

A close-up photograph of four students looking intently at a screen. In the foreground, a student with glasses and large white headphones is visible in profile. Behind them, a boy in a white t-shirt and a girl in a denim jacket are also looking towards the right. The background is softly blurred, showing an outdoor setting with green grass and a white fence.

Room for Language!

LANGUAGE ROOM

A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND FOR SCHOOLS' CREATIVE LANGUAGE SETTINGS

Creative language setting



WHAT DO WE mean by a "creative language setting"? Let's try a definition: a creative language setting is one in which peoples' urges to learn and to express themselves are affirmed, and where the modes of both knowledge inflow and knowledge outflow vary in rich and imaginative ways. For the teacher, it's a matter of finding and maintaining balance, of providing language tools without overloading the pupil's toolbox. Such a setting can enhance

language ability. And what is language ability? The term is open to broad interpretation. It entails being able to read, understand and then recommunicate written and spoken words, along with images they may convey – and to review, evaluate and analyse those things critically. It also means being able to choose the appropriate media and tools, both for one's searches and for one's own narratives.

Our learning situation is characterised by the time we live in. For example, our urge to learn can result in our being deluged in a motley and disparate mass of words, images and symbols on the Internet. "Lane changing" on that "information superhighway" has become a new driving manoeuvre in our quest for adequate answers. Paradoxically our quest for knowledge has acquired an element of defence against information overload.

Our conditions of expression are also marked now by a new borderlessness. How do we convey knowledge or thoughts when computers and technology enable us to cut and paste digitally – and elegantly? It has become increasingly important to draw clear boundaries against plagiarism. But also increasingly difficult.

The written word and the spoken word make up the core of the language setting. Vocabulary, that which can only increase; spelling and parts of speech, clause elements and sentence structure – to many people, these are clever design details in the construction of good and clear language. To others, they imply rules to ignore or question. In any case, a proper chance to absorb grammar as a dynamic set of rules is one of a pupil's obvious rights.

One's own language is heard in polyphony with others' languages in social space: world languages gushing in, immigrants' native languages, new hybrid languages. How do we both safeguard various languages' renewal-dynamic and protect the identities of those languages from becoming weakened?

Pictures – still and moving – have become message elements as common as words themselves. How do you learn from pictures? How do you retell in pictures what you have learned? How does a flow of images become an expression of language-wealth, not language-poverty?

The word, the picture, the gesture, the butterfly net. What is language and what is not language when it comes to sharing knowledge? Perhaps we don't need to draw distinct boundaries – neither between words nor between the school's rooms. One thing, however, is certain: just as schools have dining rooms and locker rooms, so too must schools have special sanctuary rooms where language will be kept alive and well. ▶

The school library

IT'S EASY TO dream of what the school library should be in a school. To the teacher and the librarian, a natural knowledge centre for joint teaching planning. To the head/principal, a vital resource in long-term development work. To the pupil, a place to practise and develop his powers of insight and ability to pose questions and seek and obtain answers – and thereby to become wiser regarding the learning process.

Schools where such collaboration has come up to speed are already providing ample evidence of what support the librarian can be to the teacher – not least as a guide through an increasing diversity of media.

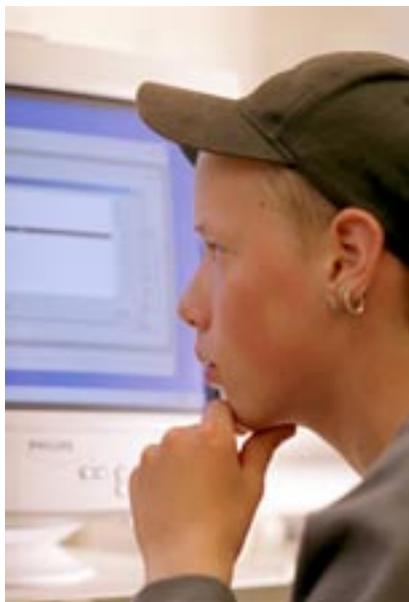
There is also strong support for the well developed school library. For example, in 2000, UNESCO adopted a special school-library manifesto affirming the importance, for democratic and educational reasons, of both the school library itself and the requirement that it be staffed by professionally trained personnel. Also, various studies show that pupils' language abilities improve when librarians and teachers collaborate.

