

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 567

CS 011 046

AUTHOR Ericson, Britta, Ed.  
 TITLE Swedish Aspects on Literacy: Selected Papers from the IRA World Congress on Reading (13th, Stockholm, Sweden, 1990).  
 SPONS AGENCY Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Stockholm (Sweden).; National Swedish Board of Education, Stockholm.  
 REPORT NO ISBN-91-7662-764-0; ISSN-0282-7522  
 PUB DATE 91  
 NOTE 169p.  
 AVAILABLE FROM Dept. of Education and Psychology, Linkoping University, S-581 83, Linkoping, Sweden.  
 PUB TYPE Collected Works - General (020) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Adults; Childrens Literature; Developing Nations; Dyslexia; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; \*Literacy; Parent Role; Reading Difficulties; \*Reading Instruction; Reading Research; Writing for Publication; \*Writing Instruction

IDENTIFIERS \*Sweden

ABSTRACT

This book presents articles that deal with literacy, both in a scientific, as well as in a practical and experiential way. Papers in the book are: "Opening Address" (Birgitta Ulvhammar); "Illiteracy: A Global Problem" (Eve Malmquist); "Swedish Cooperation with Developing Countries in the Field of Literacy" (Agneta Lind); "The International Literacy Year in Sweden--A Journey through a Changing Landscape" (Kenneth Abrahamsson); "A Decade of Reading Research in Sweden" (Ingvar Lundberg); "Who Takes the Second Chance?" (Staffan Larsson); "Reading Our Future--Swedish Policies for Adult Literacy, Work Transformation and Active Citizenship" (Kenneth Abrahamsson); "Weak Readers in the Swedish Upper Secondary School" (Margareta Grogarn); "Alphabeta-Varia--Some Roots of Literacy in Various Countries" (Egil Johansson); "I Have Reading and Writing Difficulties" (Eva Karlstrom); "The Parents' Role in Children's Literacy Development" (Berit Almqvist); "Coping with Dyslexia in a Literate Society--Working Strategies used by Students at Harnosand Folk High School" (Berit Ostman); "The Witting Method--A Method for Reading and Writing Instruction" (Ann-Catrin Akerman); and "Writing Books that Children Read" (Inger Sandberg). (RS)

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# Swedish Aspects on Literacy

Britta Ericson, Editor

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Financial support for the organization and documentation of the IRA 13th World Congress has been provided by the Swedish Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Swedish National Board of Education.

The S.N.B.E. has from July 1, 1991 been replaced by a new institution, The National Agency for Education.

Questions on national research policies on education and literacy could be addressed to the National Agency for Education,  
S- 106 20 Stockholm Sweden.

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# **SWEDISH ASPECTS ON LITERACY**

**Selected Papers**

**from**

**the 13th IRA World Congress on Reading**

Britta Ericson, Editor

Ericson, B (Ed): Swedish Aspects on Literacy. Selected Papers from the 13th IRA World Congress on Reading, Stockholm, 1990.  
Stockholm: Skolöverstyrelsen (Swedish National Board of Education) 1991

**Abstract**

The fourteen articles in this book consist of papers presented at the 13th IRA World Congress on Reading in Stockholm, Sweden, July 3-6 1990. The articles are divided into three parts. The first part gives a global perspective on literacy. The second part presents scientific aspects on reading and the third part describes different ways to work towards a good reading level.

*Keywords:* Literacy, Illiteracy, Reading, Writing, Reading and Writing Difficulties, Dyslexia, Reading Methods, Conference Papers

*Photo:* Kenneth Abrahamsson

*Cover:* Birgitta Myrman

*Distributor:* Department of Education and Psychology  
Linköping University  
S- 581 83 LINKÖPING  
Sweden

ISBN 91-7662-764-0

ISSN 0282-7522

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Printed in Sweden by Gamisonstryckeriet, 1991

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## INTRODUCTION

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*"Sharing the Future: Literacy around the world"* was the theme of the International Reading Association's 13th World Congress on Reading. Sweden had the honour of being chosen as the host country and the congress was held in Folkets Hus in Stockholm July 3-6, 1990 - International Literacy Year. The congress attracted more than one thousand delegates from all over the world.

For us Swedes the congress gave an opportunity to present our ways of working in the field of reading both within and outside our country. Our aim was to cover as many aspects as possible, especially as we thought that our way of dealing with literacy, both in a scientific as well as in a practical and experiential way could be of interest and contribute to the aim of the Congress.

The articles you will find in this book are divided into three parts. They consist of papers presented at the World Congress. The authors were all specially invited to speak at the congress. Birgitta Ulvhammar, chairperson of the Swedish National Committee for International Literacy Year 1990, opened the congress and Professor Eve Malmquist, Linköping University, was the main speaker at the Opening Plenary Session. Both of them gave a global perspective on literacy. How Sweden contributes to developing countries in the field of literacy is then described by Dr. Agneta Lind, SIDA.

From a global perspective on literacy the next part of this book deals with Swedish research on reading starting with an overview presented by Professor Ingvar Lundberg, Umeå University. The content of the other articles varies from Professor Egil Johansson's "Alphabeta Varia - some roots of literacy in various countries" to "Reading our future ..." by Kenneth Abrahamsson, Research Secretary, Swedish National Board of Education (SÖ).

The lack of knowledge in reading and writing is not only a problem in developing countries. It is even a problem in developed countries like Sweden. Eva Karlström has written about what this means to the individual under the title "I have reading and writing difficulties". The content of the third part also concerns the parents' role in children's literacy development and describes programs for dyslexics at a Folk High School. It also presents the Witting Method for reading instruction. This method has developed during a long and close interaction with students in practical situations and is anchored in theories stressing the importance of meta-cognition and linguistic awareness. Finally Inger Sandberg, a world known author, gives her view on writing books that children read.

To present in print the main Swedish contribution to the 13th World Congress on Reading would not have been possible without financial support from the Swedish National Board of Education for which I would like to express my gratitude.

I would also like to specially thank Dr. Inger Marklund and Dr. Kenneth Abrahamsson of the Swedish National Board of Education for their support not only in connection with the present book, but also during the World Congress. Their generosity and sincere interest have not only contributed towards the completion of this book but have also contributed to a positive completion of the 13th World Congress on Reading. Thank you.

With a few exceptions, Jane Dawson, MA, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, have had a critical eye on the authors' English language. The exceptions are the two earlier published articles and Dr Abrahamssons articles. The latter ones have been checked by Ulla-Britt Persson, FK, Linköping University. My sincere thanks to them both.

Stockholm, September 1991

Britta Ericson  
Chair, Swedish Arrangements Committee  
for the 13th IRA World Congress on Reading  
Assistant professor, Linköping University

**I THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE –  
LITERACY AROUND THE WORLD**

## OPENING ADDRESS

Birgitta Ulvhammar

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### Opening Address of the 13th World Congress of the International Reading Association, Stockholm, July 3, 1990

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends from all parts of the world!

I am very honoured and very pleased to have the opportunity to open this Congress which takes place only a few months after the World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien, Thailand, March 5-9.

The Congress also comes in the midst of the International Literacy Year, proposed by UNESCO and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly against the very serious background that – in spite of all efforts – there will be about one thousand million illiterate adults by the year 2000, unless greater efforts are made than hitherto.

Right now UNESCO is in the process of updating its estimates and projections of illiteracy in the world, taking into account more recent and accurate census data from a number of key countries.

The most striking result of the review is that the number of illiterates is higher than previously estimated. The illiterate adults (age 15 and older) numbered 965 million the year 1985 instead of 889 million, an increase of 76 million. This year the number is estimated to become 963 million. On the positive side: the absolute number of illiterates has – for the first time – been stabilized and has even begun to decline very slowly. The percentage of illiterates among adults will fall from nearly 30 per cent in 1985 to 26.9 per cent this year and to 22 per cent by the year 2000.

The said decline should under no circumstances be taken as a reason for doing less in the field of literacy. On the contrary:

- 963 million adults can not read and write – of whom two thirds are women
- approximately 130 million children of primary-school age are not enrolled in school and thus in danger of becoming the adult illiterates of the 21st century – of whom about sixty per cent are girls.

We should bear in mind that literacy problems concern not only the developing world. Functional illiteracy is a significant problem also in industrialized countries. It is however a relative measure rather than an absolute one. As all of you

are aware the same skill level may result in one being considered functionally literate in one context and functionally illiterate in another. And, "functional literacy" calls for a broader as well as a higher level of basic skills than does "literacy", embracing calculations as well as reading and writing.

It should be underlined in this context that it is by no means accurate to associate functional illiteracy only with industrialized countries and "plain old illiteracy" only with the developing ones. There are many illiterates in industrialized countries and, alas, a rapidly growing number of functional illiterates in the developing world.

I have here briefly outlined the situation more than forty years after the adoption of the Declaration of the Human Rights which asserts that everyone has a right to education.

One basic message from the World Conference in Jomtien is that Education for All means the right to education for young people as well as for adults. The most urgent priority is to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for girls and women and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotypes in education should be eliminated.

Underserved groups: the poor, street and working children, rural and remote populations, nomads, minorities, refugees, to mention only some of them, should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities.

Another message is that the time for action is NOW – the time to begin building a better tomorrow through education.

The International Literacy Year 1990 must become a summons to action, not a celebration. This has been a basic idea during the planning for the year within UNESCO. The International Literacy Year is a ten year long effort to combat illiteracy, a Year for the future.

But – and this is yet another message from Jomtien, which concerns the International Reading Association very strongly – national, regional and local education authorities have a unique obligation to provide basic education for all. However, they cannot be expected to supply every human, financial, organizational requirement for this task. New and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary. Non-governmental organizations like IRA are expected to play a very important role during the forthcoming decade.

Sweden and Stockholm are very lucky to host two important international meetings related to literacy this summer. Your meeting here deals with reading and reading difficulties. The 56th IFLA\* General Conference meets here in

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\* IFLA = International Federation of Library Associations

August. Among other issues it will discuss a new program for libraries in the third world. There is a clear link between the acquisition of reading ability and the need for maintaining the skill acquired through continued reading – which in its turn demands something to read.

Your deliberations here will be of great importance. You will no doubt, through your continued contacts with UNESCO, help the organization play its new, or rather revitalized, role as a clearing house for new ideas and experience in the field of literacy.

UNESCO's work must go hand in hand with increased cooperation between all those responsible for education, health, nutrition and labour opportunities. Literacy is an integrated problem which calls for integrated solutions. A very important issue here is the socio-economic situation in different parts of the world and structural adjustment programs involving among other things the distribution of resources between the social sector and other sectors of the society. The messages from Jomtien may remain only a dream unless there is a political will at the global level to find common solutions for the future.

As Chairman of the Swedish National Committee for International Literacy Year 1990 and Member of the Executive Board of UNESCO between 1985 and 1989, I take great pleasure in quoting Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, at the launching of International Literacy Year in December 1989 at the United National Headquarters. He referred to the number of illiterates and said:

“Conscience and common sense alike demand that we denounce and – most of all – act to correct this situation which is so wasteful of human potential, so unjust and so unnecessary ...”

I declare open the 13th World Congress of IRA and wish you all success and a very pleasant stay in Stockholm!

## ILLITERACY – A GLOBAL PROBLEM

Eve Malmquist

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Since 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations has stated many times in various resolutions that the right to education is one of the fundamental rights of man, and also that illiteracy is one of the most serious obstacles to economic, political, social and individual development we know. Lack of good reading ability has been characterized as a grave block to international understanding and cooperation, and the most stubborn threat to peace in our time, both within and between nations.

In practically all countries governing bodies seem to be conscious of the exceedingly important role good reading ability plays in all life's activities.

There is, however, a tremendous gap still to be noticed between statements and resolutions on solemn occasions as regards the human right to learn to read and the real situation for many hundreds of millions of children and adults in the world, both in highly industrialized countries, and so called Third World countries. The importance of reaching a rapid solution to the world-wide, gigantic problem of illiteracy is generally recognized in principle. But when it comes to practical action, other priority problems overshadow literacy programs at all levels, for example food and so called "defence".

It seems natural and justifiable that now – 1990 – The International Literacy Year, proclaimed by The United Nations, we try to form an opinion as to what extent the right of every human being around the world to have an opportunity to learn to read has been fulfilled.

The expansion noted is in many ways gratifying and the efforts made to reach the outlined goals are worthy of the greatest respect and admiration. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the world's educational status, in general, continues to be very disquieting, even alarming, not only in the so-called developing countries but also in the more advanced, industrialized countries, as I will demonstrate further, later on.

The map of low-income countries is to a great extent identical with the map of countries which have recently acquired national independence. These countries also have a high illiteracy percentage. The gap between them and the high-income countries is an ever-growing economic and political danger. In our days, the use of advanced technical means has become increasingly necessary everywhere in the world, and therefore illiteracy has become a more and more serious problem. It is true that the illiterate person can be taught a great many things, even if reading ability is lacking; however there are very limited

possibilities to learn for oneself. And lifelong learning is a sine qua non for survival in any modern civilized society.

There are fewer and fewer jobs available for unskilled illiterate workers in any part of the world of today. "Last hired, first fired" is a common expression. And "first fired" are very often those who are illiterates.

It is important to underscore that we must be exceedingly cautious with regard to the validity of available world statistics. Definitions as regards reading ability, literacy, illiteracy, functional illiteracy, length of schooling, teacher-pupil ratios, and other similar categories of data often differ quite considerably in different countries as do statistical competence and techniques.

Keeping these precautions in mind we may nonetheless be allowed to draw certain conclusions from available United Nations and World Bank data, attempting to assess the world-wide literacy situation.

- 1 Practically speaking, universal school enrollment at the primary level has been achieved in the industrialized nations around the world and also in some of the developing countries.
- 2 A number of the most advanced industrialized countries have a secondary school attendance beyond 90 per cent and most of the others in excess of 70 per cent.
- 3 More than half the populations of developing regions of the world have, however, never been to school, never been given the chance to learn to read, less than 25 per cent go to secondary school, and less than 5 per cent continue their education at higher learning institutes and universities.
- 4 The percentage of adults (i.e. persons aged 15 and over), who are illiterate has decreased from 44.4 per cent in 1950, to 39.3 per cent in 1960, to 32.9 per cent in 1970, to 29.9 per cent in 1985 and is estimated to be around 22 per cent by the year 2000, unless radical improvements are made.
- 5 While the percentage of illiterates in many countries has been reduced, in absolute figures the number of illiterates is estimated to increase by 25 to 30 million persons each year, owing to the fact that educational progress has not kept pace with the rapid population growth.
- 6 The illiteracy rate is estimated to be over 40 per cent in 49 of the member countries of the United Nations.
- 7 In 18 countries more than 90 per cent of the population is unable to read and write. In many countries the female population is almost entirely illiterate. (e.g. Algeria, Liberia, Morocco, Egypt, Guatemala, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.)
- 8 After thirty years of growth in education in the Third World countries, the number of children in the elementary schools is now declining, according to a 1990 report by UNICEF director James Grant. In half of the developing

countries the number of school children has diminished, because of the economic crisis, the debt crisis. A large proportion of school children drop out of school very early. Girls represent around 75 per cent of the drop-outs, he states. He also states that during International Literacy Year 1990, of the 100 million or so children who will have begun school this year, approximately 40 million will leave school before they have received elementary skills in reading and writing.

9 15-35 per cent of the adult population in many industrialized countries – for example U.S.A., Great Britain, West Germany and Sweden – are reported to lack functional reading ability, i.e. cannot read well enough to get along in today's complicated society, in spite of nine years or more of compulsory schooling.

10 In all countries there are hundreds of thousands of people who can read but very seldom read a book.

I am in charge of an international literacy project, funded by Rotary International (headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, U.S.A.) The first report was published in 1985. (*The Right to Read. Literacy Around the World*, Rot. Int. 1985, 234 pp) This handbook includes evaluative descriptions of the literacy situation in Latin America and the following ten countries: Australia, Brazil, Egypt, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, United Kingdom, U.S.A. and West Germany. A respected authority in literacy from each of these areas has prepared a special synopsis on matters relevant to his country. Our hope is that models of procedures used, and successes as well as failures portrayed in literacy education in various regions described in this handbook may be of value for literacy projects, teachers and school administrators in other areas where similar conditions exist.

My report here today is to a great extent based on the continued studies of a follow-up character within this project. From our first report I will limit myself to give you some brief quotations from the chapter about West Germany, U.S.A. and Japan. They will indicate for you that deficiencies as regards reading ability and reading interests are serious problems, not only in developing countries, but also in highly developed countries.

*Frank Drecoll, West Germany:* "Recently the media in West Germany began to notice a long hidden defect of the educational system ... a surprisingly large group of adults with school leaving certificates ... cannot read at all."

*David Harman, U.S.A.:* "While the proportion of those in this category (functionally illiterate) has been falling ... the actual figure remains between one quarter and a third of the entire population."

*Takahiko Sakamoto, Japan:* "Although the problem has been virtually solved in Japan, people choose not to read ... One of the reasons for this is believed to be the spread of television."

These quotations may speak for themselves. For your information Rotary International has proclaimed a ten year emphasis on literacy around the world and there are now what we call "Lighthouse literacy projects" on-going in, for example, Thailand with a 680,000 US dollars-grant. This three-year project reached with great success 700 elementary schools and 270,000 children in northern rural Thailand. Other Rotary-funded "Lighthouse literacy projects" are established in India, South America, Indonesia, Central America, Caribbean, and Zimbabwe, where Dr John Chapman, Great Britain, present in this audience to day, is providing excellent leadership.

We now have available reports from various parts of the world, clearly indicating that every country, every language, and every kind of culture is confronted with problems of reading and problems of readers in one or another form. Allow me to make a first, firm statement: Illiteracy exists in all countries around the world. It is indeed a global problem. But it is also a local problem. And illiteracy exists in your neighbourhood as well as in mine.

Everywhere in the world we will find the need of special diagnostic procedures and remedial teaching to help both children and adults who have failed to live up to their intellectual and educational potentiality as a result of great difficulties in learning to read.

Please, ask yourself questions of this kind: How is the situation in my local area? What can I as an individual reading specialist do to improve it? What can my reading council do? What can my National Reading Association do? What can International Reading Association do to assist in improving reading ability among all peoples around the world, as it is stated in our Organization's by-laws?

The reality behind the statistics concerning the growth of the number of illiterates in the world is indeed a tragic one. For children and adults denied the right to education, the right to learn to read well enough to get along in today's society, the prediction of a life marked by unemployment, poverty, and, in many cases, drugs and crime, might unfortunately often be true, not least in highly industrialized countries.

The inequality in educational provision in different parts of the world may be exemplified in many ways. Most primary schools in the developing countries are situated in villages, where pure water may be extremely scarce, and electricity non-existent. The tiny schools have only a minimum of equipment, often not even a cupboard in which books, if available, could be stored. School buildings are often unsuitable. There is a severe shortage of teachers in service in schools, and many have no teacher training at all. Books and other teaching equipment is in extremely short supply. The teacher-pupil ratio is very high (1:50, 1:60 and sometimes even higher).

In Latin America as well as in Africa and Asia a great number of children continue to drop out of school in the early years of education. In Zaire, 80 per cent of children at primary school do not get as far as receiving the primary school-leaving certificate. In Colombia a drop-out rate of 75 per cent and in Brazil 54 per cent have been reported at the end of the first grade. In Mexico 16 per cent failed first grade and 7 per cent left school.

