachers write letters and the same number keep a diary. None write articles or letters to the press.

## Teachers

The majority of teachers regarded their classes as typical of their age group. Social problems were evident in only four of the classes. In seven classes there was in principle no special teaching as in the view of the teachers it was not needed. In four classes, 1-2 pupils received extra help, and in the others special instruction was given to a few pupils, mainly in the mixed age group classes, which have a relatively large number of pupils. Also pupils who do not have Swedish as a mother tongue need special teaching. Not unsurprisingly the number needing this was highest in schools in large cities. None of the participating teachers stated there was any real discrepancy between needs and available resources.

The teachers were positive and didn't allow problems to dominate. Obviously they were able to tackle difficulties before they became major problems.

### TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO TEACHING READING AND WRITING

To identify the different approaches and attitudes to the teaching of reading and writing, the teachers were asked to respond to 37 different statements and assess these on a 5 point scale.

The statements which the majority of teachers agreed with and which they gave the highest rating, concerned enjoyment of reading, reading aloud and parental involvement in reading:

- »Each day the teacher should read aloud from a work of fiction to the pupils.«
- »Parents should be actively encouraged to help their children read.«
- »All children should enjoy reading.«

Statements which teachers gave a low rating related to reading tests involving individual words, reading material specifically related to the age of the class, closely following the textbook's learning sequence and correction of mistakes when reading:

- »9 year olds shouldn't have access to books intended for the year above them.«
- »A reading test based on individual words is sufficient to assess a child's reading skills.«
- »Teachers should carefully follow the approach taken by the textbook.«

Some of the statements were categorised in terms of two polarised groups in order to make clearer the range of different approaches teachers adopted in teaching reading. The first group represents rules and structure. Such statements were attractive to teachers who wanted children to read each word correctly and believed in correcting reading mistakes as and when they occur. The second group displayed a more open attitude. The teachers wanted children to choose their own books and believed that they should be encouraged to read their own texts. The majority of teachers had an open attitude to reading, but also stated that rules/structure is important. Three teachers differed from the others in their approach. Two of them rated statements concerning open attitude higher, whilst the third emphasised the critical importance of rules and structure.

A similar grouping of statements was made to identify teachers' attitudes to writing. Teachers focussing on rules/structure were described as putting the emphasis on form, whilst teachers with an open attitude were more concerned with content. Most teachers supported statements which mentioned enjoyment of writing, creative writing and the link between writing and reading.

»The most important factor is that children enjoy writing, and that form comes in the second place.«

»Pupils should be free to write about their own experiences and feelings without being required to focus on correct spelling and grammar.«

»Most children improve their ability to express themselves in writing by reading extensively.«

The low rating given by teachers to certain statements on the formal teaching of writing can be regarded as evidence that most of them do not endorse this approach. However, classroom observations show that the emphasis put on correct spelling varies and this is related to the writing task set:

»Correcting spelling errors and teaching spelling rules is strongly emphasised by teachers.«

»All spelling errors should be carefully corrected so that pupils learn from this.«



»Being able to spell correctly means that all pupils must receive instruction on the spelling rules.«

Two polarised groups of statements on writing were also used to identify the approaches taken to teaching writing. As before the first related to rules/structure and the second to an open attitude. The distribution of teacher ratings on rules/structure and open attitudes was greater in writing than reading. The majority gave a high rating to statements describing an open attitude, often statements emphasising content in teaching writing. Teachers were in agreement on an open attitude. On the other hand, they differed in the rating they gave rules/structure in the teaching of writing. The majority of the teachers found a balance incorporating both approaches.

#### TEACHERS' GOALS FOR TEACHING READING AND WRITING

The teachers had to determine their priorities and rank different goals in the teaching of reading. This deals with different aspects ranging from skills and understanding to interest and personal development. Skills covered reading, reading aloud and improving accuracy and speed of reading. Other statements concerned the development of reading comprehension, research skills and thinking critically. Thereafter the statements became more general and covered factors such as delight and interest in reading and finally dealt with emotional development and understanding the surrounding world. Attitudes to reading goals are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Ranking of goals for teaching reading

GOALS FOR TEACHING OF READING	TEACHERS RANKING				
	1	2	3	4	5
Develop good reading aloud skills				1	
Create long term interest in reading	5	10	2		
Improve pupils' reading comprehension		5	2	3	1
Develop pupils' research skills and study techniques		1	2	2	1
Develop pupils' vocabulary			2	3	4
Develop pupils' critical thinking			3	2	4
Broaden pupils' view of the world			1	5	2
Promote pupils' emotional development		2	5	3	3
Improve skills in reading words					
Increase reading speed					3
Broaden pupils' choice of reading materials			3	1	1
Create delight in reading	15	2			1

The reading goals selected by teachers are obviously aimed at creating interest and enjoyment in reading on the part of children, which indirectly leads to an improvement in reading of individual words and speed of reading because of the amount of reading practice. Reading becomes meaningful rather than a purely mechanical training of skills. As many as 15 teachers rated highest the goal of enjoyment when reading, whilst the other five chose interest in reading. Following these comes reading comprehension and emotional development. None of the teachers chose narrow specific goals for skills such as improvement in reading words or increasing the speed of reading.