The fundamental concepts characterising teaching development in our time can even be said to presuppose good school libraries. "*Information handling*" (an expansion of the more direct expression "*information seeking*") requires that the pupil be given access – on the pupil's own terms – to a broad spectrum of sources. "*Problem-based learning*" and "*learning by doing*" are also based on proximity to sources and tools. At the same time, the ever-growing mass of educational matter is placing increased demands on information-technological "*recycling*", which should give the school library a natural leading role in the educational setting. The goal here is "*information literacy*": the ability to read, understand and recommunicate various kinds of information, to analyse such information critically and to choose the tools with which

to present what one finds or wishes to convey

Nevertheless, Swedish guidance documents for schools reveal that the discussion of the educational role of the school library in recent decades has had a hard time making headway. From having once been called (in a 1940 Government school curriculum), "the centre of the school's working life", the school library is only an implicit presence by the time of a 1994 curriculum (Lpo94). This has contributed to an unnecessary and unfortunate opposition between the school library as a lending entity for belles lettres on the one hand and the school library as an IT-based information centre on the other. The school library's diversity of media is a precondition of all pupils' opportunities to develop their creative language abilities in all subjects.

In the best of cases, despite everything, school libraries these days are the energy centres they were intended to be. In other cases, however, it is clear that they need the armour of higher status. Language Room – the development project begun by The Swedish National Agency for Education to support school libraries and the creative language setting – has as its purview chiefly to take stock of current and future-oriented ideas and knowledge and to enhance the function of the school library in discussions of learning. The goal is the quality-assurance of the school library and its personnel and diversity of media as indispensable resources in the daily life of the school. ▶



The school library: teaching tool in a creative language setting

THE SWEDISH NATIONAL Agency for Education has been instructed by the Government to strive to support efforts by schools and preschools to improve their reading and writing settings. One principal part of that task is to strengthen and enhance the teaching role of the school libraries.

In the Language Room brief, as in earlier goal documents, a basic outlook is expressed: *The teaching setting, from preschool to secondary school, is decisive to the pupil's development. One of the school's most important tasks is to support its library as a resource in that setting. Demands for orientation and selectivity in a rapid flow of information and a profusely growing array of new media are good reasons to stimulate pupils to adopt a process-oriented working method. With such a working method, the librarian becomes an obvious member of the team.*

LANGUAGE ROOM – WITH A FOCUS ON DIALOGUE

With the above goals in view – and through contacts and knowledge stock-taking, meetings and a continuous dialogue – Language Room is to create a knowledge base and networks entailing language-related communication issues, with the focus on school libraries. Included here are the needs to discuss the widened concept of language ability and to develop long-term strategies for the school library as a centre for language development in a multicultural school.

A knowledge survey of recent Swedish and foreign research is being devised, as is a research survey of information seeking and learning.

One special research project dealing with the school library as a tool in learning and school development has been sited in the Gothenburg Region.

EXISTING CHANNELS – AND NEW

Target groups of, and collaborating partners in, the work of Language Room include pupils, heads/principals and teachers, librarians and IT instructors, teaching centres, teaching-media centres, school-library centres, media centres, universities and colleges, The National Council for Cultural Affairs, The Swedish Institute for Children's Books, The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and unions and interest groups.

An important factor is that Language Room is receiving input from outside in the form of an active dialogue with all concerned target groups. Networks being used for that include regional school-library associations, IT-in-Schools instructors, consultants at county libraries and project schools in Skola i utveckling ("School in development"). The results of the project will be discussed in seminars and used in the work of The Swedish National Agency for Education. One idea is that the new knowledge base being created can be used for enhancing the curricula of head/principal training, tertiary-education and basic instruction.

There are also plans for a biennial, a magazine and a centre focusing on the active role of the school library in the language development of children and adolescents.

GET IN TOUCH WITH LANGUAGE ROOM!



LINKS AND TIPS

Here are some suggested sites for "further surfing" on subjects related to this article.

Skolverket ("The National Agency for Education" in English):
www.skolverket.se/english

The Swedish Schoolnet

www.skolverket.se/skolnet/english

Here you'll find various educational projects for Swedish schools, including these:

- The Multimedia bureau: a resource centre for personal creativity
- Window on Culture
- links to various schools

The European Schoolnet

www.en.un.org

Featuring a special vision and strategy for the Virtual School Library

LANGUAGE ROOM/SPRÅKRUM

mona.lansfjord@skolverket.se
margareta.rosenqvist-soliman@skolverket.se
ann.wiklund@skolverket.se

TEXT & LAYOUT: Titti Hasselrot

TRANSLATION: Davis Jones

PHOTO: Anders Rising

PRINTED BY: Berlings Skogs, 2000

ORDER ADDRESS:

Liber Distribution
Publikationstjänst
162 89 Stockholm

Phone 08-690 95 76,

Fax 08-690 95 50,

E-mail: skolverket.ldi@liber.se

Order number: 00:564

Skolverket
National Agency for Education