Examples of inequality include the concentration of educational facilities in the major cities and towns, while vast rural areas lack the simplest accommodations for teaching. Racial discrimination is evident in many regions of the world.

Poor peoples' children are in many countries handicapped from the very outset. They have not been given enough food to allow proper growth and development in various respects in early childhood. Many studies have shown that inadequate nourishment of pregnant mothers (not to speak of alcohol, smoking and drugs) negatively affects their children's development. They are exposed to great risks of brain damage.

Significant differences are also noted in many countries between schools in various sections of cities, depending on the social status of the areas. Equal opportunity for all children of course does not mean that all children should be given the same treatment. On the contrary: It means that each individual child should be given special treatment. Or expressed in a more radical way: Equality of opportunity means treating people differently.

Millions of children also in developed countries do not enjoy the right to that type of reading instruction that takes into consideration the individual child's level of development, state of reading readiness in various respects, previous experiences, or individual need of enough time for proper learning. The important time factor is often neglected. We learn at different speeds. Some children need twice or three times as much time as the average to master a certain task. They are often only given equal time. And of course they fail. From the very beginning at school they experience reading disabilities and failure instead of success. Failures in the introductory phases of learning to read often lead to continued failures all through school according to many studies, including my own in Sweden.

There seems to be a rather general agreement around the world on the importance of using the child's mother tongue as the language of teaching elementary reading. The supposedly unifying effect of using a single national or official language is also recognized, but the choice of the language of instruction is more complicated than it might appear at first sight. As examples of the complex language situation in many countries I only mention that French is the official language in Zaire (before 1971 named Congo), but there are also four official languages and around 220 local languages, of which the majority lack writing systems. Nigeria has 250 ethnic groups, each one having its own language.

There are more than seventy tribal languages in Ethiopia of Hamitic and Semitic origin. Only the following four languages possess written forms: Arabic, Galligna, Ge'ez (the ancient church language) and the national language, Amharic.

Since 1965 Hindi has been the official language in India. English is, however, still used as a subsidiary official language. According to Dr Chinna Chacko Oomen of Madras, India, there are 1 625 mother tongues in India (including 179 languages and 16 so-called major languages). It is easy to understand that the problems encountered in realizing the right-to-read goal are of an immense magnitude in a country where such a multiplicity of languages and dialects are used.

I would like to state that "functional literacy" should be regarded as a relative concept and I am willing to accept the definition offered by William S. Gray in his classic UNESCO-monograph from 1956 as a starting point: "a person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing, which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities, in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group."

Such a definition may, however, be rightly criticized for being too vague. The next step from my point of view should be analyses of basic needs of adults in a specific national society as regards reading and writing skills. The literacy needs vary of course among individuals within a certain cultural group and also among groups of various kinds in a given country. Different jobs in different cultural settings require different reading capacity levels. For instance, a restaurant waiter may need a certain level of reading and writing skills, while an electrician would need another level of literacy. Nevertheless, there is a great need in any country to come to some kind of agreement on literacy levels and the kinds of reading and writing skills schools should aim at giving the students.

Literacy should be considered as a developmental process which is on-going during the whole life-time of an individual from early childhood up to adult age.

We can hardly claim that the school should be able to predict the individual student's future needs of reading and writing skills in a number of respects.

It is reasonable, however, that we accept as one important task to try to delineate a minimal capacity level as to functional reading and writing skills in a certain country. In a recent IRA publication "Toward defining literacy" (1990), Richard Venezky defines two levels of literacy. Level 1, a minimal or basic level of literacy, which corresponds to what Gray and Jeanne Chall call stage 2 in their respective development schemes, which applies to the level that allows self-sustained development in literacy. Level 2 Venezky calls required literacy, which is the literacy level required for any given social contexts. The term "functional literacy" remains useful as a general designation of abilities above basic literacy according to Venezky (1990, p. 11).

The desirable objective would then be that all students reach at least this basic-minimal level before they leave school.

The assessment of minimum performance levels as regards reading and writing skills is a complex task. The criteria are undergoing continuous change. The needs of the individual will vary with the demands of the society and the individual situation. They differ from society to society. They may also differ considerably from one phase of a person's life to the next.

The problem of functional literacy, however defined, is indeed a universal, world-wide concern. There are at least two million functionally illiterate adults in the United Kingdom according to a survey carried out by The National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales. That means that about six per cent of the adult population is either completely unable to read and write or has a literacy level below that of an average nine-year-old child. According to the results of some studies in Sweden, around 15 per cent of the Swedish students leave the comprehensive nine year school without having reached even an average sixth grade-level of reading ability.

A study on behalf of the Swedish Ministry of Education has made the estimate that at least 500 000 adults in Sweden have a literacy level below that of a sixth grade average.

This is far too low a standard. In other words, they are not able to function in an adequate way in today's Swedish society. Professor Jonathan Anderson, Australia, reports that "in Australia, a fast developing nation of 15 million people, around 850 000 adults and older young people are afflicted with the indignity of being unable to use a telephone directory or to fill out a simple employment application form". And to quote Jeanne Chall, Harvard University, about the situation in U.S.A.: "Whether one chooses 27 million, 45 million, or 72 million as the estimated number of illiterate Americans, only about 4 million adults nationwide are being helped through the currently available literacy programs." And from other studies in U.S.A. she states: "Less than 5 per cent are receiving the help they need."

We will find a similar situation in many other countries. What can be done in my community, in my country? we may ask ourselves.

The "On the Move" project of the British Broadcasting Corporation has set an excellent example of using innovative means for reaching illiterate people in highly industrialized countries. It involved a multimedia approach whereby television, radio, and print were used in combination with a nationwide referral system and locally organized tutorial services. It involved both national and local agencies, and provided learning opportunities to around two million persons with reading abilities lower than that of the average nine-year-old child.

BBC produced and broadcasted a series of radio and TV programs for the training of tutors and the instruction of participants. Furthermore, a national telephone and postal referral system was established, through which individuals seeking literacy instruction could contact literacy centres.

Studies evaluating the effects of this TV literacy project reported increased public awareness of illiteracy. The use of TV as a means of recruiting participants reduced anxieties and the stigma attached to illiteracy in a largely literate society.

This successful project has not been repeated as far as I know. But why not follow this splendid example in many other nations.

A child's progress in learning to read is to a considerable extent dependent upon experiences with the spoken word in pre-school years. Thinking and language develop simultaneously. The extension of meaning in language is a lifetime process. But lack of adequate training in the early formative years of life may seriously hamper the development of an individual's later reading performance and also his or her whole personality development. A poor verbal environment in which the adults seldom speak to the child and conversation is limited in extent and variety will negatively influence the child's speaking development, and thereby cause great reading problems later on.

It is in the interest of every nation to increase its efforts to prevent reading disabilities and functional illiteracy from occurring thereby diminishing the need for economically expensive remediation. A significant first step would be to launch information campaigns at local and national levels to show the importance of a stimulating language environment in the early years of life.

Parents, school authorities, and politicians could hopefully be reached and guided by specially prepared TV and radio programs as well as by releases of printed materials for newspapers and magazines. A gratis distribution of booklets to all parents of a newly born child with titles like "Only fifteen minutes a day" is done in some countries. They stress for the parents, how important it is that they talk, listen, and read to their child, and consciously attempt to enrich their vocabulary and ways of expressing their thoughts.

The family situation is changed in many countries. Both parents work outside the home. Parents are often in such a hurry when they come home that they don't allow proper time to speak to their children and listen to them with attention and concentration. The time parents nowadays spend together with their children is in some countries estimated to be only one third of the time parents devoted to their children during the Fifties.

I don't hesitate to characterize improved parent education as to the proper care of children during early childhood through the concerted efforts of medical people, psychologists and teachers as being one of the best investments a nation can make.

Many investigations have stressed the significance of early diagnosis, which might make early treatment of potential cases of reading disabilities possible. The lack of acceptable prediction instruments still seem to be great in most countries. Also, very few controlled longitudinal studies have been made of the effects of remedial instruction given to children with special reading disabilities.

I have myself reported on a six year longitudinal study of the development of reading ability in children at the primary stage (grades one, two and three) of the comprehensive school carried out in different parts of Sweden. The field experiments included 72 classes with a total of 1 653 pupils from 12 cities. To test the hypothesis that it is possible to reduce considerably the number of cases of special reading disabilities during the first three years of school, the experimental control group was applied. The differences between the groups were studied by, among other methods, analysis of covariance. Briefly concluded, it may be said that more than 80 per cent of the cases identified as potential cases of reading disabilities were prevented from occurring. (Malmquist, 1981)

A duplication of longitudinal research studies of this type into the effects of early identification and treatment of reading disabilities also in other countries of various language spheres around the world, might be of great value – as those having been carried out in the Netherlands by Dongen, Bosch and Mommers (1982).

A new book is published every minute in our world of today. More than 9 billion copies are printed each year. Three times as many books are now produced per year in the world as in 1950. The yearly growth in the production of books is estimated to be 4 per cent per year as regards number of titles and 6 per cent as regards an average number of copies.

Book production is unevenly spread around the world, however, U.S.A. and Europe together produce 75 per cent of the total, while Latin America and Africa produce a mere 2 per cent each of the world's book production.

Even the reading of daily newspapers is concentrated to certain areas of the world. According to UNESCO statistics 43 member nations of the United Nations do not issue any daily newspaper at all.

An average African farmer will today have to spend around 3-4 per cent of his yearly income to buy one ordinary book. Books and newspapers will apparently remain some kind of luxury for individuals in most developing countries. Therefore there is an enormous need, not only of highly increased quantities of books but also of more libraries. The special demands are not directed to large, sophisticated libraries but to many, many small ones in the villages in the rural areas. Through the libraries illiterates might be traced and encouraged to learn to read.

Are some of you able to help a village in a Third World country to get a little library with books in a language they know and suiting their needs? Might a child be encouraged to donate a book or the price of a book to a school in a developing country?

New strategies for national and international action are needed in bringing about first the ability to read and next making possible continued life-long reading habits.

Availability of books is of course a vital necessity. Might publishers in your country be persuaded to donate some money to support textbook production in developing countries?

Without easy access to suitable follow-up reading material many literacy campaigns run an evident risk of failure. New literates -- children as well as adults -- relapse into illiteracy very soon. If the right kind of books and periodicals at a suitable reading difficulty and interest level are not provided in adequate quantities, failure is almost inevitable. In this connection I would like to draw your attention to the IRA publication "How to Prepare Materials for New Literates" (1986) and the Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO, Thailand: "Preparation and Field-testing of Materials for New Literates" (1985).

In this rhapsodic and brief overview of mine we have noted that many millions of the world's children are denied the right to education and deprived of an opportunity of learning to read. One billion adults are illiterates. This means that there are one billion living reasons for us to do something.

I have touched upon some of the problems and difficulties we are confronted with in our efforts to bring about a universal reading ability, inter alia the population explosion, the shortage of competent teachers, text books and other learning instruments, the multiplicity of languages in certain countries, starvation, illnesses and undernourishment, the economic and social problems of refugees and immigrants, and unsatisfactory verbal stimulation during the early formative years of life.

Whatever the strategy for help may be, we have to be completely aware of the fact that nothing is to be really successful without a political willingness at the national level, imposing firm decisions on the choice of objectives and implementation of diversified programs in accordance with local, individual needs.

International Reading Association may with a certain deserved pride state that many individual members, reading councils and national reading associations have devoted much time and personal resources in working for the improvement of literacy in various settings as volunteers and consultants for governmental and nongovernmental organizations. But the enormous size of the problem -- at least one billion illiterates in the world -- points to the fact, that IRA's efforts can reach only exceedingly small fragments of the various target populations.

We all know that IRA does not have at its disposal the immense economic resources needed to carry out big literacy campaigns on its own. But IRA has among its members the world's most knowledgeable experts on reading research and methods of teaching reading, highly competent reading specialists and personal resources, which can be of great help. The money needed should be provided by international and national organizations, by governments and private foundations, not by IRA.

IRA's main task in this connection should be to act as a catalyst. Many member countries of UN have established national commissions to celebrate International Literacy Year. But the reports I have received from various countries point in the direction that some of these national literacy commissions lead a rather silent and anonymous life. So far, I am sorry to admit, very few initiatives have been taken in creating public awareness, consciousness of the gigantic illiteracy problem through the use of mass media, radio, TV and press agencies etc. Still, a deeply rooted view seems to remain: "Illiteracy is a problem of another country than mine."

And we may ask: What will happen after International Literacy Year? Will these national literacy commissions cease to exist or continue only in a dormant state until the year 2000, which according to the United Nations' plan is the target year for effective literacy and a literate environment world-wide?

I sincerely hope not! These national commissions could be wonderful instruments in the struggle against illiteracy. What is heavily needed is cooperation at all dimensions and at all levels. International Literacy Year represents a unique opportunity to focus public attention on one of the most demanding and far-reaching issues of our time. It can be a highly useful starting point. But literacy improvement needs continuity and persistence. It is certainly not a one-year affair.

What can we do? I have a few suggestions:

- 1 International Reading Association could stimulate the government of each country belonging to the U.N., if feasible, through these national International Literacy Year-Commissions I have mentioned
  - a) to carry out surveys of the literacy level within various geographical areas of the country, within various social and ethnic groups and within various age groups and involving both sexes. Where are the pockets of illiteracy? Identification of need is a necessary starting point for action;
  - b) to develop national norms for functional literacy for different groups of citizens in the country;
  - c) to investigate the possibilities to increase the resources for literacy development and make more efficient use of already available resources (e.g. economic and personal resources, TV, radio, press etc.).

- 2 The exchange of literacy-related information whether it be the results of research or news about on-going projects, requires increased attention.

How can existing networks be better equipped to continuously transfer the right kind of information to the right kind of people at the right time? So much valuable material is hidden behind bureaucracy files.

Are new literacy centres or sub-networks needed? At what level? And where? An international centre? Many national ones? What practical steps can be taken to increase cash resources for literacy work?

There are some literacy centres established for instance in Toronto, London, Bonn, Berlin, Philadelphia, Sydney, Bangkok, Sao Paulo, Melbourne. But the international cooperation is rather limited. International Reading Association might wish to offer its services as a highly needed coordination body? Maybe under the auspices of UNESCO?

- 3 Within the field of reading research we find very little of the available resources devoted to the study of adult literacy.

An international research centre should be established in a Third World country to promote national and international research into literacy, literacy programs and literacy policies.

International Reading Association could take the initiative in co-sponsorship with UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF, FAO, ILO, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, World Bank, business organizations etc., and act as a catalyst, giving advice and guide-lines for the operations.

- 4 Reading research departments at universities all around the world might be encouraged by International Reading Association to locate specific areas in developing countries, in which to be of special assistance in campaigns against illiteracy of a pilot character, like the very promising so-called "Lighthouse-literacy projects", now in operation in various countries, sponsored by Rotary International.

Cooperation should of course be sought with national and local governing authorities in question as well as with international agencies and financing bodies.

The struggle against illiteracy is one of the most important and also one of the most gigantic and demanding tasks of our present generation. This task has, as I see it, two facets: 1) to eliminate illiteracy 2) to raise the standards of functional literacy.

In view of the technological revolution touching every corner of the world of today we have to raise our aims as regards functional literacy – at least to a ninth grade level.

In many industrialized countries workers will by the year 2000 need literacy skills of even a twelfth grade level, in order to be able to handle effectively work instructions and blueprints presented by computers of various kinds and to allow them to meet the social, vocational and civic demands of the society.

We can anticipate, that children who this year – 1990 – enter the first grade of elementary schools all around the world, and whose professional, productive, mature life will span the years 2000–2060, because of the rapid rate of change have to make at least three or four changes in occupation. A person's reading ability, study skills, ability to gather data, and digest them, and ability to engage in critical and reflective thinking, to see, detect, and envisage new problems, how to reach beyond what the writer has been able to transfer on to the printed page, how to be constructive, vibrant, divergent, and able to realize the dimension called creative reading, will have an important bearing on the ability to function in tomorrow's society.

The heavy flow of data and information from computers will create literacy problems of great significance. Without proper training in making intelligent decisions as to the exact kind of information we need, and the ability to do rapid, selective reading, not only what to read, but also what not to read, we will drown in the informational deluge.

How can we use the technological revolution in the teaching of literacy? Tape recorders, tele satellites, flashing programs on the teaching of reading for schools, work places and homes world-wide, language laboratories, personal computers for students and teachers, electronic devices for the translation of speeches on literacy in different languages – all are great means.

There is, however, a great need for research on the effectiveness of these techniques, their limitations and areas of usefulness as well as in ways of integrating them with more conventional methods into the daily teaching in classrooms. Research is also needed on how to best train teachers in the use of these aids.

Because of the great magnitude of the problem of illiteracy in the world of today, because of my awareness of the many tragedies and miseries of life in the form of hunger, poverty, diseases, alienation, yes, also such failures as unemployment and all kinds of violence and crime, which to a certain extent are related to lack of reading and writing abilities, I would like to propose that this present World Congress on Reading in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1990 go on record with a resolution strongly supporting the United Nations' plans for universal literacy by the year 2000 and once more recommending for all UN countries a transfer from words to deeds, from theories to action, in an intensification of efforts to eradicate illiteracy effectively, in all countries around the world.

We have all of us as reading specialists great responsibilities to undertake in this respect, and so has of course International Reading Association. We cannot just nod benevolently and say yes. We must do something!! I trust that all of you assembled here today, will agree with me when I say that we should not grow weary to repeatedly call for literacy campaigns in all countries without exception, through the joint efforts of local and national authorities and international agencies of various kinds, until this far-reaching, demanding global problem of illiteracy has been properly attacked and solved.

Let our goal be:

Efficient functional literacy for all children, when leaving school, and for at least 90 per cent of the adult population in 90 per cent of the various nations around the world by the year 2000.

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# SWEDISH COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE FIELD OF LITERACY

Agneta Lind

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The following account of Sweden's assistance in promoting literacy in developing countries concentrates on a description of the bilateral support to primary education and adult literacy channelled by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

## 1. Swedish Development Assistance

Sweden has been contributing to international development programmes for more than thirty years. Since the mid-seventies Sweden has appropriated around one per cent of its Gross National Income for development assistance. In 1988/89 the total allocation to development assistance amounted to 10.3 billion Swedish Crowns (approx. 1.6 billion US dollars) of which slightly more than half was assigned for bilateral cooperation through SIDA. This assistance is mainly concentrated to 17 developing countries, most of which are in Africa and Asia.

The five objectives of Swedish development assistance are to promote economic growth; economic and social equality; economic and political independence; democratic development; and the sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment.

Sector specific bilateral Swedish assistance is mainly directed towards industry, infrastructure, agriculture, health and education. This is reflected in SIDA's organization; the Divisions of Industry, Infrastructure, Agriculture, Health, and Education are responsible for the planning and follow-up of the programmes in their respective fields.

The bilateral assistance is distributed between sectors in a process of country programming in which the recipient country sets the preferences and priorities of how Swedish assistance should be utilized. It thus enables the recipient government to integrate external assistance into its overall development strategy. Country programming is based on a notion of assistance as a contribution to each country's own efforts to tackle its problems of development and not as a substitute for such efforts.