The questionnaire showed that teachers often read aloud to their pupils several times a week and in certain classes every day. Naturally teachers read aloud most in the first year, but also during the second and third year reading aloud occurred several times a week:

»I read aloud to the class at least three times a week and choose the material myself.«

»I usually read aloud to my pupils every day.«

»I read aloud every day, sometimes several times during a day.«

Choice of book didn't seem to cause any difficulties, since teachers not only had their own lists but also consulted their colleagues and librarians. Naturally, children made suggestions on the choice of material including picture books and short story books. In one class pupils followed up thematic reading from Astrid Lindgren, by writing from the perspective of one of the characters. This is how one pupil wrote Pippi's letter:

Hello  
 I'm Pippi. And I live in Villekulla cottage.  
 Yesterday Tommy and Anika were with me  
 and we ate pancakes.  
 Even though they were slightly burnt  
 and crisp.  
 I ate 16 pancakes but Tommy and Annika  
 ate only three.  
 Because their mother said they couldn't.  
 Bye, bye from Pippi.

What is important is that the reading material is of high quality and that we choose books that the children wouldn't normally have easy access to:

»Sometimes children bring books from home, which we read aloud. This we agree on in the class council.«

»I usually choose the book we're going to read aloud. I have chosen books for special themes. I choose slightly unusual books, which the children may never have heard of.«

Most books lead to discussions in the class and one teacher pointed out how reading stories aloud from other countries could awaken the child's interest in reading:

»These stories are very good and children can think about a question and choose between three different solutions and then say why they think their solution is best. We have amusing discussions and ideas.«

The goals for teaching writing focus just like the reading goals, on both form and content and are ranked in a similar way. The skill

goals they have to decide on are described in such terms as being able to spell, legible handwriting, grammatical rules and the layout of text. Some goals are formulated more in terms of principles such as expressing oneself functionally, gaining a mastery of the written language as a new language, being able to express oneself in writing. At a higher level of abstraction reference is made to such functions as using the written language to develop cognitive processes, feelings and an awareness of language.

Table 4. Ranking of goals for teaching writing

GOALS FOR TEACHING WRITING	TEACHERS' RANKING			
	1	2	3	4
Develop good skills in expressing themselves functionally			1	2
Improve pupils' ability to spell				3
Develop legible handwriting			1	2
Encourage pupils to feel joy in writing about own experiences	11	6	1	
Encourage pupils to apply grammar rules in their own texts				
Create conditions for mastering the written language	5	1	1	4
Develop good skills for expressing themselves in writing	1	4	6	4
Develop written language as tool for thinking, communication and expressing feelings	3	9	6	
Develop language awareness			4	5
Develop knowledge about layout of texts, which can form a model for writing stories				

The primary teaching goals are thus to create an enjoyment and interest in writing. More formal goals such as being able to spell and legibility of handwriting were ranked at a lower level. Text layout and grammar rules were not mentioned at all. By doing a lot of writing, children develop both their skills in writing and handwriting in a natural and functional way. There was a high degree of consensus over the ranking teachers gave teaching goals in reading and writing. The focus was on creating a sense of enjoyment amongst pupils in the art of reading and writing, and developing the written language as a tool of communication and reflection, as well as the expression of feelings, as when writing poems:

Midday on November 6th  
The yellow grey bus  
Comes  
With flags on its roof.  
Many eager school children  
Are running  
Towards the bus

The wind is misty.  
It looks gloomy outside  
Now everything is still.  
Just the windscreen wipers  
Moving to and fro.  
The yellow eyes of the bus are glowing.

## Teachers as instructors

### APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF READING AND WRITING

In order to give an idea of the different approaches used when teaching reading and writing, the teachers described the methods they used and whether they used a specific approach for teaching reading. Nine teachers reported they didn't exclusively use any single method, but a combination of different methods:

»I switch between a variety of different approaches to teaching reading as I believe that each method has its own merits for different children.«

»I use the LTG method in conjunction with the phonic method and various forms of analysis prior to reading. A number of my children have learned to read through writing.«

»It's difficult for me to select any specific statement in the survey. I work on two fronts at the same time. Complete words and phrases as well as individual sounds of letters.«

Three teachers worked using a traditional phonic method in combination with one or more textbooks. The other eight teachers worked using a whole language approach and from the very first year writing was an important component:

