Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige 2008 årg 13 nr 4 s 278–281 issn 1401-6788

English summaries

Åsa Wedin, 2008: The monologue as a resource in the class-room/ Monologen som en resurs i klassrummet/. ***Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 13, No 4, pp 241–257. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788**

In this article, language patterns in whole class teaching in primary school are analysed, with focus on students with Swedish as a second language. I argue in the article for the importance of monologues for students' language acquisition and for the need for more knowledge about the linguistic reality that second language learners face in school, particularly considering whole class interaction. Spoken monologues may constitute a bridge between the everyday language that children meet in their homes, and the knowledge-related academic language of school, the school register.

In the article, one short episode of whole class interaction in standard three, students of nine and ten years of age, is analysed. The episode comes from a longitudinal study with an ethnographic approach where two classes have been studied during three years. The analysis is based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. The episode consisted of a short talk that the teacher had with the class after a session where she had read aloud from a book, as she did every morning. The teacher talked about schools in former days and some of the students brought up the topic of heart attacks.

The analysis showed that the teacher in this case used explicitness, clarity and varied language, which is positive for second language students. The episode had clear boundaries and the interactional pattern was visible. The teacher's monologues in the episode were coherent and the language she used was slightly above the level of everyday language. However, the students were not required to produce demanding language, which is important for all students' language development, particularly students who have Swedish as a second language. Difficult notions were not explained, and that may be the reason why no student with Swedish as a second language was among those who took the floor during the discussion initiated by students about heart attacks. Furthermore, the children who were capable of taking the floor were favoured, which at the same time is unfair to more quiet children.

In an earlier study carried out by the author in Tanzania, teachers used explicit strategies to help students focus on the teachers' monologues. This was important for teachers in that context, with extremely difficult teaching conditions. Also in this episode, the teacher used specific strategies to make the

students listen, but to a lesser content, which is natural, considering the decreasing importance of whole class teaching in Swedish classrooms, particularly at lower levels. However, the strategies that this teacher used, such as cohesion of what was said, varied language and clear speech, are important for second language learners.

In this classroom, teaching about subject knowledge was less frequent and the teacher was not trained in the role of language in education, if compared to similar studies in Australia and USA. I conclude that more knowledge is needed about how students are expected to show themselves as knowers and sharers in classrooms, how they use language to create meaning in the context of knowledge that classrooms constitute and the linguistic expressions and linguistic patterns that they need to master to be regarded as successful in school.

Allan Svensson, 2008: Does the teenager of today have lower ability for academic studies? An investigation of changes in intelligence from 1961 to 2005/ Har dagens tonåringar sämre studieförutsättningar? En studie av förskjutningar i intelligenstestresultat från 1960-talet till 2005/. ***Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, Vol 13, No 4, pp 258–277. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788**

The aim of the investigation is to study changes in intelligence among Swedish 13 year-olds between 1961 and 2005. Identical tests have been used for large and representative samples on seven occasions. The tests represent the verbal, spatial and reasoning factor according to a Thurstonian classification of abilities. The tests are called Opposites, Metal Folding and Number Series. Each test consists of 40 items.

Opposites: To find the opposite of a given word among four alternatives.
Metal Folding: To find the three-dimensional object among four alternatives that can be made from a flat piece of metal with bending lines marked on the drawing.
Number Series: To complete a number series of six given numbers with two more numbers.

During the first half of the investigation period the development is very positive. The means are significantly higher in all three tests in 1985 compared to 1961. The factors that have caused the rising trends are not easy to identify, but our results indicate that the development is connected to an increasing level of living standards, an extended availability of cultural activities and especially to extensive educational reforms.

If we look at the second half of the period, from 1985 to 2005, the trend is not as encouraging as earlier. To some degree the reason may be that the large

educational reforms in Sweden finished around 1985 and that the smaller changes which then took place up to 2005 did not give the same effects. This argument applies particularly when we look at the reasoning test, where the mean continues to increase, but more slowly than during the first half of the period. However, it cannot be used to explain what has happened to the other tests. The mean of the spatial test is somewhat lower in 2005 compared to 1985 and the mean of the verbal test is considerably lower.

In the case of the verbal test we do not think that the sinking mean is a signal of decreasing verbal ability. The falling trend rather depends on the composition of the items of the test. This interpretation is supported by the fact that at the same time as the proportion of right answers has diminished among older (archaic) words the proportion among the fewer more modern words (loan-words) has grown. These conditions make it difficult to talk about changes in verbal ability over longer periods, especially if this ability is measured by a vocabulary test. The only conclusion that may be drawn is that the vocabulary of the students is not less nowadays, but the content is partly different than 20 or 40 years earlier, which is rather obvious considering the continuous development of languages.

The results in the spatial test had risen considerably up to 1985. For girls there was an increase of almost half a standard deviation unit since 1961 and for boys a third of a unit. Among the factors that may have caused this development are the introduction of the comprehensive school during the sixties and the seventies and the growth of the pre-school during the same period. These two circumstances probably contributed to both a rising spatial ability and an equalization of the sex differences in this ability.

After 1985 the results have decreased a bit, but they are still significantly higher in 2005 than in the sixties. The reduction during the two latest decades depends mainly on lower scores among boys, a decrease which is not easily explained. However, the different development between male and female students has implied that gender differences in the test have changed. In the beginning of the sixties boys had a significantly higher score than girls. Forty-five years later girls scored significantly better.

In the reasoning test the increments are of the same magnitude as those in the spatial test up to 1985, and even in this case school reforms are likely to have been of importance. However, unlike the spatial test the scores in the reasoning test have continued to rise even after 1985, although the acceleration of growth may have declined. There is also another difference between these two tests. Male students still perform better in reasoning ability.

Two of the abilities measured by the tests are of significant importance for school achievement. *Verbal ability* is crucial for acquiring knowledge of Swedish, foreign languages and many other subjects. *Reasoning ability* is significant for maintaining success in mathematics and sciences. From this point of view it may be an alarming signal when the scores of the verbal test are considerably lower in 2005 than in 1961. However, as has been pointed out, the falling tendency depends on the composition of the items and can not be taken as an evidence of decreasing verbal ability.

In the reasoning test the students score higher in 2005 not only compared to students 45 years earlier but also when a comparison is made with students 20 years ago. To conclude, there is nothing in this investigation that indicates the teenager of today has lower ability for academic studies than previously. On the contrary, the results indicate higher ability at least in the case of mathematics.