## 2 Bilateral Assistance in the Field of Education

In 1988/89 the Education Division of SIDA was involved in assisting projects and programmes in 11 of 17 programme countries. Total disbursements amounted to 270 million SEK in 1988/89 (approx. 45 million US dollars), which corresponds to about five per cent of the total Swedish bilateral development assistance.

In relative terms, however, allocations to education and other social sectors have been decreasing somewhat during the last few years to the benefit of a growing import and budget support, especially to countries in acute economic crisis.

Since the early seventies, SIDA has adhered to a strategy in which highest priority has been given to basic education, comprising primary education and adult literacy programmes. The emphasis on basic education is closely related to the main objectives of Swedish development assistance, economic growth, equality, independence and democracy – no nation can hope to get nearer to these objectives without providing basic education to its citizens, children as well as adults. Moreover, literacy education, for adults in particular, is so far the only form of education in which female learners are participating to the same extent as male learners, and sometimes even to a higher extent.

A large share of Sweden's bilateral education support, 66 per cent, is devoted to the level of basic education, comprising primary education (58 per cent) and adult literacy (13 per cent). This proportion has been rather stable for the last five years. This is rather exceptional in that only 7 per cent of the world's total assistance to education in developing countries consists of support to the primary level.

Sweden's bilateral support to education is provided to eleven programme countries. In ten of these countries the support is concentrated to the level of basic education, i.e. in Bangladesh, Botswana, Ethiopia, Guiné-Bissau, India, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Adult literacy and/or post-literacy programmes have been included in the cooperation with Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Table 1 shows the proportional distribution of the assistance to education by sub-sector over the last four years. Table 2 specifies the actual amounts spent on primary education and adult literacy/post-literacy by country in the financial year 1987/88.

*Table 1 Distribution of Swedish education assistance by sub-sectors  
1984/85 – 1987/88 (per cent of total)*

SUB-SECTOR	84/85	85/86	86/87	87/88	88/89
Primary	49	58	55	58	57
Secondary	9	5	3	3	1
Tertiary	1	2	2	3	2
Vocational tr	23	22	26	21	23
Adult ed.	8	10	8	8	13
Miscellaneous	10	3	6	7	4
	100	100	100	100	100

*Table 2 Swedish education assistance to primary education and adult  
education (literacy and post-literacy in 1987/88 by country  
(Disbursements in MSEK)*

COUNTRY	PRIMARY	ADULT
Bangladesh	10.0	—
Botswana	24.9	6.1
Ethiopia	26.9	3.3
Guiné-Bissau	4.4	—
India	2.5	—
Mozambique	6.7	2.0
Sri Lanka	7.7	—
Tanzania	19.1	7.9
Zambia	15.5	—
Zimbabwe	25.0	—
TOTAL	142.7	19.3

In addition, some financial support is being provided by the Education Division to adult education and literacy activities, which promote regional and international networking and exchange of experiences through research, seminars, and publications. For example, the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) is granted support for such purposes. More details about SIDA's special support to international literacy promoting activities linked in particular to International Literacy Year are dealt with separately below.

Non-formal adult education activities are, furthermore, included in other sector programmes, i.e. related to projects in the fields of health, agriculture or industry. SIDA also supports NGO<sup>1</sup>-run programmes in the field of basic education for children, as well as adults. It can be estimated that a total of around 100 million SEK are yearly spent on NGO or project related basic education programmes in addition to grants managed by the Education Division of SIDA.

The comparatively low share of the assistance budget allocated for adult literacy and post-literacy, confined to a rather limited number of recipient countries (see Tables 1 and 2), partly reflects that most of SIDA's programme countries at present give higher priority to formal primary education. In some cases it also reflects a generally low priority to adult literacy within the country, but not always. Another important explanation to the limited financial assistance to adult literacy education is, furthermore, that it generally does not require heavy investments in buildings and equipment.

### **3 Content of SIDA's Support to Basic Education**

SIDA's support to education is based on sector cooperation agreements normally covering three years. The implementation of these agreements is annually reviewed. The sector support procedures, introduced in the early seventies, have allowed for a considerable flexibility, implying, for example, reallocation of funds between projects, as well as between various items in a project budget. Literacy programmes usually consist mainly of local costs and it has been possible to meet such costs under these sector programmes, for example costs for honoraria for literacy workers, transport and local training courses.

#### **(1) Primary Education**

The most common component of SIDA's support to primary education consists of the whole chain of activities involved in supplying the schools with textbooks and other teaching material. This includes training and equipment needed for curriculum development, publishing, and printing of textbooks, including paper supply. It also comprises management and equipment for distribution purposes, including vehicles and storing facilities. Personnel, long- and short-term, is to some extent included. Support to production and distribution of instructional material, textbooks in particular, has been an important element of practically all SIDA's cooperation programmes in the field of primary education.

Other components, often included, comprise the following areas:

- construction and equipping of schools (Botswana, Ethiopia, Guiné-Bissau and Zimbabwe);

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<sup>1</sup> Non-Governmental Organization

- in-service distance training of unqualified teachers (Ethiopia and Sri Lanka);
- teacher training, mainly in-service (Guiné-Bissau, India, Tanzania, Zambia);
- educational planning and management (Mozambique and Zambia);
- special education for handicapped children (Botswana, Sri Lanka, Zambia and Zimbabwe);
- innovative programmes, such as the Shiksha Karmi Project in Rajasthan, India. It aims at extending education to remote areas by mobilizing local resources. The teaching staff is made up of specially trained local female instructors without formal qualifications. In Zambia a Multigrade Programme has been introduced through SIDA support. It also offers children education in their home village for some years. In addition, a method of tight timetabling has been tried out in Zambia, which facilitates a more efficient use of existing classrooms. In Sri Lanka special programmes have been supported that assist disadvantaged primary schools in rural areas, in the slums of Colombo and in two plantation districts.

Since 1988 SIDA has been supporting a successful Non-Formal Primary Education Programme in Bangladesh, run by the large Non-Governmental Organization Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). This support complements the Swedish co-financing of a World Bank (IDA) project to the whole Primary Education system. It manages to attract many more girls from poor families than government run schools do. Furthermore, after having completed three grades, most of the students transfer to grade four in government schools. This is an example of an innovative NGO approach, which both complements and challenges a less efficient state system.

## (2) Adult Literacy and Post-Literacy

In Mozambique and Botswana it is still mainly the actual literacy programme that receives Swedish support. In Tanzania and Ethiopia, Sweden's assistance is presently concentrated to post-literacy programmes. In Tanzania adult education support is also provided for the Folk Development Colleges for early school leavers and adults who have completed the literacy programmes. Assistance to adult literacy education has mainly been used for the following components:

- paper and printing materials and equipment for the production of textbooks (Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Tanzania) and rural newspapers (Tanzania);
- means of transport (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania);
- renovation of and equipment for training centres (Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania);
- local financing of literacy activities, such as training of instructors (Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and Tanzania), writers workshops (Tanzania), printing and distribution of teaching material (Botswana, Mozambique,

Tanzania), purchase of books for rural libraries (Tanzania), honoraria to instructors (Botswana);

- personnel: for example, in 1988 there were one senior adviser and two bilateral associate experts, recruited and financed by SIDA, attached to the post-literacy programme in Ethiopia, and in Tanzania two educational planners were assisting the Ministry of Education in the fields of post-literacy and Folk Development Colleges.

Pilot projects testing innovative approaches and methods have been part of the Swedish assistance to literacy in Mozambique and Ethiopia.

In Mozambique it is concentrated to a staff training centre (the Manga Centre outside of Beira) where new methods and contents, more adapted to the experience and background of learners and tutors, are being developed. A core group of trainers were given the opportunity to visit a number of Latin American countries in order to share experiences of adult literacy teaching prior to the development of a pilot training curriculum. This was essential, since more participatory and active teaching methods for adults were rather unknown by most Mozambiqueans. South-South interchanges of experiences in the field of literacy has been an important component of Swedish assistance to literacy in Mozambique.

In Ethiopia, two pilot projects, supported by SIDA, are under implementation. One regarding basic development education through Skill Training Centres at district and local levels is intended to help communities start their own basic services with the help of simple technologies, literacy, post-literacy and reading rooms. The other pilot project is oriented towards increasing the relevance and effectiveness of post-literacy and skill training in respect of rural women's needs. Both projects started in 1988 and are confined to three pilot areas.

#### **4 Lessons from Swedish Bilateral Assistance to Literacy Programmes**

Experience the world over seems to indicate that most successful literacy programmes have been intimately linked to the socio-cultural, economic and political context. The state has been the prime mover in promoting and organizing large scale literacy programmes, which have managed to reduce the overall national illiteracy rate. National commitment and political priority for literacy have been crucial for attaining such positive results. Above all, the successful literacy programmes have been part of a wider process of mobilization among the people. The successes achieved have not primarily been a question of the number of books printed, rural libraries in operation or vehicles supplied. Although all these components certainly are required for a literacy programme, they can never substitute or cause mobilization of the people or determine the programme contents or the implementation approach. External assistance can play an important role, given that the project planning carefully

responds to local needs and national priorities. A great deal of sensitivity and flexibility is required on the part of donor agencies.

Donors easily fall into the trap of being overly influential in their assistance to specific projects. Preference is given to projects which are limited in scope, space, and time and which can be budgeted in some detail before being approved. Decision-making procedures within donor agencies are based on this notion of a project and so is the image of foreign assistance among the general public in the donor countries. Donors, furthermore, often look at projects as investments requiring capital costs only, preferably the foreign exchange component. Literacy projects usually do not meet these criteria, and consequently receive very little support. They are widely spread geographically, and more difficult to plan and cost in detail. They require support to cover local recurrent costs rather than capital costs.

Swedish technical assistance has constituted only a small fraction of the support provided to literacy programmes. One reason is the possible contradiction between the need for local mobilization and external assistance. Another reason is that the relevant Swedish experience in the field of literacy is limited.

## **5 Sweden's Contribution to International Cooperation and Studies in the Field of Literacy**

Sweden is actively involved in supporting International Literacy Year (ILY) as a way of stressing the need to mobilize more resources and priority for literacy, seeing that illiteracy is a global problem, and that literacy is a human right, as well as a question of social justice. Special support to a number of activities related to the aims of ILY is provided by SIDA, for example:

- the recruitment and financing of an associate expert assisting the ILY Secretariat of Unesco headquarters in its task of increasing international public awareness of literacy as a need and a right;
- a financial contribution for a three year period for the hiring of a full-time Programme Officer by the International Task Force on Literacy (ITFL), a consortium of international and regional NGOs initiated by the International Council of Adult Educational (ICAE) as a response to the UN declared ILY;
- advocacy of support for basic education, adult literacy in particular, in international contexts, such as the General Conference of Unesco and donor meetings, and the forthcoming World Conference on Education for All. SIDA has, for example, been the lead agency for adult literacy in discussions on Basic Education within the International Working Group on Education (IWGE), consisting of the large bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. The state-of-the-art review "Adult Literacy in the Third World - A Review of Objectives and Strategies" (Lind & Johnston, published by SIDA in the Education Division Document Series No. 32, Oct. 1986) was produced as a result of this assignment within the IWGE.

For the purpose of facilitating world-wide sharing of experiences in the field of literacy SIDA funds have been allocated/granted for the following studies and research activities:

- a feasibility study on the creation of an International Resource Centre for Literacy, commissioned by the International Council for Adult Education (co-financed by the other Nordic donor agencies). The study is expected to be completed by the beginning of 1990.
- a review of NGO literacy experiences to be undertaken by the regional networks linked to the International Council of Adult Education;
- a Unesco Consultancy assisting Nicaragua to carry out a survey on literacy retention;
- a study in Tanzania with assistance from the International Institute of Educational Planning on the effects of literacy with special reference to women;
- a Nordic research Symposium on Literacy and Women, held in Stockholm, 8–10 June, 1989, organized by the Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries and the University of Stockholm (co-financed by Norway).

World-wide dissemination of reported literacy experiences has also been funded by SIDA as a response to International Literacy Year, i.e.:

- the translation into French and Portuguese of the above mentioned SIDA publication on Adult Literacy in the Third World as well as its printing for distribution (in English, French and Portuguese) throughout Africa by the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education;
- the publishing of a special issue on Women and Literacy of the periodical bulletin edited by the Women's Programme of ICAE.

Finally, SIDA promotes activities aiming at creating public awareness in Sweden on the problem of illiteracy and the need for literacy efforts in the Third World in particular.

## **6 The Need to Mobilize More Resources and Priority to Literacy**

In the present situation of increasing debt burdens and economic constraints in many Third World countries access to basic education and literacy is being undermined. The economic crisis has implied a serious dilemma for many Third World states. They are forced to balance short-term stabilization measures, which usually imply drastic expenditure cuts, not least in the education budget, with long-term investments in education and training, necessary for overall economic and social development. SIDA's policy on education assistance has stressed that educational development and planning is a national social and political process and should be analysed as such. Success depends in the final

analysis on each country's ability to find political solutions to complex educational problems and resource shortages. In its guide-lines for educational assistance SIDA has concluded that great consideration has to be given to the special characteristics and varying conditions of developing countries. In SIDA's bi-lateral assistance to literacy education for children and adults there has been a growing emphasis on rendering existing systems more effective. The need for quality improvements, such as in-service teacher training, provision of textbooks for all, and improvement of planning practices have been stressed.

As previously stated, achievements of literacy education are not primarily determined by external assistance. However, literacy activities require allocation of sufficient resources whose amount must be calculated not only on the basis of the literacy programme as such, but also in terms of providing follow-up and accessible reading material for new literates in sufficient quantity. It is therefore important not to consider adult literacy as a cheap and easy road to education and development. It is often difficult to avoid high drop-out rates among learners and tutors in literacy programmes. Other risks involved are the setting of too high expectations in the literacy objectives, resulting in high failure rates and subsequent demobilization, and large-scale relapse into illiteracy. These setbacks are less strongly felt in situations of general mobilization of the society and political priority for literacy, or at least concentrated mobilization of teachers and learners. In addition, a combination of local, national and international resources may make a considerable contribution to the chances of achieving the intended programme objectives.

There is not only a need to assist government efforts to provide their citizens with basic education, however. The role of NGOs in supporting or running literacy programmes also deserves attention by the international community. The strength of many NGOs is their community identification and base. In the case of existence of government literacy programmes, NGOs can perform a useful supplementary function, by mobilizing teachers and learners and by performing a refining role in the overall programme to local conditions and needs. The NGO obviously assumes a completely different role where the state programme is very weak or non-existent. In such cases NGO programmes can play a major role in involving marginal groups in literacy education and related empowering activities.

# THE INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR IN SWEDEN

## A Journey through a Changing Landscape\*

Kenneth Abrahamsson

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### 1. To Read is to Travel Across an Open Landscape

Reading is like a journey or a voyage in and out of different worlds. A good library is like a railway station. You can buy a ticket to take you in any direction and to any culture. The whole world lies at your feet. You can find answers to questions from the daily life of an ant to the latest developments in the field of space research. We can also learn more about the rights and responsibilities a citizen has in an ever-changing society.

A journey also includes travelling past various landscapes, seeing the way people spend their daily lives and watching different cultures pass by like small glimpses of life on the other side of a train window, smudged by miles and miles of time and distance. But reading is also an excellent way of travelling; it affords privacy without the stigma of exclusion, and it provokes thought and insight when words are in need of deeper reflection. If we use this image in a broader sense we can see the United Nations International Literacy Year as a many-faceted train of knowledge with a great number of carriages.

We also know that there is a timetable that must be read; all people on this planet should be able to read by the time the next century comes around. It is a journey where we will pass many stations and where we do not know where we will finally stop. Will we have enough engines to pull the train? Will there be enough carriages for all citizens or will we have to buy first, second and third-class tickets? Are there enough experienced engine-drivers and train personnel? Do we have enough reading material? And last, but not least, do the passengers have the motivation that is needed for the trip? We have no proper answers to many of the above questions.

There are far too few who can acquire a ticket to this train of knowledge. The greatest inequalities are to be found between industrialized countries and the Third World, especially within the least developed countries. Great gaps can also be found within each country. In modern-day Sweden, all young people and adults have the same formal right to knowledge. This right has recently been

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\* This paper comprises some personal reflections on the value of the International Literacy Year in Sweden. A more systematic description of the ILY-90 in Sweden will be published by the Swedish National Committee for the International Literacy Year.

reconfirmed in a new act of legislation stressing the equal rights of all citizens as well as respect and care for our environment. But in practice, their "tickets" entitle them to different classes. Some passengers have to travel second or third-class. For others there is not even room on the train, or they lack motivation to learn in their present life context.

Oftentimes the life-story of a single person can tell more than thousands and thousands of statistics and numbers. While taking part in the Book Trade Fair in Gothenburg, I met a teacher of basic education for adults who was expecting a new pupil - a visually handicapped adult from a North African country. The man, who was about twenty years of age, could neither read nor write, and he had just embarked on the most important journey of his life. The teacher was enthusiastic, but also grappled with a lot of methodological problems. Should training in literacy be in the man's mother tongue, Arabic, or should she use French or even Swedish? Would Braille be a viable method? What extra materials were available in the library for visually handicapped?

Beyond the pedagogical and methodological problems there were even greater difficulties. What was the man's concept of the world around him? How did his concept rhyme with our concept and the teacher's concept? By reflecting in this manner we see that the great challenge of the International Literacy Year can be mirrored in the quiet glance of one single individual.

## **2. The Different Carriages on the Train of Literacy**

During Literacy Year 1990 every country has set off on their own train of literacy with various kinds of carriages and compartments with different types of passengers. The large number of heavy carriages is pulled slowly up winding hillside tracks in the same way as diesel engines pull their carriages through the Rocky Mountains. These literacy trains are pulling the greatest load, namely a global literacy catastrophe where almost 1,000,000,000 people in the world are incapable of reading and writing, or would be regarded as being semi-literate.

In a Swedish setting there are other carriages with various passengers who are discussing what can be done to further promote the importance of reading for development of young people and what efforts can be made to help both young people and adults with difficulties in literacy. There are different groups of passengers travelling in these carriages, but with a common destination - an increased and expanded rate of literacy - but these passengers sometimes speak of language using different languages.

There are process-focussed teachers of reading and writing, there are specialists dealing in international comparisons of literacy and there are groups of people who are chiefly interested in how malfunctions in the brain contribute to reading and writing disabilities among different groups of people. Some groups of passengers favour the use of the word dyslexia; others see red as soon as they hear the word.

Those passengers who don't seem to have reserved a seat on the train and who walk around without having anywhere to sit down are those belonging to groups like Swedish FMLS (fr. (The Swedish Association for Eliminating Reading and Writing Difficulties). These passengers can sometimes end up in the cold between the carriages when the discussion level starts to get heated. They are sent back and forth between various experts who think they themselves know best, who invite them in to their carriages "guaranteeing good results..."

What these passengers really want is to have their right to knowledge sanctioned and supported, to be afforded acceptable social, pedagogical and economic conditions and not to be guinea pigs in a laboratory for various pedagogical schools of thought.