»The children have learnt to read using their own and the texts of others as well as through writing. They have been writing since they first started school each day and in many different situations.«

Another method is exemplified by a teacher through the emphasis put on the working climate in the class and enjoyment of school work:

»Being positive and enthusiastic, creating a delight in reading in a gentle, warm and positive atmosphere – I see these as the keys to success in teaching reading and writing.«

A number (13) considered that it was not important to have a textbook in the initial stages of teaching:

»A textbook is not necessary for actually learning to read, but it does mean a lot for children when they get their first books.«

The majority of teachers (17) didn't consider it important that children learnt to sound words before dealing with meaningful texts. It was much more important to go from a higher level and only then carry out an analysis. This indicates a clear preference for working in an *LTG* way. However, classroom observation and teacher interviews showed that clear distinctions such as these were not in fact maintained in practice.

#### DAILY READING AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

As a reflection of or in contrast to the goals teachers regard themselves as having in terms of goals for teaching reading and writing, they described the work pupils do on a daily basis in the classroom. Most often:

*Listening to the teacher reading a story aloud*

*Reading to oneself in class*

*Learning the letters and sounds and their relationships and/or sounding out individual letters and words*

*Learning new words from a text*

*Writing closely connected to reading*

*Writing narratives and stories*

The fact that reading aloud leads to greater interest, especially for children with reading difficulties [WELLS, 1986], is entirely consistent with the goals set up. A similar relationship applies to writing. Writing stories and narratives is closely related to reading and is connected to the child's own reading experiences.

At the end the teachers rated different writing activities on a 9 point scale. This covered formal activities such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation, capital letters as well as organisation and layout of work. Requirements on contents apply to different types of writing e.g. messages, stories, tales, letters and texts describing their own experiences. Summarising texts is a similar but much more complicated writing task.

Table 5. The importance of different writing activities

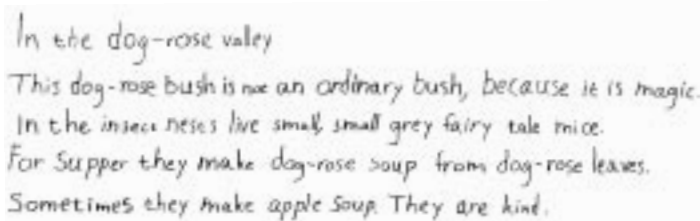
WRITING ACTIVITIES	TEACHERS RANKING								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Written messages		3	9	5	1		1	1	
Handwriting			1	2	5	3	1	4	4
<b>Writing stories and fairy tales</b>	9	4	2	2	2	1			
Create awareness of use of capital letters and punctuation		1	3		6	5	2	3	
Spelling correctly				1	1	5	8	2	3
<b>Writing letters</b>		2	4	7	1	3	1	2	
<b>Writing about own experiences</b>	10	9	1						
Summarising a text	1			2	3	3	4	3	4
Dividing own texts into sentences and paragraphs		1		1	1	2	1	5	9

The focus on content in the teaching of writing is also evident here. The highest ranking was given to two activities dealing with content, writing stories and tales and about something that had been personally experienced. Some types of functional writing activities were also emphasised, such as writing letters and messages. Low ranking was given to text layout, spelling, upper and lower case letters and the use of punctuation:

»In my previous third year class, we had a project where the pupils were free to write about whatever they wanted. Mothers and fathers brought in their old works of poetry. They read their poems aloud which I then transcribed. The pupils were then able to choose between reading a poem or writing a

poem with a friend. In the second year they get to do a lot of writing and write descriptions of their photos. We work a lot with the camera and they get to write about their own photos.«

One class worked on a writing project *Miracles of Nature*. The pupils explored a nearby nature sanctuary, took photos, used their imagination and wrote down their experiences. In giving a description of a dog-rose bush, one pupil began his story like this:



In the dog-rose valley  
This dog-rose bush is not an ordinary bush, because it is magic.  
In the insect nests live small small grey fairy tale mice.  
For supper they make dog-rose soup from dog-rose leaves.  
Sometimes they make apple soup. They are kind.

#### TEACHERS DESCRIBING THEIR TEACHING

Observers in the classroom gave us a picture of how teachers and pupils worked together. Teachers also gave their own views on approaches and methods of working, in particular on how they viewed themselves in terms of organising their work and carrying out the teaching. The interviews covered e.g. co-operation with other teachers and parents, diagnosis, pupils with special needs, contents of teaching, co-operation with pupils and homework. Teachers supplemented the questionnaire with additional information, which helped to give a clearer and more comprehensive picture.

One teacher emphasises freedom and responsibility:

»Freedom and a sense of responsibility have emerged. I think it is important for children to feel a sense of joy in their school work. This comes from being able to participate in making decisions. I want to give them the freedom to feel that they are working for themselves. So that they are satisfied and learn something from their own explorations and discoveries and the decisions they make. This helps to give them a sense of responsibility.«



### Another teacher views herself as a »key distributor«:

»My intention is to function here as a key distributor. They have to unlock the doors themselves. I want to put the children into situations where they learn new things in new contexts, and where each child can find their own key.«

Teachers don't want to give their pupils pre-determined knowledge but rather tools which will enable them to discover their own ways and means of learning.

The quotation above also applies to the other teachers. Most of them described their way of teaching as taking a holistic perspective and described their overall teaching goals. In this respect, they displayed a reflective attitude to teaching. No more than a few gave a detailed account of their activities in terms of content.

The teachers had a pupil-oriented attitude to learning and developed their teaching from the child's initial learning level. For this reason pupils often followed an individualised work timetable. Teachers provide the framework and within this pupils have their freedom. The tasks given were followed up individually and the work handed in should be well-done. It was easy to identify teachers with a rules/structure approach and those with a more open attitude.

Just as in the dialogue room [DYSTHE, 1993], pupils must build their own knowledge, whilst the task of the teacher is to organise the process of acquiring knowledge:

»I want the pupils as far as possible to take responsibility and work at their own rate at the same time as they are a class – a group, which I try to keep together as a functioning unit.«

Pupils with reading weaknesses got particular care and attention, receiving reading and writing tasks related to their skill levels. In some classes the contents of a text were discussed and the teachers were quite conscious of how important it is for pupils to understand not only what they read, but also to develop their background knowledge and vocabulary. Just having reading training either individually or in groups, without a general discussion on a common text, does not give sufficient support to children, in particular those with low level reading skills.

The teachers were flexible, able to spot opportunities and prepared to grasp these wherever possible. Very often the children's own interests formed an important component of the teaching. Some teachers stated that taking an experimental approach leads to good results, since pupils' curiosity and sense of discovery is involved.

The most important advantages of a pupil centred way of working are that the children enjoy themselves and feel good, they feel that they measure up as persons and that their work is also good. In this way they retain a belief in themselves – their basic self-confidence is not undermined. All teachers expressed themselves positively about their methods of working:

»The children feel appreciated and that they are important.«

»The children are active the whole time and full of spontaneity.«

»I get independent children.«

»The children learn to read and write and develop their skills.«

»They feel a sense of joy in being able to read and write.«

In all probability, the teachers were able to create together with their pupils a good atmosphere, and direct pupils with firm and careful guidance towards the goals, taking into account the interest and spontaneity of the pupils. Teachers who are flexible, experienced and secure are able to satisfy the special needs of individual pupils.

Some teachers were able to incorporate Bruner's thinking on different phases in their pupils' learning. This resembles a spiral from play/story/personal experiences through knowledge and theory to value/meaning and the future. And to this model they contributed their own experience and thinking:

»All children when they come to school have a range of different initial knowledge and experience. As teachers we must base our work on the initial starting conditions of individual children. Experience and knowledge build on each other.«

A common characteristic of the teachers was that their experience has helped them to develop their own ways of working. They seemed to be an eager group of teachers trying to update their skills and knowledge through courses, reading, and discussions with their own colleagues. With their lengthy experience they

were able to take a critical but open attitude to new thinking and ways of working at the same time as they are open to change. After working many years in school, they have developed ways of working that fit in to the needs and interest of both their pupils and themselves.

#### TEACHERS' PLANNING

During the school year teachers are involved in a number of different types and forms of planning. Long-term planning covers the school year and the term, short-term planning relates to the week, day and lesson. In this respect, the teachers differed from each other, some conduct long-term planning, whilst others have found that this isn't productive:

»Each day we have a planning session in school. We analyse the day's work and document what we have managed to accomplish and what we should have been able to manage. The pupils get homework which they do at home together with their parents.

»This depends on what we have done earlier and the themes we are working on. I take different themes and decide what I want to accomplish e.g. work with different artists, and then do my planning on this basis.«

»I don't plan in detail. The daily planning is based on the children's timetables and I don't have the same expectations for all children.«

**Teachers have developed their planning skills over a long period of time. They have an intuitive understanding which they seldom formulate explicitly in words:**

»I know what to begin with in the first year and what I want them to be able to do in the third. I don't follow any course material. I think that over the year I find bits from a number of different textbooks and authors. The approach I have developed in my teaching is far removed from the educational theory I learnt at teachers' training college.«

**The teachers planned their work in many different ways. For some long-term planning seemed to be very important, whilst others preferred to have greater flexibility. What they share is the importance they attach to having a good foundation to build on**

and that the goals formulated in their planning had a clear progressive structure.