I could easily describe many of the carriages on this train which passes by the Swedish knowledge-oriented society at increasing speed. There are young people with reading difficulties, there are immigrants with a lack of previous education and there are of course adults with functional disabilities of different kinds. There is also a feeling of hope and confidence that people will be able to find ways of conversing and communicating when written language does not suffice. We see a revival of the narrative tradition, sign language, song and music, i.e. a communicative combination involving the complete person and personality.

But the International Literacy Year can also be depicted as an inner journey, an expedition in one's own world, a journey where the doors to knowledge are opened in different ways for different groups of individuals - a journey where the way is just as important as the means of arriving at a certain station.

### **3. A Broadening of the Goals and Boundaries of the Literacy Year!**

Since the train is painted in the colours of literacy, one might ask how many carriages in each country carry passengers set out for destinations such as writing ability, the ability to voice one's own opinion or even the ability to listen. Numeracy is also a basic ability, and in this context it seems not to have been allotted as many carriages as it deserves.

Looking back at history once more, we can see that there is much to be said about the fact that the ability to write has been just as important as the ability to read where productivity, civic development and culture are concerned. Reading and writing as basic skills are not only decisive factors for productive elementary society. They are important implements for the strengthening and development of our civilization, our cultural heritage along with our values and fundamental social ideals.

The International Literacy Year cannot be reduced simply to a question concerning methodological approaches to reading training or action programmes for young people and adults with reading and writing disabilities. In a broader sense it should cover a wide range of culture from international solidarity, cultural heritage and national traditions, active citizenship, the craftsmanship and skills of the labour force, the ability to read and write and also the care for the weak and vulnerable groups in society.

#### **4. The International Literacy Year as a Catalyst for Our Educational Realities**

In Sweden the National Board of Education, the county boards of education and local authorities have all actively and systematically worked towards the goal of better reading and writing abilities among young people and adults. A current and summarizing account of this work was published during the autumn of 1990 as a part of a publication entitled *Om grundläggande kunskaper och färdigheter i en skola för alla* (tr. *On Base: Knowledge and Skills in a School for All*). This publication is written in the spirit of the Literacy Year without bearing its motto or logotype.

Around the same time the national literacy committee and the NBE published the booklet entitled *Att läsa - en nyckel till många världar* (tr. *Reading - A key to Many Worlds*) where the background of the Literacy Year is presented. Most of the publication is devoted partly to the importance of meaningful and purposeful reading and writing and partly to what can be done for young people and especially adults with reading and writing disabilities. Both publications complement each other and are now available to educators, principals and teachers.

It should also be pointed out that a number of other reports and publications have been published during the Literacy Year. They concern both the reading habits of young people, reading at the workplace, attempts to solve the reading and writing problems of adults, etc. Furthermore, Utbildningsradion, the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company, has produced extensive materials in the form of TV and radio programmes along with various publications concerning the delights and difficulties of reading. This material is presented in a special article as part of the above-named booklet *Att läsa - en nyckel till olika världar*. On the local scene, both city authorities and libraries have taken many new initiatives. The different activities at the national and community levels will be described in a series of reports from the Swedish National Committee for the International Literacy year.

The International Literacy Year has received a good deal of attention in Sweden. This can be seen by the frequent number of articles in the mass media.

A Literacy Year cannot, of course, replace attempts that would otherwise have been made within an area, but it can pose important questions needed for strategic discussion. Therefore, the Literacy Year is also an occasion to conclude and develop pedagogical and didactic perspectives such as:

to arrive at a broader knowledge of the methods and variations of learning to read and write,

to illustrate various efforts, contributions and possibilities of development for different groups of young people and adults with special reading or writing disabilities or whose ability to communicate is hampered by diverse functional impediments,

to analyze more deeply the connection between literacy and numeracy and also which general knowledge and basic skills a citizen needs in one of the Nordic welfare-oriented societies,

to observe especially the great import and meaning of experiential reading for the imparting culture, solidarity and personal development,

to widen the concept of literacy so that it includes making a citizen more capable of actively and critically comprehending and using all the old and new types of media which he or she comes into contact with,

to deepen both perspective and working methods in the way both school and adult education present development in the Third World and the connection between the lack of literacy and other social conditions.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the Literacy Year concerns goals, quality and development in various countries' educational systems. In this way it spans over a considerable wide range of areas, from disturbances in brain function and how they can cause reading and writing disabilities in children to those economic, social and political factors which have contributed to the fact that many children in the Third World are not even allowed to begin school. The Literacy Year is therefore a question of the right to education for young people and adults.

A society which cannot guarantee all citizens this right is a handicapped society. Today, our landscape of information in the industrialized countries takes on a new shape, a grey zone with increased space for market-oriented solutions at the expense of the service once afforded by the public sector. Many of the services offered by civic institutions will now cost the user a certain fee. At this point in time there are heated discussions taking place whether or not books should be considered a right or a piece of merchandise. The future challenge does not

in the formulation of "good learning rights" for all citizens, but rather to what extent public and private institutions will fulfil their obligation to provide learning opportunities for all citizens.

Another threat or challenge is to be found in modern communication technology. The new satellite "fall-out" of mainly action or show business-oriented programming is one side of the coin. The other side is the rapid development of new technology - fax, electronic mail, video, etc. presents an important challenge for future civic information. And here it is of vital importance that one must be aware of new developments and make serious attempts in the future to avoid creating new gaps between various groups in an information society, especially concerning neglected adults in different walks of life. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that "trains of knowledge" in different countries let all passengers on board, irrespective of their social, economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

And last, but not least. As far as the situation in many countries is concerned, special-priority tickets should be given to women and children.

## **II SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS ON READING**

# A DECADE OF READING RESEARCH IN SWEDEN\*

Ingvar Lundberg

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## INTRODUCTION

Written language is a relatively new development in the history of mankind. Alphabets are cultural achievements not older than three or four thousand years, whereas spoken language is probably as old as the human species. A system which allows the user (a reader or a writer) to communicate with others from whom he is removed in space and time has certainly had the most pervasive and profound consequences for the living conditions of man. The efficiency of writing for storing information is obvious. By making marks on a surface, one can transform an idea or a thought into something physical that transcends time and space. Thus, written language is spatial, visible, and durable, whereas speech is evanescent and temporal.

No wonder that mastery of such a remarkable system has become a highly valued skill that is a prerequisite to success in our society. It is also a skill that is pretty much taken for granted by those who can do it. However, it is in fact an extremely complex skill which requires explicit instruction and a considerable amount of practice for its full development. To analyze reading would indeed be to describe "very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind" (Huey, 1908, p. 6). Skilled readers must be familiar with 30-40 000 words and be able to recognize them within a fraction of a second even when typefonts are different and when the meaning of a word differs in different contexts. Very powerful computers, despite tremendous memory capacity, cannot do what skilled readers can do.

In the past ten to fifteen years, researchers have substantially advanced the frontiers of our knowledge about the reading skill. Significant new discoveries have been produced especially in cognitive psychology. The reading process has become an attractive challenge for cognitive psychologists and linguists who have felt the need of demonstrating the relevance and applicability of their disciplines.

As in many other fields, reading research has been heavily dominated by U.S.A., Canada and England. The generality of the insights gained from this impressive work might, however, be hampered by the fixation to a single language, a specific orthography, specific school traditions, and specific cultural patterns. However, a more balanced situation is now developing. Over the last

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\* This contribution has also been published in Svenska unescorådets skriftserie. Nr 1/1991.  
FNs internationella läskunnighetsår 1990

couple of years, the activity level in reading research has remarkably increased in some European countries, most notably in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Scandinavian countries. The present review will present the Swedish research scene as it has evolved over the eighties. With the exception of studies by Edfeldt (1959; 197+) and by Malmquist (1958, 1970) almost nothing has really been reported to the international audience before 1980.

As a context for the review of Swedish reading research, some general background information about the Swedish school system and Swedish orthography will be presented.

## BACKGROUND

By a long historic tradition, reading literacy has been a highly valued skill in Sweden, even in preindustrial times. Long before a compulsory school system was established in 1842 a majority of the adult population was literate in the sense that they could pass annual Church Examinations where oral reading performance as well as comprehension of religious concepts were assessed by the parish priest (see Johansson, 1987). Furuland (1989) has described the further development of literacy in Sweden. He pointed out the critical role of electric light in the process of literacy socialization of the Swedish people over the past century. He now observes how electronic media threaten the dream of wide spread and high quality literacy.

### The Swedish school system

Compulsory education starts when the child is 7 years old and includes 9 years of schooling. Almost 100 % of the schools are public, and teaching is regulated by a master plan common to all schools in the country. Teachers are trained in state colleges with uniform admission policies and uniform standards of quality. The remarkable homogeneity of the school system is further promoted by the lack of social stratification in most Swedish municipalities. With the exception of a few metropolitan districts, residential areas are mixed with people from all kinds of social strata. Tax and income policies have brought about considerable economic equality. Thus, on the whole, the variation among schools is small in comparison with most countries as far as teaching standard and socio-economic background of the pupils (and thus achievement) are concerned.

In special education the integration work has advanced considerably over the past decade. Special schools for handicapped or special classes are extremely rare now, most pupils with special needs being integrated in regular classrooms. There is also a general trend of trying to break the traditional isolation of individual teachers and establish teams of teachers where special educators are included.

According to a firmly established tradition in Sweden, children should not be subjected to any formal reading instruction before the school start, neither in preschool institutions nor at home. In the last preschool year more than 90 % of all children are enrolled in kindergarten or day care centers for at least 3 hours per day. By tradition the emphasis in Swedish child care service is on social, emotional, and esthetic development rather than on intellectual preparation for school work. Thus, a majority of Swedish children enter school by the age of 7 without any reading ability. However, there seems to be a tendency, as reported by first-grade teachers, that an increasing number of children has been subjected to informal literacy socialisation at home and are thus able to decode simple words and sentences.

### Methods of the first reading instruction

Methods of reading instruction are fairly uniform in the first grades. All existing basal readers system in Sweden are designed to keep some balance between analytic and synthetic methods from the beginning. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated from the start, which is in contrast to many other countries (e.g. the U.S.A.) where writing is typically introduced later in the program. In Sweden, writing is supposed to support the teaching of reading and facilitate the task of breaking the alphabetic code. Phonemic segmentation and sound blending is emphasized early by a majority of teachers. During the last decade some version of a language experience approach has caught the attention of many Swedish teachers in the elementary grades. Mostly it is used as a supplement to traditional, basal oriented methods, and the phonics elements are retained as an important part of the new approach.

Up till now, teachers in the elementary grades typically follow a class during the first three years after which they start anew with a beginner's class. Thus, they tend to develop a higher degree of expertise on beginning teaching than colleagues in countries where students are followed over a much longer period (e.g. Denmark).

### Orthography

The phonics emphasis in Swedish teaching of reading is probably a reflection of the rather regular orthography. Although the grapheme-phoneme correspondences are quite consistent, at least in comparison with English, there are some significant exceptions causing problems, especially in spelling and to some extent also in reading. Some sound segments can be represented in the orthography in a great number of ways. Take for example the [ʃ] sound which can be spelled in the following ways: *stj, sj, skj, sk, sch, ch, sh, g, si, or ti*. The [j] sound is spelled as *j, g, gj, hj, lj, or dj*. Vowels such as [o] are quite randomly spelled o

or *å*, and [ʒ] is spelled *ä* or *e*. The morpho-phonemic character of the orthography can be illustrated by *hög* (high) and *högt* (highly) where *gt* is pronounced *kt* but spelled according to the morphemic relationship.

Especially hard hurdles are the principles for doubling consonants, which also is one of the main sources of misspellings. The rules are very complicated and include many exceptions. The normal case is that consonants are doubled to indicate a preceding short vowel. In unstressed syllables, however, short vowels do not need double consonants. A number of other exceptions are governed by morphological rules. Like many other German languages, Swedish is also characterized by heavy clusters of consonants in initial as well as in final position, e.g. *strand*, *skälmskt*, or in middle position in compound words such as *falskt-skrikande*. Phonotactic reductions and assimilations are common in normal pronunciation, e.g. *Lundberg* is often pronounced *Lumberg*.

### Research review

Any reviewer faces selection problems. In the present case these problems were handled by the application of the following explicit criteria:

- (1) Only research published in a language available to an international scientific community will be included (English, German, French).
- (2) The research should have been published in refereed journals or as monographs or book chapters reviewed by experts.
- (3) The research should not have been published earlier than 1980.
- (4) Only original research will be included, and empirical studies will have high priority.

Reading as a complex skill requires multidisciplinary approaches for its exploration. Thus, the review includes studies from psychology, education, linguistics, and literature.

The material has been organized in the following way: First, a section on early reading development or emergent literacy will be presented. The second major section will be concerned with reading disabilities. Reading comprehension in a broad sense will be treated in the third section. Finally, specific aspects of reading not covered by the general themes will be included in the fourth section.

### Early reading development

The acquisition of reading skill does not begin with formal reading instruction in school. Throughout the preschool years, most children in Western societies are subjected to a great deal of informal literacy socialization. Although a majority of children enter school as nonreaders in the traditional sense, they often

display surprisingly well developed concepts of the nature and the function of written language. A skill component, however, is also involved in reading literacy, which does not easily seem to develop spontaneously in the natural ecology of a child, but which, in many cases, seems to require explicit teaching and extensive practice for its development. Thus, mere exposure to print in the environment is not sufficient for reading development. Hundreds of millions of illiterate adults with no school experience reside in urban environments polluted with commercial print and road signs without making much spontaneous progress.

Lundberg (1987c) proposed that reading acquisition emerges from two separate but related ontogenetic roots, one being critical to word decoding and the other related to the comprehension aspect of reading. The second developmental strand involves book-handling skills, print awareness, and experience of story tellings and readings. The factor behind word recognition or decoding of the alphabetic script, however, has rather to do with phonological awareness, i.e. the ability to attend to the sound structure of language.

"One of the great successes of modern psychology is the discovery of a strong relationship between phonological awareness and learning to read" (Bryant & Goswami, 1987). Swedish researchers have contributed significantly to clarifying the causal nature of the relationship taking advantage of the fact that we have a comparatively late school start. This implies that we can find perfectly normal children by the age of 7 who still cannot read a word and only know a few letters by name. Thus, we can investigate factors related to early reading in a less confounded way as compared to most other countries. By combining longitudinal and experimental methods important advances of the field have also been made.

Lundberg (1982) reported a study where reading disabled and normal readers were compared as to the ability to segment spoken words into segments like syllables and phonemes. The difference was dramatic in the first three grades but decreased to a much lower but still significant level in later grades. This kind of finding, although very robust and reproducible, does not tell us much of the causal mechanism.

In Lundberg, Olofsson & Wall (1980) the ability to attend to the formal aspects of language (e.g. rhyming, phoneme segmentation or synthesis) was assessed in preschool for some 200 children. They were followed over the three first grades in school where their reading and spelling progress was assessed. On the basis of preschool data on phonological skills it was possible to predict the level of reading and spelling skill three years later with high accuracy, even when general intelligence and other factors were kept under control. However suggestive, the data were still basically correlational in nature and did not permit strong causal interpretations.

Now, a critical question was whether phonemic awareness was a skill that could be trained in kindergarten outside the context of formal reading acquisition. The answer was clearly affirmative in a study by Olofsson & Lundberg (1983). The design was quasiexperimental with pre- and posttest and included three experimental groups and two control groups. The training period was 6-8 weeks with daily 15-min sessions.

In a later study (Olofsson & Lundberg, 1985) the long term effect on reading and spelling in school was assessed. Due to ceiling effects no clear cut results could be reported, although some indications of a positive effect on spelling was obtained.

Torneus (1984) came closer to a solution of the chicken and egg problem. She did a LISREL-analysis of the data reported in Lundberg (1985) and got support for a model specifying a causal relationship from phonological awareness to spelling and reading. Additional evidence was obtained from an experimental training study on a different set of students.

A large scale study in cooperation with Danish school psychologists finally settled the case (Lundberg, Frost & Petersen, 1988). More than 400 children participated in an extensive program for stimulating phonological awareness in preschool. The positive effects on reading and spelling persisted until grade 4 when the last assessment was made. This unambiguous finding has theoretical as well as practical implications (Lundberg, 1987 a,b; Lundberg & Höien, 1989, 1990).

To develop a functional orthographic lexicon for fast and automatic word recognition, the child must grasp the alphabetic principle and attend to the constituent structure of words. Without phonological insight, there is no way to use the alphabetic system productively in reading and spelling. This seems to be the conclusion to draw from the research evidence reported by the Umeå-group.

Closely related to the issue of linguistic awareness is the assumed dichotomy between oral and literate culture. Non-literate children (preschoolers) generally do not understand puns or more complex riddles, which seem to require flexible attention shifts between content and linguistic form. A commonly held view is then that literacy is a prerequisite for becoming aware of linguistic forms. Aronsson (1988) challenged this view as well as theories that emphasize the importance of literacy for the child's general cognitive development.

According to Aronsson (1988) language becomes visible when there are problems in connection with communication. Such problems often arise for a bilingual child who notices errors of interference. Aronsson (1981) found that the grammatical awareness was more developed among bilingual preschoolers than among monolingual children. Thus, literacy is only one of several practices with a bearing on language awareness according to Aronsson. Her analysis

(Aronsson, 1984) of the Amharic language in Ethiopia revealed how language structure might facilitate indirect and complex oral practices with impact on language visibility.

The fundamental impact of written language on cognitive development has been emphasized by Olson (1986). The permanence of written language leads to a different treatment of language, where a distinction is made between intentional meaning ("what was meant") and sentence meaning ("what was actually said"). Nonliterate children should then have difficulties in realizing that a sentence can have a different meaning from the intended meaning. Learning to read and write implies that one makes explicit the distinction between form and content. Working with the alphabetic system, handling linguistic forms on paper should facilitate the discovery of the language system, facilitate that there are different ways of expressing linguistically one and the same state of affairs.

This was the starting point of a series of investigations reported by Hedelin and Hjelmquist (Hedelin, 1988; Hjelmquist & Hedelin, 1989; Hedelin, 1990). In ingenious play situations they studied preschooler's ability to make the distinction between what is said and what is meant. On the whole, however, the relationship between this ability and reading and writing was weak or absent.

More qualitative studies of early reading acquisition have been reported by Söderbergh (1977). She studied, very carefully, single cases who acquired reading skill long before school start (already by the age of three) and described in much detail the course of learning. Detailed, qualitative studies of early reading acquisition have also been reported by Liberg (1986, 1988). Dahlgren & Olsson (1985) published a study on the child's concepts about reading and functions of reading before school start and after some period in grade 1.

Among studies of early reading acquisition should also be mentioned a joint Scandinavian effort (reported in English by Höien & Lundberg, 1989). Some 50 children from 10 different Scandinavian environments (rural, urban) have been followed closely from preschool to grade 4. The approach has been case oriented, comparative, ethnographic and ecological, where the children's reading development has been related to factors in home environment (social and cultural capital), community resources, classroom processes, language etc. A stage model of early reading acquisition has been guiding the assessments and observations. Exceptional slow development has been observed in a few cases. The explanation has not been found in environmental factors.

A longitudinal study of 700 children was reported by Lundberg (1985). After about 7 months in grade 1 a comprehensive survey was done of cognitive functions, reading, spelling, school attitudes, self-concept, sociometric status, and teacher ratings of language development, motor skills, social development and emotional adjustment. Part of this broad assessment program was repeated in later grades.