The weekly newsletter  
 We've been writing about dinosaurs.  
 We've been writing "Do you know"  
 sentences about dinosaurs. Do you  
 know that the mouth of the  
 Tyrannosaurus is so big that it could  
 eat a whole person. One day we drew  
 imaginary dinosaurs in different  
 colours with crayons. We glued  
 them onto black paper. We've  
 made dinosaurs out of clay. On  
 Friday we were writing letters to  
 a dinosaur who is standing and  
 talking together with his dinosaur  
 friends. We've been painting the  
 word dinosaur in Chinese in water  
 colours. Over the last week we've  
 been working on our individual  
 tasks. We have had our reading  
 hour. Solveig Varnås works at  
 the library. She came to our  
 school and talked about fairy tales.

#### TASKS AT HOME AND DIAGNOSIS

##### Tasks at home

In all levels at school, there are tasks to be done at home, even as early as the first year, where most teachers gave a task each week to be done at home. These are individual and cover both reading and writing. One aim at an early stage is to give parents an insight into the children's school work since many teachers regard parents as important resources for the child's own learning and development. Tasks are not particularly large in scope, but should be meaningful and the pupils should feel responsible for them:

- »It is important that the homework is meaningful. It is also important to monitor how pupils have done their homework and find out how each child has been thinking and what they have done. I am more interested in giving them homework requiring open answers so that they can find different alternatives and opportunities.«
- »I give them homework in Swedish each week. These are reading assignments from the »Book of Letters« which the children can do in three different ways, getting help from their parents.«
- »I give them one homework assignment each week. Swedish and Mathematics alternating every other week. In Swedish it may be a question of finding letters and cutting out special pictures and writing words beginning with a specific letter.«

**In the second year the teachers give group and individual assignments twice a week, often at different levels with pupils having the right to choose their own level:**

- »We have reading homework from the reader each week. This is individual since the children have reached different stages in their reading book. The weak performing pupils get shorter homework assignments.«
- »Each week they have reading homework with a short section on facts. They usually have two homework assignments which they all do except for a few pupils who get individual assignments.«
- »Ideally we would like children to read ten minutes each day.«
- »Those in the first and second class needing further training in reading can choose together with me how many pages they want to read each week. We make a note of this on a card. I then check what they've been training on at home.«

Example of a reading card

I've read these books		Note down the pages you've	
listened to			
		Week 36	Week 37
1. _____	Monday	Pages	Pages
2. _____	Tuesday		
3. _____	Wednesday		
4. _____	Thursday		
5. _____	Friday		
6. etc			

Homework tasks become greater in scope and the degree of difficulty increases in the third year with greater emphasis put on formal requirements. Pupils have to spell a certain number of words, often individually selected and sometimes these are taken from the children's own texts:

»We have the week's words on Mondays and homework on Fridays. I have a list of high frequency words which I think they should know by the time they go into the third class. Sometimes the children choose the week's words themselves and sometimes they work in twos and threes on the words and correct them together.«

One class in the second and third year uses a special book where they do their homework and their weekly writing assignment. Parents are informed and encouraged to help their children in their homework.

Example of a writing assignment

Hello again

This time you're going to write and tell us about an older relative of yours. It could be a grandfather, grandmother, aunt, uncle or someone else.

Write about names, looks, age, home and everything you can think about.

Tell us what it was like when you last visited him/her or when he/she visited you.

Maybe you have a photo at home that you could make a drawing of and frame.

Good luck!

Homework starts at the very beginning of the first year in the autumn and then over the next three years. Most teachers gave individual homework assignments, and they really want to involve parents in the school work. Written assignments focused on both form and content.

### Diagnosis

**Most of the teachers consider they don't benefit from using special diagnostic tests. As class teachers they know their pupils well, and when necessary make notes on their progress:**

»Now that I have so few children I can often sit down with them and give them individual attention while they are reading. I also put questions to them on the text.«

»I have a picture of all my children and what their specific difficulties are, and each week I make a note on whether they need a little extra help with something and then discuss it with them.«

**Diagnosis was carried out in different ways using e.g. textbook materials, the reading development scheme (LUS) or their own texts.**

**In some classes there is a special teacher who at the start of school assesses the pupils' reading and writing skills. Using these diagnoses as a foundation, the special teacher and the class teacher together decide which pupils should receive special support. Work in the classroom is related to the pupil's level. The distribution is wide, some pupils only know a few letters whilst others can already read.**

### PUPILS NEEDING SPECIAL SUPPORT

**In the classes there were a variety of needs and different difficulties and some of the children had not progressed very far in their development. The teachers had a positive attitude to them and tried to identify these at an early stage in order to provide support and encouragement:**

»A good relationship with the children, warmth and encouragement are particularly important if they are to succeed.«

»I give the children a lot of encouragement and at the same time try to be very honest.«

»If the children receive encouragement and sufficiently difficult tasks, most of them are able to succeed. It's important that they all do as well as they can and get the feeling that they are doing well and can be satisfied with themselves.«

In some cases there was a special teacher available. Co-operation is important e.g. for planning and informal diagnosis. Special teachers take care of the overactive children, those finding it difficult to concentrate and with speech impediments. Teaching methods for these vary, but all the solutions were based on the individual needs of the child.