Despite a most homogeneous school environment and home background, considerable variation among children in reading and writing was found already in the first school year. The variation was explained in terms of a broad spectrum of factors. By applying various multivariate techniques, like AID-analysis and path-analysis, the conclusion was reached that language development had the most crucial role in accounting for individual differences in basic skills in reading and spelling, the contribution of other variables, such as motor skill, social and emotional adjustment, school attitudes, self concept, class size etc. being small or insignificant.

The level of basic skills in reading and spelling in grade I was highly predictive of later development in these fields. The extreme group of children, who either showed unexpected rapid development or unexpected slow development of reading were compared along a large number of dimensions. Also here language, and especially language understanding, was the most critical determinant. Neither pedagogical environment (classroom) nor home background could explain the rate difference.

### **Reading disability**

Sweden has provided at least two classical contributions to the research literature on dyslexia, one from medicine (Hallgren, 1950) and from education (Malmquist, 1959). During the 1980's a renewed interest in the field has emerged. Important inspiration has come from Norway (Gjessing, Höien) and Denmark (Elbro). A notable Swedish contribution to the international scientific community in dyslexia research is the establishment of "Academia Rodinensis pro Remediatione" (Per Uddén, Curt von Euler, Ragnar Granit). The prestigious academy was founded in 1982. Among its 100 members from many countries seven Nobel prize winners can be found. Several important international conferences, work-shops and symposia have been organized and sponsored by the academy and resulted in publications (e.g. von Euler, Lundberg, & Lennerstrand, 1989; Whyte, 1989),

Why do some students have difficulties in learning how to read? Among the candidates proposed as causal factors in reading disability or developmental dyslexia are visual problems, faulty eye movements, crossed laterality, sequential problems, emotional disturbances, deprived home backgrounds, poor teaching etc. Although many of these factors obviously contribute to reading difficulties, a more fruitful approach in the search for causal factors might be to start with an analysis of the specific cognitive and linguistic demands raised by the alphabetic script. Such task analysis has been the point of departure for many Swedish studies of dyslexia during the past decade.

There seems now to be a fairly general agreement among dyslexia researchers that processing failures at the word level is a key factor in reading disability.

Nonautomatic, slow, effortful, and dysfluent word recognition is a characteristic symptom of most dyslexics. However, relatively little empirical evidence has been presented concerning the underlying factors. One would suspect that many dyslexic children find it difficult to extract the abstract and elusive phonemic units from the stream of spoken language and map these units onto the grapheme units of written language.

Lundberg (1982) demonstrated a strong relationship between reading disability and lack of phonological awareness. However, the correlational nature of the data did not permit any causal interpretation. It might well have been the case that the poor phonological awareness among the dyslexics was the consequence of limited exposure to print. A stronger case for a causal interpretation would be a demonstration of poor phonological awareness (as compared to normals) among dyslexic children even before they started to read in school. Lundberg (1989) reported a retrospective study of 13 dyslexic children, none of them showing any sign of phonemic awareness in the beginning of the last preschool year. After 8 months of extensive practice with metalinguistic tasks, three of the children came close to the average level of phonemic awareness for the whole trained population of normal children, whereas 10 children were resistant to the training program and entered school without segmentation ability. Because language comprehension, vocabulary, and nonverbal intelligence (Raven) all were in the normal range for the dyslexic children, it seems as if we have found a cognitive-linguistic deficit that is very specific to the reading task, not involving other domains in the cognitive system.

Lundberg & Höien (1989) reported the development of phonological awareness, word recognition skill, and spelling for 35 dyslexic children as compared to a normal group of 395 children. On all three dimensions there was a large difference between the groups. Over the first three school years the gap tended to increase, possibly indicating the operation of a negative Matthew effect (Taube, 1988).

Taube (1988) analysed the relationship between self concept and reading skill. LISREL-analyses supported those models suggesting a reciprocal causality. However, the influence from performance to self concept was stronger than the influence in the opposite direction. The influence from self concept was stronger on reading comprehension than on decoding skills including spelling. As a group, the dyslexic children identified in grade 1 did not catch up in reading and spelling during the whole school period of 9 years. Besides language factors, attention and strategic behavior seemed to be critical factors distinguishing disabled students from normally achieving ones. And the learning disabled showed persistently lower self concept.

On the basis of the evidence presented so far, we can conclude that the dyslexics as a group have poor access to the phonological segments of words. The poor self concept observed could not be interpreted as a causal factor of primary

importance. It might well be the case that the lack of phonological skills only is characteristic of young dyslexics, whereas older dyslexics might have overcome such problems and instead suffer from lack of higher-order textual skills.

A study of older dyslexics was reported by Lundberg & Höien (1990). Out of a population of 1250 15-year-old students 19 clear cases were selected by an elaborated procedure. Equally sized age-level matched and reading-level matched comparison groups were also selected. The assessment program included speed and accuracy of pseudo-word reading, lexical decision tasks, phoneme synthesis, and reversal of syllables, all tasks assumed to be related to phonological processes.

The dyslexic students were significantly inferior to the normal comparison groups on all phonological variables. The results indicated that the basic problems for older dyslexics were the same as for the younger ones. The critical weakness is not general but specifically related to the phonological system.

The final piece of evidence of phonological problems as a key symptom of developmental dyslexia was obtained in an MRI-study where phonological problems could be related to abnormal asymmetry of plana temporale in the brain hemispheres (Larsen, Höien, Lundberg, & Ödegaard, 1990).

Not surprisingly, reading disabilities seem to run in families. Among the 19 dyslexics reported in Lundberg & Höien (1990), reading problems were observed among close relatives in 16 cases. For the control group the corresponding number was 3 (Höien, Lundberg, Larsen & Tønnesen, 1989).

Lundberg & Nilsson (1986) utilized the unique Swedish church examination records to study the inheritance of reading disability. They were able to follow a large number of families over several generations from 1750 and on. The incidence of reading problems was clearly higher in families starting with an affected individual than in comparison families. Tracing ancestors of dyslexic individuals living today further confirmed the family nature of the disability. However, the genetic mechanism for transferring dyslexia over successive generations is still unknown, although modern linkage methods might help to solve the issue.

Recently, Swedish researchers have considered the implications of the new conception of dyslexia for developing remedial methods. Olofsson (1990) has developed a computer-based program, where the reader reads a self-selected text on the screen. As soon as he/she encounters a difficult word, the mouse is used to point at this word which results in feedback from a speech synthesizer producing a spoken version of the word and, at the same time, a highlight of the critical word in reversed video. The speech support can also be given in syllable segments. The principles underlying this system are congruent with the core

symptom of dyslexia discussed above as well as to current concepts of metacognition. Evaluation of the system has so far yielded encouraging results. Speech synthesis has also been used in a remedial program developed by Dahl (1990) with more direct focus on phonological awareness.

People with visual impairment often have serious reading difficulties, although for reasons different from dyslexia. Visually impaired persons' reading of daily newspaper text with speech synthesis has been investigated by Hjelmquist, Jansson, & Torell (1987; 1990) and by Drottz & Hjelmquist (1986). The results indicated that visually handicapped persons can benefit very much from the support system provided by speech synthesis. The new "reading" mode was also compared to braille reading. The subjects reported that braille reading tended to give more direct contact with the text (all subjects were good braille readers). However, more text was actually read and read at a higher speed with speech synthesis.

### Reading comprehension

Recent research has emphasized that reading comprehension is basically a constructive process, and that meaning derived from the text is as dependent on the reader as it is on the text. Thus, research on reading comprehension is an extremely difficult task. Only few Swedish researchers have been bold enough to make an attempt.

Traditionally, reading comprehension has been studied as a product after a reading session and assessed by asking questions about the passage or requesting recall or a summary of the content. More recently, the ongoing process of reading has attracted many cognitively oriented researchers. Studying reading on line, however, requires new methods. Bromley, Jarvella & Lundberg (1985) have developed a computer based text-window technique which permits us to follow the ongoing reading process in some detail. Visual-graphic factors, linguistic factors in the text, working memory, anaphoric resolutions, error monitoring, eye-voice span, oral reading errors are all examples of factors investigated so far with the text-window system (Jarvella & Lundberg, 1987, 1989; Jarvella, Lundberg, & Kalliokoski, 1988; Jarvella, Lundberg & Bromley, 1989).

Waern (1980; 1988) has applied the think-aloud method to study different text processing tasks. Prior knowledge was found to be used not only for comprehension but also for idea processing and criticism. The think-aloud method was found to be useful in clarifying evaluation and monitoring processes in reading. The relationship between metacognition and reading comprehension has been studied by Persson (1989) who interviewed skilled and less skilled readers by the age of 12 and 15. The awareness of reading processes and strategies for comprehension was low among the younger and the less skilled readers.

Oral reading speed, free recall and summarization of narrative stories presented on videotex were studied as a function of reading skill, text structure and physical factors were studied by Backman, Lundberg, Nilsson, & Ohlsson (1984). A total of 144 subjects (13-14 years old) participated in the experiment, half of them being rated as poor readers and half as good readers. Good readers outperformed poor readers on all dependent variables. Important propositions in the text structure were better recalled and were more often included in summaries than less important parts of the texts, especially if they were signalled by a different color. Reading comprehension as an intricate interplay between various physical, structural and skill factors was highlighted in this elaborated experiment.

Linköping has been the place for a research project on interpretation and comprehension of literary texts. It started in 1982 under the leadership of Gunnar Hansson (Hansson, 1989, 1990). Recently it has been gradually transformed into a project on esthetic socialization in preschool with Cai Svensson a main coordinator. The first part of the project involved studies on how children's ability to interpret literature develops over the school years. The dimension "figurative-literal" has been particularly focussed. The interpretation ability has been found to be influenced by a rich symbol environment in the home background. Children from homes where literary and biblical texts were read and talked about produced more symbolic interpretations of poems with symbolic meanings than did children from homes without such habits (Svensson, 1985, 1987). In another study Svensson (1989) found that the typographic arrangement affected the reader's expectation of figurative and symbolic meanings in the text, and that this sensitivity increased with age.

Over the last years the communication between ordinary people and official bodies has been a matter of great concern in Sweden. Various measures to decrease the language gap have also been taken. In particular, attempts have been made to increase the comprehensibility of law texts. Gunnarsson (1984, 1985) presented a theory of functional comprehensibility of legislative texts. She identified some of the critical factors influencing the way people understand a typical law text. A key assumption was that different purposes of reading causes variation in comprehension level. Correspondingly, properties of texts could be described at different levels. Thus, for example, when the reading purpose is action oriented, superficial text levels play a minor role. Gunnarsson obtained fairly strong empirical support for her theory.

### **Sweden and the surrounding world**

By a long tradition Sweden has a special responsibility of supporting educational projects in the third world. In this context, Lind (1988) studied national literacy campaigns in Mozambique, a country where 93 % of the population was estimated to be illiterate. She found that political priority and strong national commitment were of crucial importance for success, whereas teaching quality seemed to play a less critical role. However, in later campaigns where more

illiterate people were enrolled, a number of pedagogical and organizational shortcomings were revealed. One conclusion to be drawn from Lind's important study is that reading acquisition for most adults is not an easy task. "It is important to refute the false idea that adults learn literacy easily" as Lind expressed it. She also pointed out the risk for people to relapse into illiteracy due to lack of adequate post-literacy activities. Lind & Johnston (1990) presented a comprehensive review of approaches and strategies that have been applied in the Third World to spread literacy on a large scale among adults.

Sweden's international orientation is also reflected in the participation in IEA's comparative project on Reading Literacy in 35 different countries among which many developing countries are represented. The final data collection of this huge investigation will take place in the beginning of 1991. Various aspects of reading skill and reading activities will be related to economic and cultural resources, school organisation, teaching strategies and home factors. Our conception of reading literacy will probably be much richer after this study. New knowledge with policy implication will also be generated. Sweden plays a significant role in this project by being represented in the Steering Committee as well as in the Standing Committee of the whole IEA-organization.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The review presented here has by no means given a complete picture of Swedish reading research. Many valuable activities were excluded by the selection criteria set up. Nevertheless, the trend is obvious. An increasing number of Swedish researchers in various academic fields have found reading and literacy challenging and worthy domains to explore. No doubt, this is a healthy and promising sign for the coming decade.

Our ultimate concern, of course, is to bring about an urgent and necessary improvement of current educational practices. Although the Swedish school system meets high international standards, the future demands on the level of reading literacy in the population are expected to be far higher than today. Only by systematic and theoretically based research within many disciplines will there be a basis for rational actions. So far, however, the practical consequences of reading research have been quite modest. One reason for the embarrassing gap between theory and practice might be related to the researchers' emphasis on the "hardware" of written language acquisition at the expense of the "software" of learning strategies. Only if reading researchers shift their emphasis to the development of theories and models of the software of reading will basic research bring light to practical education. Promising tendencies in that direction can be detected in the present review. Over the next decade, reading research will certainly be an increasingly important field of inquiry in Sweden as well as in the rest of the world.

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## WHO TAKES THE SECOND CHANCE\*

Implementing educational equality in adult basic education in a Swedish context.

Staffan Larsson & Anders Fransson

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### Introduction

Research findings are only ever about some fraction of a totality. When such findings are read they are interpreted against some background, some context, which is based on both explicit knowledge that is thematized and assumptions that are taken for granted. It is therefore always difficult to interpret research findings. When findings emanates from an alien context or a context that the reader has not experienced, there is a clear risk of not understanding the writers' message. It is our experience, in the area of adult education, that differences in systems, culture and history between countries contribute to this problem of international sharing of research findings. We will therefore start with a short overview of the context that constitutes the background for our results.

### Participation in Swedish adult education

According to rather detailed statistics, at least half of the Swedish adult population was involved in some kind of education or training in the year 1986 (SCB; 1988: the age-span 16–64 is the basis except for *folk high schools (residential colleges)* and *study organizations* where figures refer to all ages). The most important forms in terms of numbers of participants were study circles which are organized by the 11 nationwide study associations (28.4% of the adult population participated) and training organized by employers (27.5%). However, in most the number of hours spent in these ways were rather small; a study circle normally takes 20–30 hours spread over about 10 meetings and company-based training courses are seldom longer than one week.

Two other forms, *municipal adult education* (4.2%) and *labour market training* (0.8%) involve fewer people, but often in a more intensive degree, for instance half a year, or a year or more on full-time basis. Administratively linked to municipal adult education is *adult literacy training* (0.4%) which provides intensive training of basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. The higher education system also involves adults to some extent in “non-vocational” courses (1.6%). Finally 127 *folk high schools* offer education on a full-time basis for one or several years (0.3%), as well as shorter courses (4.5%).

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\* This contribution has also been published in Report from the Department of Education and Educational Research, Gothenburg University, 1989;2.

There is no direct correspondence to what is normally defined as adult basic education (ABE) in North America. An aggregation of ABE -segments from the forms mentioned above would show that the number of participants in ABE is far less impressive than in others forms and levels of adult education. Only about 1.5 per cent of the work force participates in one or more ABE-style courses each year.

Women dominate in study associations (59% of the participants), in the longer courses in folk high schools (59%), in higher educations "non-vocational" courses (60%) and in municipal adult education (64%). Men dominate in labour market training (61%) and in staff training (53%).

Altogether this constitutes a system that is rather complex, and this is further complicated by the fact that each form has its own history, function, culture and goal.

### **Forms of adult education and their characteristics**

Study associations and folk high schools constitute popular education. Popular education is administratively independent from, but financially supported by, the state. Originally popular education was an integrated part of popular movements such as the labour unions, political parties, free churches, consumers' or producers' cooperatives. It was organized to meet the needs of its members. Thus most units of popular education have some ideological or interest group commitment, with the exception of some folk high schools that are governed by the county councils.

The first folk high schools were founded in the late 19th century, with the main purpose of educating farmers for their growing role in local political life. At the beginning of this century the popular movements started to found their own folk high schools to train their members; since then this form has grown and has had varying functions. Notwithstanding these changes, the folk high schools have maintained their focus on developing personality and citizenship.

The first study associations were formed in the beginning of this century, and were connected to the workers' movement and the temperance movement. Their purpose was to provide a kind of supplementary counter-education for working class youth. Formal education beyond compulsory school recruited children almost exclusively from the middle and upper classes and was adapted to the needs and values of these classes. Later, study associations were formed on the basis of other interests or ideologies such as the free-churches, the farmers, the white collar workers and even the state-church. The most recent was formed only a few years ago by what is known as the sports-movement.

The character of counter-education has faded and nowadays the study associations have developed into rather independent institutions (Arvidsson, 1985, 1989). The ties to the founding organizations and their ideologies have become less and less important over the years and in many respects the study organizations have developed into market-oriented institutions with rather loose ties to certain interest-groups. Most study circle participants are probably unaware of the ideological roots of the association organizing the course. However, the study circles still serve the lesser educated to a degree that can only be explained by their unique relation to the popular movements. Taking part in one or two study circles a year is part of the way of life in large segments of the population, especially in the country. Participants in study circles pay a small fee but the larger part of the cost is met by the state and the local municipality.

In sharp contrast to popular education in terms of objectives, target groups and financing stands the rapidly expanding company-based training. Corporate training programmes are initiated by the employers and looked upon as a kind of investment. Basic training is considered by the employers to be a responsibility of the state as is the question of educational equality. This view is not shared by the labour unions, which are very strong in Sweden and in the last few years the unions have acted to change the nature and distribution of company-based training.

Inspired by proposals from the labour unions the Social Democratic Government decided to establish what are known as "renewal funds". All companies were compelled to put 10 per cent of their profit during the year 1985 into these funds and were then allowed to use their contributions over a 5-year period for the purposes of training, and research and development. The proposals for using these resources had to be acceptable to the dominant union in each company. It was stipulated by the government that a considerable part of the money spent on training should be devoted to basic training for employees with only a few years of formal schooling. About one billion dollars were put into the funds which should be compared to the 20 billions dollars that is the estimated cost of company-based training over the same 5-year period.

This year, 1989, the two main unions have formulated policies on corporate training (LO, 1989, TCO, 1988) with the aim of steering it to some extent towards the interests of their members. The blue collar workers union, LO, with 2,2 million members, called for a more equal distribution of the resources spent on company training. They demand a minimum of two weeks training for each employee every year and the right for employees with less than 10 years schooling to receive supplementary education up to that level. The TCO, which organizes most of the white collar workers, and has 1,1 million members, has put forward similar demands. The unions' interest in company-based training is linked to their efforts to change the organization and conditions of work to be less harmful for health and personal development. The radical nature of the proposals can be illustrated by the fact that only 2 per cent of employees with

less than 9 years of schooling received more than one week of company-based training during the first six months of 1986 although about 25 per cent of the employees have spent less than 9 years in school.

Corporate interest also coordinate their action in educational policies. One document of this is a newly published report from The European Round Table of Industrialists (1989) that presents a strategy to make education on all levels fit their interests.

Labour market training has its roots in the early post-war period ( Ellström, 1989). It has been, and still is, a very important instrument in the implementation of the general labour market policy that has been a main concern of the Social Democratic Party ever since it started its long government career in the early thirties. Labour market training enabled those who lost their jobs because of changes in the structure of industry and agriculture to be retrained. Industry, which was advancing progressively, was provided with a labour force with updated competence. Through an internationally unique labour exchange organization, employers and individuals seeking a new employment were helped to find each other. The structural change was speeded up and facilitated by LO's wage-policy, implemented under the name "Solidary wage-policy". Only those companies who were able to pay the wages negotiated by central committees of the LO and the employers' central organization, SAF, could survive.

The level of unemployment has not exceeded 4 per cent since the Second World War. At present the unemployment figure is between 1 and 2 per cent which should be compared to an unemployment rate of around 10 per cent in most European countries.

Labour market training is allocated by labour exchange agencies; it is not open for simply anyone to apply for. All costs are paid by the state and the participant gets an "income" which correspond roughly to 90 per cent of his average income before he lost his job.

Municipal adult education provides training of which most is equivalent to that provided within the secondary school system. It is governed by the local authorities but steered by a national policy through a national curriculum with general aims as well as specification of frames and content in each course (Fransson, 1989). This form of education was given to coherent character as a result of a bill passed in 1967, but it has its roots in courses for adults who wanted to qualify for entrance to the universities. This function still remains but is now overshadowed other programmes on lower levels.

A substantial part of the municipal adult education is concerned with education at the lower secondary school level. Priority is given to adults with only a few years of schooling and in a difficult social situation. There is a financial support system which makes it possible for this group to take full-time programmes for

one or two years, sometimes more. The courses are organized in a system of stage and each student can devise an individual programme of theoretical and vocational courses. All courses are free of charge and are open to everyone.

Adult literacy training is administratively part of municipal adult education, but it has its own system. It was established in the seventies and gives training in basic skills for people with severe difficulties in writing, reading and mathematics. More than half of the participants are immigrants. Participants with a Swedish background often have a history of school failure, unemployment or other social problems. Adult literary training is sometimes included as a part of a full-time treatment programme organized by one of the social agencies.

Instruction in literacy is free for all adults who are considered to need training on this level. Employed participants get a grant to cover the major part of their income loss when they go to class.

### **Official goals for adult education in Sweden**

Four goals for all state-financed adult education were gradually formulated between 1967 and 1975 in a series of government bulls, and these still apply as general goals today. They are equality, democracy, economic growth and the satisfaction of individual preferences (Broström & Ekeröth, 1977). The goal of equality forms the general background for this paper.

The equality goal was introduced into official documents in the early seventies as a result of pressure from the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Workers' Educational Association (Broström & Ekeröth, 1977). As a consequence of this, the allocation of resources was changed in favour of education for persons with least education.

Another important decision for the enhancement of adult education was The Educational Leave Act 1976. This guarantees all employees the right to take leave for study purposes without losing their job, The Employment Security Act of 1974 having already given most employees security of tenure.

A new system for financial aid was established in 1975, which enabled grants and loans to be distributed through the state in accordance with the equality goal. The most important part of this was that grants were made available which opened the possibility of full-time study to a number of formerly excluded groups. Priority is given to persons with little education, difficult social situations and and work that is tough and monotonous. In 1987/88 around 18,500 persons had grants of this type.

The financing of participation in labour market training has already been mentioned. Most of this training is localized to special vocational training centres. In

some cases those who are unemployed or those who must leave their job and be retrained because of illness or for other reasons, are given labour market grants for basic training at the lower secondary school level or sometimes higher level at a municipal education centre. Finally, there is a grant and loan system available for all adults at the same conditions as for students in higher education.

### **Recruitment for equality**

The fulfilment of the equality goal entails problems. One problem is that of recruiting the target groups. In order to decrease the educational gap recruitment must be actively aimed at the target groups; otherwise adult education will produce a still larger gap, which is what has actually happened up to now.

One of the reasons for this is the limited financial resources available for instruction and study aid. The different grant and loan systems mentioned above are helpful for only rather a small fraction of the large numbers who need basic adult education. Basically, the financial problem is one of both the number of available grants and the amount of the grants.

Another problem has to do with how adult education is conceived of by the target groups. Furthermore it has to do with how adult education institutions act to promote the recruitment. In this article we will deal with these two problems. We will present some results from two research projects, one on how unskilled workers conceive of education and one on how different educational institutions act to meet unskilled workers' perspectives and needs.

### **Unskilled workers' views of education**

Through a series of in-depth interviews with unskilled workers from different settings we have tried to understand how persons with few years of school education and who work in jobs with low competence requirements look upon education and what they see it as taking for them to start studying again as adults. The interview records are supplemented by descriptions of the workers in their work situation and a questionnaire which was sent to a representative sample. The descriptions gives a different perspective on interests and motives and actions compared with the questionnaire – a situational understanding rather than an explanation (von Wright, 1971). Our methodological approach is qualitative analysis, which means dealing with qualitative rather than quantitative differences. Methodological questions are not dealt with further in this paper.

The research project altogether comprised five case-studies in five branches: dairy workers, auxiliary nurses, textile workers, factory storemen and unskilled mechanics. Data consists of 194 interviews together with descriptive material concerning the working process. All case-studies have been reported in Swedish

(Alexandersson & Larsson, 1982; Helmstad, 1983; SÖ 1984; Larsson & Thång, 1985; Helmstad & Larsson, 1985, Alexandersson & Thång, 1988). In addition to this, 42 training officers were interviewed about training of unskilled workers from their perspective.

An attempt to integrate the studies resulted in a monograph (Larsson et al., 1986). The results are also reported in two papers in English. (Larsson, 1985, Larsson, 1987). The Swedish studies have been followed up and elaborated in Canada by Stalker Costin (Larsson & Stalker Costin, 1988, Stalker Costin, 1989) and in New Zealand by Benseman (1989).

In this article we will first discuss some observations from two of the cases, auxiliary nurses and factory storemen.

### **The situational character of educational interest among auxiliary nurses**

Thirty-five auxiliary nurses working in the same hospital were interviewed. We found that educational plans and ambitions in this group had five different roots: 1) a long-term plan, 2) a crisis situation, 3) a latent interest that was realized because of a convenient offer, 4) a feeling of threat, that their situation in work should deteriorate if they did not participate in education/training and 5) that they were forced (as an order) to participate (Larsson & Thång, 1985).

#### **1. Long-term plan**

Education or training is wanted as a part of a long-term plan. Persons express this by applying for education, using semi-relevant education or strategically choosing jobs to reach a specific aim (to fulfil a dream). The following résumé of an interview illustrates this category:

"Lisa has always had the same goal which she tried to attain untiringly: to be able to work as an occupational therapist. She views this as something she inherited from her father, a tradition she wants to fulfil, try to do what she has learnt from her father. She wants to teach others to work with their hands. This has led her to take several courses in handicraft offered by popular education and municipal adult education. She has also spent time in a folk high school. She views her present work as an auxiliary nurse as a practical experience and a training in preparation for a training to become an occupational therapist or an assistant occupational therapist."

5 out of 35 persons could be characterized by this category

#### **2. Crisis**

The present situation is experienced as problematic, or more severely, as a crisis. All avenues for development as a person are blocked. Divorce or personal loss has led to thoughts of starting a new life. Education might then be considered as a possible solution. This is typically a situation of limited duration. The following résumé presents one case:

"Lillemor always had dreamt of spending some time in a folk high school. During a personal crisis she realized this ambition. She explains why she started folk high school thus: Well, there were many things. On the one hand I got divorced, on the other hand there were a lot of problems at my work-place. It was a matter of personal development, where I wanted to get away from my former life and the problems at work. We had had a year that was very difficult at work."

There were 6 persons that fitted this category.

### **3. Latent educational interest**

When education/training is offered as a part of everyday life, it sometimes happens that an unexpectedly large number of people turn out to be interested. It might be vocationally related training or general education that is offered in the work-place. A characteristic trait here is that many of these have never tried to participate in studies individually through the "open market". Two aspects seem to be important for the new interest in education: a practical/economic and a social-psychological aspect. The first is about convenience in time and space but also about the absence of costs. The second aspect has to do with education or training as a part of the collective's normal activities, or, in other words, doing what is expected of a member of a collective that the person identifies with. Here is an illustration.

"Britt is among the auxiliary nurses who have been accepted as a students on the first course in the hospital's own training. (There have been such courses available for a long time, but not in this hospital.) She has never thought about studying as an adult before, nor about becoming an assistant nurse. She has only attended some courses in macramé and weaving. She does not know anyone who has studied as an adult. The most important motives for applying for the assistant nurse course was that it was given in her home district, that it is short and that it is paid. During her studies a lot has changed for her. She thinks about education generally in an altogether different way than before. She has found new friends, learnt a lot and found out that studying is pleasant."

There were 14 persons that could be placed in this category. The general background to our findings here was that a new offer was made for auxiliary nurses in the hospital. Almost all applied for this course.

### **4. A perceived threat**

Education or training is accepted because a threat is felt, that status or opportunities will otherwise be lost. A condition is that the threat is close and concrete and that training or education is perceived to be a solution. (A more abstract threat – bad prospects in general for a certain occupational group – does not motivate many in Sweden to start studying because labour market training is relied on as a rescuer from such unemployment.) One can say that in this case there is no genuine interest in education. An illustration:

"Anna has never planned to participate in any kind of adult education. She has attended some popular education courses (English, child psychology). It is difficult to follow courses since she has night work. She applied for the assistant nurse course because it was decided that those who work nights must be qualified as assistant nurses. She might as well do it now, before she gets too old. She has not felt any lack of education in her job, but it can be a good thing to have followed the course. She would not have applied for it on her own initiative. Then she thinks that 6 months is not very long – she must be able to manage that."

There were 6 persons that were considered to belong to this group.

### 5. Coercion

Some persons don't want to accept training/education of longer duration, unless they are ordered to do it:

"Karin had 8 years of elementary school and took an auxiliary nurse course in 1975. She has never thought about adult education. It is enough, as it is. The auxiliary nurse course for 6 weeks was the maximum that she could stand. The only course she has attended was last winter when she joined her husband in a course in marketing. He has a business firm, so they thought they should go. She did not attend on a lot of occasions. Otherwise she thinks that it is 'deadly boring' to study. Karin has not applied for the course to be an assistant nurse. 'If they order me I will do it, it is the only possibility. Not otherwise. I don't like studying.'"

There were 2 persons in this category.

### Discussion

The difference between the first three categories and the last two might be described in terms of a distinction between education and schooling. In the last two categories the situation is one where the persons would rather have been doing something else – they have a purely external relation to the studies, while in the first three there is a genuine interest – they are not alienated from the learning task. In the discussion below we concentrate on the first three categories.

The first category is one that has been traditionally looked upon as typical of the target group, at least for formal adult education. In the establishment of municipal adult education, in 1967, the target group was the "reserve of talent". This is a group of students that are searching for and using educational facilities even if they are not easily accessible. It is a group of people that are not alien to the world of education and/or have a purpose that is not acute. In short, this is a group of people who are actually using adult education to a great extent.

The second group is more a "fragile" group; a person in this life situation is open to different alternatives, education being only one of them. The high interest in education is temporary and often fades away as life changes, as the "crisis situation" is solved in some way. Several researchers have pointed to the importance of life transitions, such as Cross (1981, in her COR model the

variable D), Johansson & Ekerwald (1976) and Aslanian & Brickell (1980, referred to in Cross, 1981).

In connection with the third category it might be said that "a latent interest" is less clearly acknowledged in the adult education research, the reason probably being that this interest causes manifest action only under very special circumstances. For example, these circumstances might involve a change in the conditions on which a course is given, from an "normal" situation to a more attractive offer. Our auxiliary nurses were exposed to such an attractive offer and the effects were striking. Other examples are given in the concluding section of this paper.

### **Potential for recruitment**

There are not many people like those in the first category, who have only a few years of formal schooling but have long-term plans for getting an education. A recruitment strategy that is adapted to the needs and habits of this group is simple but will reach very few. Sooner or later adult education will find that it is hard to find enough students to start long courses in basic subjects like mathematics, English, Swedish and civics. This is exactly what has happened in Sweden during the eighties.

A more active strategy is needed to capture the sudden openness to education experienced by persons in a crisis situation, those identified by the second category. Unless a proper educational alternative is found while the heat is on other solutions are chosen. In Sweden a number of preparatory courses have been developed which make it possible to start studying with very short delay. Instead of waiting for a regular course to start, would-be students are offered the chance to try different subjects and to discuss their future as students with a counsellor.

People in the third category, those with a latent interest in education, are, however, seldom reached. To exploit this great potential, it seems that adult education needs to be integrated into people's everyday lives.

To a great extent people live with and relate to others with the same educational background, even though cross-class families are not uncommon – 43 per cent according to a Swedish study (Lundequist & Nyberg, 1987, reported in Petersson et al., 1989). The level of formal education is an important selection factor on the labour market. Thus people working together tend to have about the same educational background and ambitions. In groups where those with little education are in majority, education is often looked upon as something for "others" outside the group. For a person in such a situation, to get involved in adult education is to take a far-reaching step. It is a step with great consequences, since it requires the person to leave a familiar context of relations with

vague prospects for the future. It means leaving the "normal" life; doing something that should not be done when seen from the perspective of the current environment. It might even be looked upon as a form of betrayal (see Willis, 1979) and a person daring to apply for a course in adult basic education may be ostracized by his comrades. Instead of supporting his ambitions they may try to correct his deviant behaviour. In a sense, entering long-term studies means rejecting the life-style and culture of a group where the reading of books is a very rare activity, so the negative reaction from comrades is easily understood.

For people with more than compulsory education the situation is quite different; life-long education is often part of their jobs and their life-styles. To take up adult education is to return to a familiar environment. It does not normally mean anything negative for relations with important persons – you are not leaving your group. Instead, there is compliance with widespread expectations and social norms. Thus the social distance to adult education is small. Geographical distance and economic conditions are not obstacles of great importance, since people with higher education usually have more money, especially when it comes to savings.

Thus if we return to the implementation of a recruitment policy governed by an equality aim, the relation of adult education to the everyday life of those with little education has to be considered. The equality aim has implications also for curriculum, but we will not elaborate on that problem here.

From the perspective of closeness to everyday life different forms of adult education in Sweden differ considerably. It is study associations that traditionally have the closest relation to the everyday life of those with low education. First, the labour unions have a legal right to have study organizers at every work place, paid by the employers. The study organizers have the right to walk round and talk to his fellow employees about educational possibilities. In most cases the study organizers recruit students to study circles or courses organized by the unions. Second, in many places taking part in activities of the study associations is a part of the local social life; this is especially the case in the country and small towns. In many cases ordinary life and study circles are integrated for poorly educated people. Thus the study associations' recruitment problem does not basically reside here, but rather in the perceived meaning of education (we will return to that later). However, as has already been mentioned, study circle courses are relatively short

Labour market training (LMT) may be close to many of the poorly educated but that closeness is irrelevant here because people do not have the opportunity to apply for such courses. Remission to LMT occurs in cases of unemployment or serious risk of unemployment in the near future.

When it comes to the other forms of adult education that offer courses of longer duration, namely municipal adult education and the folk high schools, the distance to everyday life of the poorly educated is obvious. They entail visiting an unfamiliar environment – a school or a residential college in the country – where people with a different background will be met and where the content and forms of work are very different from those encountered in an ordinary job.

### **Company based training for the poorly educated – a narrow gate**

Another problem that is relevant in this context is generally narrow view held by most employers on the function of company-based training. In the research project referred to above, (Larsson et al. 1986), 44 training officers were interviewed about their view on training and education of unskilled workers. An extremely instrumental attitude was found: training on the job should be kept at a minimum level. Unskilled workers seldom need any training to perform their work tasks and should not be offered unnecessary courses. It was not considered in the interest of the employer to spend money on educational efforts to raise the general level of the basic competence of unskilled workers.

When it came to the organization of work, there had been very few attempts to elaborate work-tasks; reported changes were on the level of rotating existing tasks. This is in line with reports, for instance from Moxnes (1984) that widespread talk about enlarged jobs has nevertheless resulted in only minor changes. Our empirical findings on the views of training officers are based on interviews done in 1984 and 1985. One sign that it is still valid is that the head of company training at Volvo (the biggest work-place in Sweden) confirmed it in 1989, by pointing out that decisions on training for workers are decentralized in the sense that local managers at a lower level, decide on those matters. She points out that these managers are steered by measures of productivity and that training and similar activities serve to decrease productivity according to those measures (Keen, 1989). This way of measuring is only applied on workers.

It is always hard to predict the future pattern of qualification requirements in the labour market. German researchers on qualification requirements in working life (for instance Kern and Schumann) now seems to have left the hypothesis of a polarization in the labour force. That hypothesis meant raising qualification requirements at higher levels and decreasing the demand at lower levels. Instead, those researchers now expect increased requirements for almost all, and unemployment for those that cannot meet the requirements; in other words, the tasks for which little knowledge is required are expected to disappear. (Aronsson, 1983; Broady, 1986; Rajan, 1989)

There are indications that this latter pattern is reasonably valid for Sweden's contemporary working-life as well. One thing is that the proportion of white collar workers in industry is constantly growing; it is now more than 30 per

cent. The union for white collar workers has experienced very rapid growth, while the blue collar workers union is stagnating. (It might be noted that almost all employees are members of a union). The change in the organization of work is constantly making white collar workers out of blue collar workers. This seems to be a rise in the qualification requirements, at least at a very crude level. On the other hand, we concluded from our investigations of the unskilled workers' work-tasks that it is difficult to imagine a decrease in the qualification requirements, since most work-tasks are so lacking in complexity that there is nowhere to go to reach a less qualified level. There remain a lot of loose ends in this that cannot be dealt with here.

In any case, the employers' reported perspective leads to an increase in the gaps in knowledge between those with a long education and those with a short education – the differences in schooling is added after school. If the qualification researchers are correct, there are not only a problems from the perspective of equality, but also problems for unskilled workers trying to get jobs in the future. In conclusion, other interests have to intervene, if poorly educated people are going to get more training at the work-place.

Such an interest has in fact made a move. As was mentioned at the start of this paper, the two largest unions in Sweden have recently independently published pamphlets where they put forward and discuss concrete ideas on how to organize adult education related to the work-place. The LO makes two main proposals:

1. All workers should be given a right to receive a certain "renewal of their work-competence". It should be an "individual right" entailing at least two weeks a year. The employee should have the right to save training weeks over the years to make up a longer training period.
2. Every worker who lacks a basic competence equivalent to comprehensive compulsory school or lowers levels of upper secondary school in the subjects Swedish, mathematics, English and civics should have the right to acquire that competence, in work-time and without losing job benefits. The realization of this part requires legislation by Parliament. The LO has estimated the number of hours needed to reach the intended level of competence is 1,400 hours per person, or the equivalent of 175 working days. About 25 per cent of the work force (more than one million workers) belongs to the target group of this gigantic educational effort. In order to finance the reform it is proposed that the employers should contribute a proportion of the total wage outlay. This money should be handled by a funding body in which all major parts of the labour market are represented. It is supposed that the state should contribute a sum equivalent to what is spent in ordinary schools for the same amount of teaching.