Some teachers had no special resources but preferred to solve problems themselves by dividing the class up into groups and giving each group appropriate material. In some classes, parents help and support the children in their reading. Some teachers let the children use the computer for writing. Virtually all opportunities are explored:

»As a rule I have access to a special teacher I can consult. I haven't had any children needing help. If this occurs I can get help, but I think there's a lot I can do myself with good advice and the right sort of material. There is a lot to choose from.«

## Teachers as work managers

### PUPILS' PARTICIPATION

In the first year, it is fairly clear how children are being schooled into being aware of their responsibilities and taking responsibility for their own learning:

»I always try to let the children do things in their own way and get them to learn how to get on and work with each other and feel that they are responsible. After all they are the ones who are going to learn something, not me. So it's quite natural that they should learn to take responsibility for this.«

»I want them to know why they are doing things and learn to get on with each other and work together. They should learn to find out about things by exploring. When the pupils are working on their own, they often choose a working area, in which to read, write and paint. They work a lot using their own mind maps in different subjects.«

»I think it's very important that they get a framework, but have freedom within this. I want them to learn to take responsibility for themselves and their co-operation with others.«

»During their own work, they can always choose what they want to write



about. It's not the group who decide this. I think that the children can discover so much themselves. Some of them choose to write in their diary several times a week, whilst others choose to write a letter, a story or a poem. Some choose to write in something we call the Scribble Book, which will then give them an answer to their questions.»

**What came out of these interviews was broadly in line with observations of classroom practise.**

The pupils planned their work using daily or weekly work cards and teachers checked that what was done fulfilled the requirements. Planning also involves a highly explicit checking function. Working areas and themes proposed by teachers as well as the pupils' own ideas for themes and time allocated to these were taken up and worked on along these lines:

»In the third year, they usually have the task of checking the newspapers to see whether there are any articles that may be of interest. They can then bring these to school and read them to their classmates. After that we have a discussion.«

»We have had stories, articles about culture, authors, painters and composers. When they finish in the third year, they have a whole collection of articles in a file on culture. As a result they become very interested in music and literature and have listened to a lot of music.«

»We work a lot on different thematic areas. Here reading and writing fit together and pupils both read and write a lot. During certain periods we read and write book reviews. It means they also write and tell stories. They bring books which they then review. This means using a lot of library books from many different thematic areas.«

Many classes were »research oriented« and worked eagerly on what in many cases they had themselves chosen to study, and the pupils took responsibility for the quality of the result and presented their work in exhibitions and in their pupils' files. When working on a reading project, pupils planned this together with the teacher. Parents were also involved, but the pupils were responsible for actually doing the work.

Reporting and assessment are recurring features of the working schedule. By writing a weekly newsletter the pupils take part in the evaluation of the week's work. They present their work so that

teachers and classmates can all share it. Following a discussion in the class, the weekly newsletter is printed and distributed to parents.

#### CO-OPERATION WITH COLLEAGUES

Co-operation between teachers was based on an open classroom and openness towards colleagues and parents, which in its turn leads to a more open discussion of teaching issues and problems shared by teachers. The teachers co-operated on many different levels with other adults, especially teachers of Swedish and other languages, special teachers, colleagues in the same or different years, teachers at the intermediate level, pre-school teachers and trained day-care personnel, all this is aimed at satisfying the needs of the class.

There is a network of teachers consisting of smaller groups of teachers taking part in the daily teaching work of the class. Teachers in the lower and intermediate levels of the school make up an additional network, which is further enlarged by pre-school teachers and day-care personnel who work with the pupils outside school hours. Some teachers, however, choose not to take part in such forms of co-operation, whilst a few for different reasons did not have such opportunities.

The planning carried out together with special teachers deals with individual pupils or smaller groups with weaknesses of various kinds e.g. a lack of progress in their language development or speech impediments. Some pupils experienced difficulties in concentrating or were overly active. In addition, together with teachers of Swedish as a second language, special attention is given to individual pupils. Co-operating with teachers in the same year involved planning joint working areas, between levels this can also involve different themes and subject areas. Teachers of arts, music and handicrafts may also be involved in the planning work.