A question that is to rarely discussed, at least in Sweden, concerns the content of education and training. Sköld and Stockfelt (1981) have discussed learning,

primarily in work-life, as positive or negative in relation to the workers' personal development and as an agent for social change. From this perspective company training can be positive but also negative. The work as such can be positive as well as negative from a learning aspect; it can make people adapt to conditions that are negative for the health, identity etc. It can also be positive through developing skills, knowledge and identity. In fact the importance of work as content is often overlooked, even looked upon as irrelevant. Ginner (1988) has investigated the Workers Educational Association's view of education during the post-war period. He found an Neo-humanistic view competing with a Citizen education view, but he found almost no traces of a Polytechnic view which would stress work and the development of workers' "know-how" in all aspects of their work.

Training on the job is very limited for most unskilled workers, that is clear from recent surveys (SCB; 1988). Many jobs are even composed in such a way that there is a "competence ceiling" (Larsson et al., 1986). The necessary competence to perform the tasks adequately is learned in a few hours. Once that level of competence is reached additional experience or problem-solving efforts add nothing to the quality or quantity of the performance. To develop broader perspectives these unskilled workers need education that is relevant to other contexts of life, not only work-life but also social life and their life as a citizen, as someone who can produce and reproduce culture.

### **How storemen perceive the meaning of education**

As was touched upon earlier, one of the main difficulties in getting the poorly educated involved in adult education has to do with how they perceive adult education. It is a problem that has to do with the meaning of education.

In another of our case-studies, the one about storemen, (Helmstad & Larsson, 1985, Larsson & Helmstad, 1985), we concentrated on this aspect. We made an effort to relate conceptions of the use of education to the storemen's actual work-tasks, as they could be analyzed through observation. Our analysis was based on interviews with 43 storemen at the same work-place, where 600 worked in all.

Two different views of education and training were identified: one restricted and one more wide. Thirty storemen were classified as being in the restricted category and eleven in the wide one. Two could not be classified.

### **The restricted view**

The restricted view is one where education is exclusively related to a concrete use. Education or training (there is not a clear distinction in Swedish between those concepts in everyday language) is something that can be used in a new job

or in new work-tasks. Study-circles are looked upon only as preparation for special functions in the union. There follows an illustrative quotation:

The interviewee has declared that education is a good thing:

Question: "Why do you think education is important?"

Answer: "Well, I think it will lead to better jobs, I suppose. That's what you hope when you get an education. I suppose it must be so."

Question: "Do you think it can mean something more, apart from getting a better job?"

Answer: "Of course it can... If you get an education to be something, then it is something you want to do and then it will perhaps be more fun to work with that. You will perhaps be more content with your work-place."

and later:

Question: "If someone that has only seven years of school and then takes courses to bring this up to comprehensive compulsory school level (nine years), and then returns to his or her old job, is that meaningful?"

Answer: "I don't know. Is there any use in that, really? Maybe, I don't know."

Stalker Costin (1989) uses conceptions in her study that are more specific. Three of those concerning the uses of participating in adult education could be considered as restricted: one that refers to practical application, one to credibility for the work-place and one where adult education is used to allocate status. Benseman (1989) found one conception that referred to "get on" in life and "better themselves" in their jobs and social standing, one where adult education was viewed as the key to better jobs and life-styles, and one where it was synonymous with schooling.

### **The wider view**

In the wider view, education is seen as something that can have multiple effects: immediate usefulness at work but also personal development and a richer life. Out of eleven persons in this category five make reference to cognitive development in some sense, while five others refer to a social dimension, that confidence grows and relations changes. One person emphasizes the political value of education in that history teaches how to relate to society. A quotation :

Question: "Yes, do you think it (school), was meaningful?"

Answer: "Yes, absolutely."

Question: "In what sense?"

Answer: "It has broadened my perspective."

Question: "In what way?"

Answer: "Yes, both cognitively, in the way you think simply, and in relations to other people."

Question: "Education has an important function, then?"

Answer: "Yes, it has. Because a lot of people you meet have had an education and as a rule that has changed them in some way. They have other interests and a different view on life... from someone who leaves school after 9th grade and starts working at a job like this."

Stalker Costin reports one conception where she refers to adult education as a personal possession and Benseman reports one where it provides a broader perspective and deeper understanding of all aspects of life.

In the Swedish study we checked the educational background simply measured by number of years spent in school.

The number of school years turned out to be systematically related to view on education:

	mean	s.d.	Md
A restricted view	9,5	1,4	9,0
A wider view	11,9	2,5	12,0

A simple way to understand this result is to look upon the difference in views as a consequence of amount of experience, and maybe also of quality. In the latter case one can argue that those who have more education also have a more positive experience. The general argument here is that a longer acquaintance with something will result in more elaborated views of that something. Säljö (1979) has also reported similar changes in the view of education as a result of amount of schooling.

## Conclusions

The different views can also be used to discuss the meaning of different kinds of education/training as they are conceived by different groups. In the more restricted view, education is related to concrete tasks in some sense, which would mean that education/training is considered worthwhile only if that relation is obvious. When it comes to the possibility of changing job (where training/education could be a concrete means), there was a difference between young workers and those over 30 years of age. In almost all cases, those over 30 thought they were too old to engage in education for this reason. Many also thought that they could not afford it, in which respect they differ from the auxiliary nurses; this difference might be explained by the fact that the nurses did not normally work full-time, whereas the storemen did and this makes a great difference from the perspective of family economy.

The reasoning above reaches the conclusion that, *if we try to view education with the eyes of those with a restricted perspective, and also take their life-situation into account, adult education does not often appear to be meaningful.*

This is a perspective that takes a "subjective rationality" as the logic of reasoning. In a wide sense the reasoning is based on the assumption that the interpretation of reality is the basis for action (as would be the expression of a symbolic interactionist), or that the phenomenon as it appears to someone is constituting the world in which we act (as it would be expressed from a phenomenologist's point of view).

The weaknesses of this perspective in this case is twofold. First, there are alternative views to consider, for instance behaviourist or freudian views on human action (behaviour), which complicate the relation between the way in which the world is conceived and action. Second, there is the contextual problem; people tend to change conceptions as context changes, and thus the context of the interview and its characteristics are important. In our case the interviews were done on the storemen's place of work. The results might have been different in a school context, just as they could have been different if another storeman had done the interviewing and so on. Results must therefore be used with care.

Observation of the action as such as an alternative to interviews is not a very impressive one. To observe action is not a wise strategy when one tries to understand why people do not do something!

### Life-situations that are important

If we return to the problem of recruitment, the restricted view of the poorly educated persons becomes vital in two respects.

First, it is a general problem for those who try to motivate them to get an education. Experience from study organizers shows that a close relation does not solve the problem of how education is conceived of – a change of view seems only to result from positive experiences.

Second, it points to the importance of the life-situations of poorly educated. Changes in their situations will make training/education meaningful to some extent. Such changes might be related to work, but also to activities as citizens or to cultural activities. Education may become a part of a general activity pattern and given meaning by these activities.

The rising qualification requirements in the world of work was discussed earlier and we concluded that they are increasing generally with unemployment facing those that cannot meet them.

A representative sample have been asked about a number of non-work activities in 1968, 1974, 1981 and 1987 (Pettersson et al., 1989). The conclusion is that the level of activity is increasing in almost all fields of interest (reading books, go to restaurants, gardening, fishing etc). The differences between different social groups have not been analyzed.

Finally, activities in the area of informal work must be considered with respect to the time left for education during leisure time. There has been dramatic changes as a consequence of women's rapid entrance into the formal work sector during the post-war period. This is a quite an unknown field. However, it is clear that in Sweden the amount of formal and informal work is very large in the age-groups when children are typically being reared – the ages 20–50, and especially for women – while the amount is lower before and after those ages. This puts a strong limit on participation in activities outside work hours, such as education.

### **Involving unskilled workers in practice**

In this concluding section we will present some observations from a project in progress (PRI-KOM), where we are trying to identify successful strategies for recruiting persons with fewer years of education. We have focused on municipal adult education which is the main organization to provide such programmes.

The results will be discussed in relation to the first three categories on the situational character of educational interest among auxiliary nurses.

## **1. Organizing programmes for well-motivated persons**

Municipal adult education was established to meet the educational needs of those who lacked formal requirements for admittance at the university. In the beginning only courses at upper- secondary school level were organized. No recruitment efforts beside information materials and advertisements were needed. The objectives for municipal adult education were successively changed. The aim of educational equality was stressed and a course system at lower secondary level was created.

The response was unexpectedly strong and regulations for admittance were introduced: only those lacking nine-year compulsory education were accepted. The reason for this restriction was that many applied for lower secondary level courses to improve their grades and so enhance their chances in the competition for attractive programmes at secondary school level. The restrictions led to a decrease in student numbers in spite of large outreach programmes where different strategies for finding and motivating the poorly educated were tested. This reform period, which took place in the first half of the seventies, concluded with the introduction of a very ambitious study support system and an Educational Leave Act.

In spite of these very important reform that made it possible for large numbers of workers to leave their jobs for full-time studies, the number of applicants for basic adult education has continuously decreased. Well motivated persons with long- term educational plans are very rare among the applicants nowadays and some school-leaders feel that programmes at this level will soon be history. At the same time, there are about one million in the work force who have less than nine years of basic schooling!

## **2. Meeting educational needs of persons in crisis**

A growing number of students in basic adult education try education as a way of changing their life situation. Most of them are women with monotonous and low paid jobs. They have reached a position where they feel that they have to make a last try to do something about their life or resign. Their self-confidence is low and they doubt their aptitude. Their main ambition is not to reach or achieve something, and thus they have problems in expressing detailed wishes and plans.

In a growing number of municipal educational centres systems or preparatory guidance courses 4-8 weeks long have been developed to meet the needs of this group. One good example is found in Gävle, a town with about 80,000 inhabitants.

The present preparatory courses (PC) are the result of a ten years developmental work where course content, forms of work and study support systems have gradually evolved. The PC is eight weeks long and comprises 165 lessons. The students take subjects like English, mathematics, natural sciences, civics and Swedish. They have regular guidance sessions both individually and in groups. Emphasis is put on stimulating participants (the terms used for the students) to formulate problems for small projects. A new PC is started every four weeks and new-comers meet the "veterans". All teachers in the unit are involved in teaching at the PC and service on this course is even regarded as a kind of in-service training where teachers have good opportunities for learning about the educational needs of these students.

About two thirds of the participants in PC continue to full time studies at the lower secondary level programme and constitute half the total number of participants in these courses. Improved self-confidence and elaborated educational plans are some of the main results of PC.

### **3. Making latent educational interest manifest**

We have already mentioned the establishment of "renewal funds" in 1985. In some companies the labour unions have convinced the employers to use part of this money for basic adult education for poorly educated employees. Resistance to this idea has been widespread and strong; it seems to have been broken only where the unions are strong and conscious about the value of basic education, and where the employers generally put a high value on education.

One of the cases where these preconditions were filled were in a lorry-factory in Gothenburg. A special study has been made of the programme for adult basic education developed at that factory (VLAB).

An inventory, carried out by the union, showed that 1,400 out of 4,220 employees belonged to the target group for adult basic education; 777 persons had less than nine years of schooling. Most of the employees are men.

The equivalent of about five million dollars were devoted to a programme for offering persons in the target group one or more courses at lower secondary school level. The courses could be taken in working hours without loss of job benefits. The courses lasted for about six months with about four lectures concentrated to half a day each week. Classrooms at or near the factory were used.

All persons in the target groups were contacted individually by representatives from the company and from the union. They were offered courses in Swedish, English, mathematic and computer usage.

After two and a half years 230 persons have participated in one or more courses. A drop-out of 10 per cent is reported. Drop-outs had generally not expected the reading load to be so great. The outreach programme at the factory has systematically taken one department after the other. Participants have had the chance to study together with their friends and colleagues, during working hours and in close connection to the factory. The teachers have made efforts to collect examples for instruction from the participant's working life.

An evaluation is presently being carried out. One unexpected result observed is that level of absenteeism in the departments sending participants to the programmes has decreased considerably, morale and work satisfaction are reported to have improved. The production rates have been kept in spite of absence for studies. The evaluators explain this as being a result of the favourable attitude of employees to the study possibilities offered. A latent educational interest has become manifest.

One more example will be mentioned. In the paper-mill of Ortviken near Sundsvall in central Sweden the local union got the equivalent of \$30,000 from the renewal funds to carry out an investigation of educational needs and interests among all blue-collar workers at the mill. All but 25 of 686 employees were interviewed for 15-60 minutes. The interviews were carried out in cooperation between the union and a teacher from the municipal adult education centre in Sundsvall.

Almost everyone stated educational interests, 133 wanted to take basic courses in Swedish and 207 in mathematics.

In the next phase of the inventory all those who were interested in courses in Swedish were tested and 63 – all men – were considered to be in need of a basic literacy course. They were offered daytime-studies three times a week, a room in the papermill was to be used as classroom.

All 63 accepted the offer. They have now completed a full year of in the literacy course and no drop-outs have been reported.

It is too early to draw conclusions from the limited number of cases of work-place education in basic adult education but the success in reaching men with low level of competence in basic subjects is noteworthy. Municipal adult education has up to now almost completely failed to recruit persons from this group to adult basic education.

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# READING OUR FUTURE

## Swedish Policies on Adult Literacy, Work Transformation and Active Citizenship

Kenneth Abrahamsson\*

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### 1. To Read Our Future

My contribution reflects a professional and also personal interest in policies for literacy, learning jobs and active citizenship. My approach represents more a birds-view than a grass root perspective. I will try, however, to start with a future orientation and then look back at "where are we now?".

Reading literacy is a necessity if one wants to read our future, to anticipate new events. The societal and occupational expectations of active literacy skills are growing the closer we come to the turn of the century. But reading is also a way to understand the dynamic relationship between the past, the present and the days to come. Images of beloved or disastrous futures are reflected in many written visions. Two classic examples are Thomas More's *Utopia* or Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* written more than four and three hundred years ago.

If we restrict the historic time span to one century, it might be interesting to contrast the visions of two more recent futurists, namely Jules Verne and Edward Bellamy, active in the second half of the 19th century. The vision of Jules Verne comprised a number of technological adventures like the submarine *Nautilus*, a number of flying ships or vehicles to be used on the journey to the center of the earth. His books are a symbolic manifestation of the trust in science, technology and great societal adventures. Many of his technological models or metamorphoses were "big steps for mankind ...".

Bellamy, on the other hand, has very limited visions or associations concerning the technological future. His famous book *Looking Backward 2000-1887* has the form of a dialogue between Julian West and Dr. Leete on the conditions of life in Boston in 1887 through the mirror and context of the year 2000. Its main content reflects the equality of standard and living conditions in society including the equal treatment of men and women. His book had its roots in political ideas on the new society and Karl Marx' visions of a true communist equal state. Society was organized as an army with a work force between the ages of 21 to 45. After three years of compulsory work, the citizens can make a more free choice. I have chosen these two approaches as they represent two quite different ways of imagining the future; i.e. the technological environment and

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the social infrastructure. Literacy for the future has to be explored in the cross-roads between technology and society.

Thus, one way of reading our future is to start from the year 2000 and look back at the present situation. It is not a very long time span, but it has become an international point of evaluation regarding the international literacy missions during the 90's. It is also the year when illiteracy in America should belong to history according to an often quoted sentence by the president of the U.S.A., George Bush.

"By the year 2000 every adult American will be literate and possess knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

Many observers doubt the realism of this challenge, but we certainly need new visions to cope with the demands of the next century.

## **2. Literacy in Sweden – a Historical Background**

Contemporary life is to a large extent based on the written word. The ability to read and write is a necessity for active participation in civic life, in the world of work and of course, also in your neighbourhood or within the family. New technology and an increasing use of computers call for new forms of literacy.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to give some examples of Swedish research and practice in the field of adult literacy. The content reflects literacy issues from historic to current research approaches, from young to adult learners and from readers to writers.

Sweden has a long tradition of enhancing literacy among its total population. The first major contributions were developed centuries ago through the State Church. This literacy mission was based on an oral tradition and aimed at promoting a better reading of the Bible and other official religious texts. Another step forward was taken by the free and independent churches during the last century. They focused not only on the citizens' capacity to read but also on the individual's own choice of what to read. Public compulsory schools started in Sweden in 1842. Compulsory schooling is traditionally a major institution for promoting literacy. There are, however, important developments outside formal education.

A number of new popular movements were initiated towards the end of the last century, such as the Temperance movement, the Cooperative movement and the Liberal movement, the Farmers' movement and the Labour movement. A typical feature in the building of Swedish popular movements has been the value of knowledge and active citizenship. Folk high schools (residential colleges for

adults) and study circles are – in addition to libraries – the two most common tools for learning.

Which future lessons can we read from our history? Will new forms of literacy, or illiteracy, develop within the context of the new information society?

### **3. The Challenge of the International Literacy Year 1990**

We all know that 1990 has been proclaimed the International Literacy Year by the United Nations. All of us agree to the fact that growing world illiteracy, with almost one billion illiterates, is one of the most difficult educational challenges -- or threats -- of our time. In a global sense, we are far away from the essence of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that "everyone has the right to education."

Thus, the right to education for all is still more a vision than a reality. Over 130 million children, mainly girls, have no access to primary education. Almost one billion adults, women as a silent majority, are illiterates or face severe reading and writing difficulties. More than one third of the adults have no access to printed knowledge or skills to cope with information technology. In a post-war perspective, the rate of illiteracy has declined, but a new situation occurred in the mid-eighties with a negative development in the world education systems. Many Third World countries are struggling with the challenge – universal access to primary education – while industrial and post-industrial countries have their problems located on higher levels in the educational system.

The number of young people that complete elementary school is also declining in a global perspective. School drop-outs are not, however, only a problem in the third world. The hidden rejection of certain groups of young people in the formal school system is also a growing problem in the industrialized countries. Adult illiteracy or severe reading and writing difficulties are no longer consequences of lack of schooling or too few years in formal education. It is also evident that these problems are dependent on dysfunctions in modern school systems.

#### **Sweden and the Literacy Year**

Schools and adult education reach practically everybody in the country. Compulsory schooling is from 7 to 16 years of age. Nearly everyone continues to at least two years of upper secondary schooling. More than 50 per cent of all adults are active in some kind of organized learning (i.e. study circles, folk high school courses, in-service training, municipal adult education, adult basic education, labour market training, etc.) during one single year.

Unfortunately, however, being taught is still not synonymous with having learnt. Thus, there are many challenges for schools and adult education organizers to face in making literacy and numeracy a right for all individuals. This should be an important step forward from a vision where everybody has the basic skills to develop and continue in a life-long learning enterprise.

Sweden has, as most other countries, formed a *National Committee for the International Literacy Year*. One of the crucial tasks of the Swedish ILY-committee is to analyze and discuss future literacy missions in Sweden. Special attention has been paid to efforts to enhance reading literacy and basic skills in schools. Another field of interest concerns initiatives to support international understanding – especially Third World development problems – in schools and adult education. The role of basic skills and civic knowledge in schools and adult education in a post-industrial and knowledge-intensive society forms another issue of interest.