Class teachers and special teachers:

»The special teacher and I have a discussion every Monday afternoon. At this time we discuss the children and think through what may be important for each one of them. We plan the week and organise the project together, e.g. reading project. The special teacher is often in the class and she also gives individual attention to the most needy children.«

»Each day we have a discussion on how we are going to organise our work. On Wednesdays we have a conference. On Tuesday afternoons we are all available after school if anything special needs our attention. Three times a week the special teacher works in a small group with those children needing help.«

Class teachers and teachers of Swedish as a second language:

»There is no special co-operation with the teacher of Swedish as a second language. He doesn't think he should support us, but instead has completely different ideas on teaching. He works as an independent teacher and doesn't want to co-operate with others.«

»The teacher of Swedish as a second language and I work in a unit where we discuss the children who need special help. After this the teacher of Swedish as a second language makes a diagnosis at the beginning of each term and then monitors the pupils' progress. If there is a large project in Swedish, she is involved and shares the work in the class.«

»We don't have a teacher of Swedish as a second language. We organise our work in a teaching team.«

The class teacher and other teachers at lower levels:

»There is excellent co-operation between myself and other teachers in the second year. We plan large parts of our working area together, and exchange ideas and borrow material from each other.«

»I do my planning together with the other class we have in the first year.«

»I work together a lot with the other first and second year classes. Together, we draw up the work schedule and help to inspire each other.«

The class teacher and other teachers:

»I don't co-operate very much with teachers in other years. I've got a small group at the intermediate level where I work together with the special teacher in a computer project with pupils who have reading difficulties.«

»We work together on different themes involving several teachers. I work together with two teachers in the music and theatre group.«

»We work together on a project ›The Whole School Sings‹. All the second and third years also have a workshop once a week. All the children in the second year are divided into groups. I have two groups each week. Right now we are working on a project involving colour and writing poems and so on.«

The class teacher and trained personnel in day-care centres – pre-school teachers:

»In the third year I work together with the pre-school teacher who has the class I will start with in the following year. Earlier the children came to the class once a week during the year. At that time we had a project 'Like the band', 'Exploring language' and 'Whoops-a-daisy' and we worked with language training, music, rhymes and movement.«

»We have two work teams. Trained personnel from the day-care centre are also involved and follow up our thematic areas. We do some planning with them each week. The children have four hours of practical work together with them each week. Trained personnel from day-care usually follow up the themes we are working on. My recreational instructor has been together with us on various study visits, so that he will be able to work together with them later on. I believe our co-operation is working out really well.«

**Co-operation takes place under different conditions and for different purposes, and is organised in many different forms. All planning was aimed at creating effective help and support for the children. Teachers worked quite naturally together with both teachers at the same level in many different situations and with other teachers in their specific areas of interest. Co-operation takes place on the basis of pupil needs and available resources. The teachers were skilled in finding solutions and regarded themselves as resources in this work.**

#### CO-OPERATION WITH PARENTS

**Both teachers and parents consider co-operation important:**

»If I don't have the support of parents, it doesn't work out as well. If the parents don't come to the school, I get in touch with them. After all, it is for the child's own good.«

**Co-operation takes place in a variety of ways e.g. at parents' meetings, individual meetings, class visits from parents and through participating in social occasions and excursions. The teachers arrange meetings with the parents each term, or once a year and provide information about the school work, and also use the opportunity to create a good working atmosphere. At individual**

meetings, the teacher meets the parents and the child or sometimes just the parents. Some teachers have a number of such meetings each term.

Parents' meetings:

»Usually I have one meeting with the parents in the autumn and an individual meeting with them to discuss their child in the spring. And they know that they can always ring if there is anything special. And so can I.«

»We have three meetings with parents each term. In the first year we had four. I also have a personal meeting with each pupil and the pupil's parents for fifteen minutes. In the first year we have a meeting where the parents introduce their children and give us a little background about them.«

»I have had introductory meetings with the parents and encourage them to get in touch. I also get in touch with them from time to time.«

Visits from parents:

During their visits, parents actively take part by e.g. talking about their work to the children who listen, make notes, and then describe it. We collect their texts and produce a small booklet with descriptions of different occupations.

### The Accountant

Knut is an accountant and works at an office. You have to be very good at Mathematics and Swedish to be an accountant. He helps different companies. He explained to us all about balancing the books, balance sheets and profit and loss accounts. Knut told us a funny story about Kalle Kula, who bought and sold bananas. It seems to be an interesting job and some members of the class would like to become accountants.

Some teachers wanted to know in advance when parents are thinking of making a visit, whilst others said they could come whenever they want:

»We have both planned and unplanned visits. I have asked parents to give me a call and tell me when they're coming. It could be a bit disturbing for the class if a number of parents all came at the same time.«

»Visits are not planned because I don't think it matters when they come. In the first year, there is usually one parent coming each week. I think that's good.«

»I have told them that they don't need to ring me beforehand, they can come and see what we're doing whenever they like. I think it's such great fun.«

»It has turned out that almost all visits from parents have been pre-arranged. There have been many parents this term, which I think is fun. They've been here for either a whole or half a day.«

Parental contact can also be more indirect through involvement in the child's school work. During a reading project, parents can help the children with their reading at home, write comments on homework and keep in touch with the teacher during the course of the project.

Contact is also maintained through an information booklet and the weekly newsletter written by the pupils telling parents about what is happening in the school.

Parents and children also meet in the school and have an enjoyable time together. The children give an account of their work on different themes and parents help in arranging end-of-term activities, from Christmas parties to barbecue evenings.

Apart from speaking over the phone when necessary, teachers and parents have formal contacts, such as parents' meetings, contact meetings, class visits, and the individual pupil interview. In addition, parents help out at the school with all the activities at the end of term, meetings and excursions. The homework the children get gives parents further insight into what we're doing and how their own children are progressing. Teachers arrange their contacts with parents in many different ways and develop different strategies for handling new situations. With the lengthy experience they have gained, teachers have developed skills for meeting parents and finding solutions to acute problems, sometimes using unconventional methods, very often in situations that are not easy.

# 9

## Reflections



In this survey different views on teaching initial reading and writing skills have been focussed on as a background description to the findings. The intention has also been to show the variety of conflicting information and situations teachers have to deal with, and the number of different decisions that have to be made quickly and effectively, decisions that are related to individual pupils and to teaching as a whole, all of which helps to contribute to the achievement of goals. Teachers also function as brokers between pupils and the curriculum. Their task is to organise relevant contents so that pupils are involved and aware of the goals.

Is it a utopian dream to unite the school's responsibility for providing knowledge, which is not learned outside the school, together with real communication situations where the pupils' thoughts, ideas and views are taken seriously and their experiences form the basic ingredients of teaching and education?

No, on the contrary it is essential that all pupils can participate in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills which the school can help to build up. It is particularly important in the early years of teaching reading and writing that all children get the foundation

they need for their further development in learning to read, write and interpret texts of different kinds. This is essential for those who will live and work in the complex society we will face in the next millennium.

One way of getting closer to this goal is to use the results from *Good Reading and Writing* by circulating examples of good practice to teachers out in schools and to the higher institutions of education providing training for teachers. The next step is for teachers to regularly and systematically record progress made by individual pupils in their reading and writing skills so that they can acquire greater knowledge of how the learning process is developing. By means of observations, pupils can monitor their progress and take part in planning future steps in their education. This involves an evaluation of the work carried out by teachers, since they need to deal with issues over whether methods and working material have been well chosen, which can assist planning for the future. This can also provide a good basis for a dialogue with parents, since these records give a clear picture of the individual pupil's strengths and weaknesses.

A penetrating and equally positive response to the question is given in Gunilla Molloy's book *Reflective reading and writing*, which provides guidelines for teaching Swedish to years 7 to 9 in the compulsory school. The title accurately describes the book which also contains a very clear parallelism in its reasoning. In Molloy's didactics, it is essential that pupils both »learn« to learn and think, by writing about their reading and that this work is linked to individual pupil needs and conditions. Her didactic thinking thus goes in the same direction as the project teachers have embarked on. She relates the reading of texts to the pupil's reality and tries the whole time to base the work on their experiences and take up existential issues. The work on Swedish in the last three years of the compulsory school has been systematically thought through and develops continuously the skills of reading and writing by having pupils write and improve their texts on a regular basis, together with their classmates as well as individually. They learn to reflect over their learning and each pupil's work is related to their own individual level. Molloy is particularly critical in her description of traditional teaching in subjects where there is dependence on the planning used in textbook materials. In her view this restricts



reflective learning and instead supports reproductive learning, an approach that conflicts with the goals of the syllabus, which aim at creating independent thinking pupils.

An important instrument to help analyse the pupil's progress are the new national tests and diagnostic material, which will undoubtedly play an important role in developing reading and writing skills. In terms of the project, diagnostic material for the second year is of great interest, since its design can be clearly connected to how teachers in the project are working. The material is intended for the second year, but can and should be used both earlier and later. This goes hand in hand with the project *Good Reading and Writing*. Consistently used it provides genuine opportunities for teachers to work in the very way successful teachers work as described in the project. The material is designed in the form of an observation matrix, and although it doesn't provide any quantitative assessments of vocabulary etc, it does record the pupils' way of working and responses to different situations. In conjunction with the teacher's regular records, it gives at an early stage a clear picture of pupil performance and identifies those pupils who are lagging behind in their reading and writing. They can then be identified and remedial steps quickly taken.

The question put above on the contents of teaching in reading and writing in the future is thus not utopian, but can in fact be affirmatively answered. There is every reason to believe that the results of the project will provide a fertile ground for the further development of reading and writing didactics in the early years of the Swedish compulsory school.

It is also apparent that what is described above connected with the project results provide a fertile ground for future development of reading and writing didactics in the early years of the Swedish compulsory school.

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