Finally, the committee has the role of stimulating new research in fields such as the societal determinants of illiteracy, the assessment of its volume and content and useful practice in literacy teaching for young people and adults. The Swedish committee also functions as a clearing-house for ideas and initiatives concerning the promotion of a more literate society in a broader sense. Conferences, seminars, production of information material, exhibitions and an active collaboration with other agencies are also important tasks. One initiative that can be mentioned is a book entitled "*Att läsa – en nyckel till många världar*" (Reading – A Key to Many Worlds). The book was published for the International Literacy Day, September 8, and has now been distributed to schools and adult educational organizations. A short description of the ILY-90 in Sweden has been written by the present author (*The International Literacy Year in Sweden – A Journey Through a Changing Landscape*).

#### 4. Literacy and Compulsory Education

Active literacy is one of the central objectives in the national curriculum for Swedish compulsory schools. In this respect, literacy includes a broader dimension of communicative skills needed in a modern society. In 1990, the Swedish National Board of Education presented a report "*Om grundläggande kunskaper och färdigheter i en skola för alla*" (On Basic Knowledge and Skills in a School for All), which attempts to identify the necessary levels of literacy that would apply to *all* pupils after nine years of compulsory schooling

"A basis for identifying basic language skills can be summed up in the following way:

### Speaking-Listening

As a general rule, pupils leaving compulsory school should have enough self-assurance from a linguistic point of view that they can express themselves clearly in various communicative situations. They should have learned to listen to others but also have learned to state their own opinions. A gradually increasing linguistic competency will be reflected where a pupil –

- plays an active communicative role in small group discussions,
- has no difficulty in speaking to, relating to and performing for a peer group,
- listens with interest to narrative accounts of friends and teachers,
- listens – takes part in discussions, abides by “the rules of the game,”
- narrates and relates clearly concerning own experiences and educational materials,
- listens actively to both imaginative and factual stories,
- takes part in group discussions; listens to others and is also able to voice an opinion and motivate it,
- narrates and relates clearly and easily in front of a class,
- shows a positive attitude to new information and can comment on it.

### Reading

A pupil can be said to have achieved elementary skills in reading when he or she can use reading as a means of gaining knowledge and experiences and thereby have increased possibilities of influencing his or her own life situation. A basic goal in this context is also that a pupil will want to continue to read. The levels in this process are where a pupil –

- likes to listen to someone else read aloud,
- can read simple texts silently and aloud,
- can read on his or her own and react to the reading by narrating or by drawing a picture,
- can choose his or her favourite stories,
- experiences being able to read,
- likes to read children’s stories and borrow books from the library,
- can read both stories and non-fiction and tell about them using his or her own words,
- can make comparisons and evaluations and draw conclusions from that which is read,
- can choose and gather information from texts for a decided purpose,
- can understand and use lists ordered alphabetically,
- can read well enough so that any lexical problems do not hamper his or her understanding and experience of the text,
- has acquired a wide range of reading habits and interests – newspapers, non-fiction, informative materials, literature,
- can modify his or her reading technique according to type of text and purpose involved.

## Writing

A basic ability to write means being able to express in writing communication that can be understood by others. This entails a reasonable level of formal training (spelling, handwriting, linguistic structure) and also self-confidence in one's own ability to write. This ability increases more and more as a pupil –

- can print blocked letters,
- can write simple stories, letters, texts accompanying pictures,
- experiences being able to write,
- has learned handwriting,
- can sound out words and write them,
- can see sentence structure and use both full-stops and capital letters,
- can write and relate stories chronologically,
- can write about past visits, excursions, etc.,
- writes reasonably well with a readable handwriting,
- can also spell most words that cannot be sounded out,
- can organize a written text so that the course of events and context can be clearly understood,
- can fill out forms and write applications,
- has a positive attitude towards written expression.

The descriptive levels above are both brief and, as previously stated, somewhat approximated. In other words, there is ample space for concretion and clarification. A group discussion will undoubtedly lead to a need for expanding and criticizing many of the points and levels expressed. This would of course rhyme well with the whole purpose of critical thinking and debate which is so important for pupils to learn in school. Discussions of this type are not only necessary within groups of teachers, but also among pupils, who in themselves represent the most important interested party and who can contribute new and perhaps overlooked perspectives concerning the development of basic knowledge.”

## Research on Schooling and Literacy

During the last decades many efforts have been made to arrive at a reliable picture of the level of literacy in Swedish compulsory schools. Through the standardized testing used in schools it has been possible to demonstrate that there does not exist any true illiteracy in schools. But there is a hitherto unknown number of students who leave schools with incomplete reading and writing skills, or with lack of functional literacy. These numbers are difficult to estimate primarily because of the increasing number of immigrant students. Lack of reading and writing skills in the Swedish language does not necessarily mean lack of reading and writing skills in the student's home language.

Recent national assessments on literacy and numeracy among students in grades 2 and 5 – aged 8 and 11 respectively – show a positive picture. Thus, even if the situation is better than stated, literacy and numeracy are skills that you can

master better or worse. The main question should thus be restated to concern the question of a sufficient level of literacy and numeracy – sufficient for giving individuals the possibility to master basic skills in all other school subjects as well as in life outside the classroom.

Here, longitudinal research, comprising 10 per cent each of five cohorts, the oldest ones being born in 1948, the youngest in 1977, gives ample evidence of the great importance for future life – within and outside the educational system – of basic skills. Individuals, who when they leave school lack these basic skills, of which sufficient literacy and numeracy are the keys, will not be able to take full part in the society in which they live.

Another large effort in trying to establish reliable and valid measures of the level of literacy – in this case world-wide – is at present taking place within the IEA.

Sweden, in collaboration with 35 countries, takes part in the IEA study on Reading Literacy. This is an international research endeavour that will give each of the participating countries a rich material to work with in the context of literacy. From Swedish points of view, not only the main study but also the possibilities for a wide range of special studies, will undoubtedly furnish professionals in schools as well as politicians with material for discussions and debates.

Apart from the main study – the reading literacy level of 9- and 14-year olds in an international perspective – the following special studies have been discussed.

- i) Immigrant students in Swedish schools – what is their level of reading literacy in Swedish?
- ii) What changes – if any – have taken place regarding the level of literacy between 1970 and 1991? (The first IEA Reading Comprehension study was conducted in 1970.)
- iii) The level of reading literacy in the home language among immigrant students in Swedish schools. Here there will be a unique opportunity to relate the results from these groups in Sweden with their counterparts in the home countries. Consequently, can Sweden live up to one of the main goals of immigrant policy – bilingualism?
- iv) The level of reading literacy in modern languages among Swedish students.

## **5. Provision of Adult Education and Learning**

### **Goals of Adult Education**

All adult education organized and subsidized by the State, whether credential or non-credential, is subject to goals of educational policy defined by the Riksdag (Parliament).

Adult education, then, has the following aims:

1. To bridge the education gaps and in this way promote greater equality and social justice.
2. To increase the ability of adults to understand, critically appraise and take part in cultural, social and political life and in this way contribute towards the development of a democratic society.
3. To train adults for various duties, to contribute towards the transformation of working life and to help achieve full employment, in this way promoting development and progress in society.
4. To cater to individual adult preferences with respect to wider opportunities of study and education, and to give them an opportunity of supplementing the education received in their formative years.

In principle, adult education is open to all adults and to groups spontaneously turning to it, either as a means of improving their general knowledge of one or more fields or because they find it necessary to improve their competence in the community or at work. These studies are often of a wide-ranging, basic character, and above all they provide persons whose youth education was brief and insufficient with an opportunity of raising their general level of knowledge.

### **Different Forms of Adult Education**

The traditionally strong position of adult education is partly connected with the large number of mandators. Study circles, for example, are organized by eleven adult education associations whose members include all the leading popular movements. The folk high schools have more than fifty different mandators.

These many different mandators operate independently of each other, and so there are very good prospects for the total mass of activities corresponding to the many different needs existing among adults. The numerous mandators, as well as their affiliations to popular movements, also provide opportunities for wideranging involvement and for widespread, active recruitment.

Ever since the 1960's, the Swedish authorities have actively supported various forms of adult education, the aim being to bridge educational gaps and provide opportunities for current education. Adult education, just like youth education, has to be organized in such a way as to be generally available to all comers, which means that special resources have to be earmarked for the educationally disadvantaged. The union organizations of manual and salaried workers, LO and TCO, have played an active part in spurring social reform.

Adult education is a manifold concept. One possible basis of classification is the distinction between formal or credential adult education, popular education and

personnel education. A fourth type, including elements of both credential and personnel education; is labour market training or employment training.

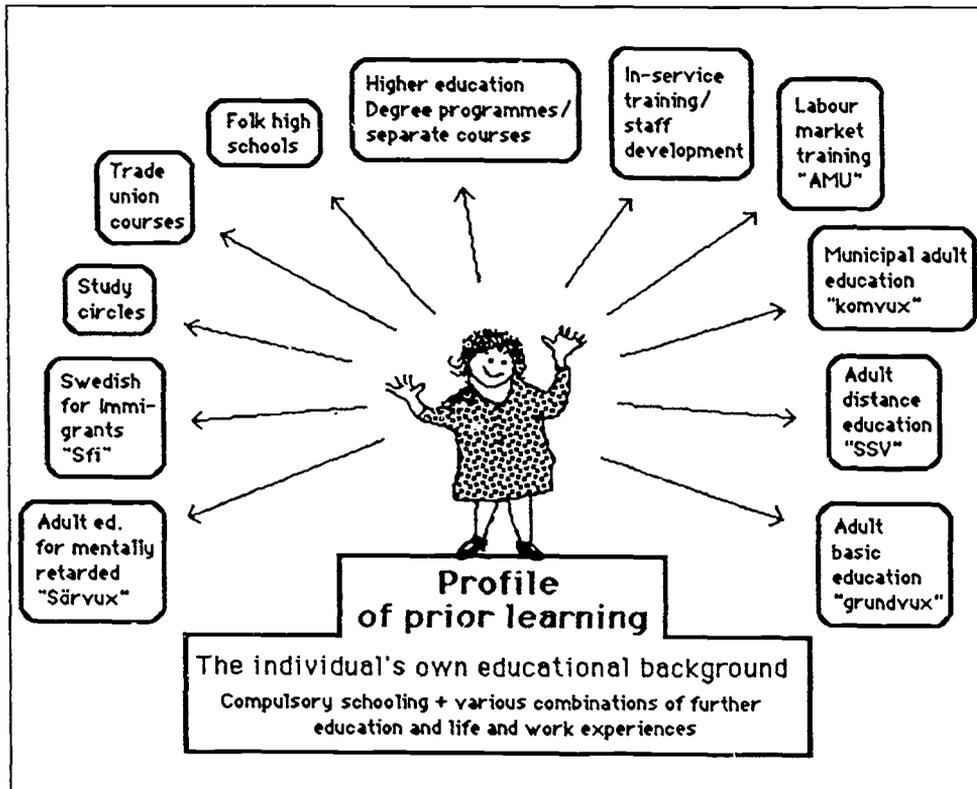


Figure 1 The provision of adult education opportunities in Sweden (not adapted to the proportion of the volume of different forms of adult education).

### Formal Adult Education

Formal adult education comprises basic education for adults (*grundvux*), which is operated by means of authorities with State grants, and municipal adult education (*komvux*). This type of education can also be taken to include basic Swedish language instruction for immigrants. Formal adult education is above all aimed at giving adults a chance of making up for deficiencies in their previous schooling and of qualifying for further studies, for vocational education or for employment.

## **Popular Adult Education**

Popular adult educational activities, comprising studies at folk high schools or under the ægis of adult educational associations, are partly State-subsidized. To qualify for subsidies, the education has to meet certain general conditions, but otherwise the mandators are at complete liberty to decide the emphases and content of educational activities for themselves.

The abundant variety and generous availability of popular education also make it possible to reach those who would otherwise not go in for educational activities. Popular education has the declared objective of developing basic democratic values in society. This education confers knowledge and skills, but perhaps its main importance lies in strengthening the self-confidence of the participants, increasing their understanding and respect for other people's opinions and in this way contributing towards the democratization of society.

## **Labour Market Training**

Sweden has a very active labour market policy, aimed at sustaining full employment. Labour market training is an important measure for the prevention and solution of unemployment problems. Mostly it takes the form of specially organized vocational training, but it can also make use of the regular educational system.

## **In-service Training and Staff Development**

Personnel education or in-service training, in the present context, can be defined as the education which concerns employees and is organized on the employer's terms and at his expense in companies and national and local authorities. Decisions relating to personnel education, then, are made by the employer, but the trade unions are able to exert various degrees of influence. Sweden does not have any legislation governing entitlement to or influence on personnel education, but agreements on the subject have begun to develop between the labour market parties.

There is no comprehensive information available concerning all personnel education in Sweden, and there are great gaps in our knowledge regarding the scope of different educational influence.

Labour force sample surveys (AKU) are regularly undertaken in Sweden by Statistics Sweden (SCB), which is a national authority for the compilation of statistics. According to an AKU survey report in 1987, more than one million persons or just over 25 per cent of the employed population took part in some

form of personnel education during the first half of that year. There are great differences between categories of employees. In terms of union membership, 20 per cent of LO members, 38 per cent of TCO members and 48 per cent of SACO members (SACO being the national organization of graduate employees) were involved in personnel education. This imbalance becomes even more pronounced if we take into account the duration of education. The already well-educated receive twice as much personnel education as others. The average per member and year in this respect is 2.3 days for LO members, 4.3 days for TCO members and 6 days for SACO members. A summary of a recent study by Statistics Sweden on volume and participation of in-service training in Sweden is presented in the appendix.

### **Adult Education in Sweden – Some Main Characteristics**

The purpose of this introduction has been to present some of the ideological principles of Swedish adult education, with special emphasis on a labour-market perspective and on a general distribution of the organisation and content of adult education in Sweden.

There are of course several other possible ways of describing Swedish adult education to an international audience. One way is that of referring solely to the good intentions and the overriding objectives. Another is to describe as exhaustively as possible the goals, content and participants of the various forms of education. In this connection, however, it may be appropriate to try and summarize some of the main institutional conditions governing adult education in Sweden.

There are three important, basic conditions which have to be met in order for gainfully employed adults to be able to engage in educational activity of more than a recreational nature. There must be an adequate range of educational opportunities, the individual must be able to finance his or her educational activity, and there must be some form of guarantee concerning leave of absence from work.

The Swedish State Authorities have assumed responsibility for all three of these fields and have tried, by various means, to establish the necessary preconditions of adult educational activities.

#### *i) Adult Education in all Municipalities*

All citizens, regardless of residential locality and social status, have – at least from a formal sense – equal access to adult education. The creation of municipal and national adult education – a parallel organization to youth education – gives adults an opportunity of acquiring the same competence and formal qualifications as are conferred by youth education. The direct support given by the State to popular education, in the form of extensive subsidies for both study circle activities and folk high schools, has given popular education an internationally unique position.

Both formal (credential) and popular education have, as a result of public support, been established throughout the country. State subsidies also make it possible for education to be provided at very little charge or none at all. The broad geographical distribution of learning opportunities, does not imply, however, that traditional obstacles to adult learning, such as lack of self-confidence, restrictions of study-assistance, cross-pressure of different social expectations of adults, etc., do not operate in Sweden.

*ii) Broad Provision of Study Assistance*

Sweden has opted for a separate system of educational leave of absence and various social and financial benefits for students. Thus at all educational levels the individual first applies for an educational programme and is then able, through the study assistance schemes, to obtain coverage of personal expenses. "Study Assistance" (studiemedel), consisting of a small grant and a larger loan, is something to which all members of the community are entitled. For gainfully employed adults, in addition, there is special adult study assistance, which is partly income-related and is intended to make up for loss of earnings. This latter benefit is applied for on a benefit basis and priority is given to the educationally disadvantaged. Participants in labour market education programmes are entitled to a special educational grant (utbildningsbidrag), that needs not be repaid.

This ability to finance studies by means of separate social benefits gives the individual a rather free choice of educational form and speciality.

*iii) Law of Educational Leave of Absence*

The Swedish legislation, guaranteeing entitlement to educational leave, underlines individual liberty in the educational situation. Thus all gainfully employed persons are entitled by law to educational leave, without any restriction as regards its duration or the choice of studies. The employers cannot reject such an application, but he has the right to postpone the studies for six months at most.

*iv) Studies as Part of the Renewal of Working Life*

Adult studies and learning also occupy a prominent position in the reform of working life. The Shop Stewards Act, the Co-determination Act and various collective agreements entitle trade union representatives to devote time to studies during paid working hours. Just as labour market policy is vitally important to adult education, questions concerning job content and control of working life, as well as the working environment, have a crucial bearing on learning interests and further educational activities.

Workplace training in the form of personnel education is in fact the sector of Swedish education which has grown most rapidly in recent years. Working life as a setting for educational activities and learning is expected to expand further in the future, partly as a result of the greater emphasis being put by employers on competent development and learning organizations instead of conventional courses and built-in education programmes.

## 6. Post-literacy and Lifelong Education – Ideas and Examples

Literacy is a hot issue in the Swedish school debate. There are many explanations for this. Being literate is a necessary key to a deeper understanding of cultural traditions and the history of each country. Literacy is, however, not only an issue of empowerment and active citizenship in society. It also reflects the symbolic control or domination by different interests and values. Literacy is an inherent dimension of the notion of lifelong education and learning. It is also highly relevant in all forms of post-compulsory education. Furthermore, literacy teaching comprises a variety of educational methods and teaching approaches. Thus, research on literacy and basic skills comprises a number of approaches with different subjects and disciplines. In a more general perspective, research does not solve problems, but it can help us find out how we can develop methods and practices on our road to a more literate and numerate society.

### The Knowledge Gap in Sweden – Defining the Problem

In a summary of this nature, it might be expedient to pay attention to the extent and the manner in which the following questions have been treated in an international debate:

- a) How many clearly defined adult illiterates are there in various industrial or post-industrial countries?
- b) How large a part of the adult population in these countries has reading and writing disabilities of an evident nature?
- c) How many adults lack sufficient basic skills in order to take part effectively in society as far as work, family and civic rights and responsibilities are concerned?

A question of central importance for most post-industrial societies is that there are more or less large groups of adults with considerable reading and writing disabilities, but who are not illiterate. The norm used in this context is usually the extent of earlier schooling. The number of years a person has attended school is sometimes a necessary, but not always conclusive criterium. There are many adults with a seven or eight year education who still have dyslexic difficulties.

The number of adults with an educational level of less than nine years is gradually decreasing from 65 per cent in 1960, 18 per cent in 1990, to an estimated 10 per cent in the year 2000 and a bare 5 per cent in 2010. As of this date, there is no empirical data in order to determine how large a proportion of this group has reading and writing disabilities. It is also difficult to determine how many of those now in upper-secondary schools, who experience a lack of communicative skills in reading, writing and speaking.

A conceptually and pedagogically more difficult problem is how many adults lack the necessary skills to assert and maintain their rights in society in a capable manner. The information society we live in today and in which we will live in the future will demand basic skills far in excess of what is now the result of a completed compulsory education.

Over the last years the debate and research concerning basic skills of adults and literacy developed and achieved greater importance. Adult literacy, or rather functional adult literacy (a somewhat dubious term) is now a vital policy area in several OECD countries, and especially in the United States and Canada.

A knowledge-oriented overview based on the theme of *functional adult literacy* is being carried out within the CERI/OECD. The study will deal with the following four problems:

- a) a definition of the different facets of the problem
- b) an assessment and evaluation of the scope of the problem and its various manifestations
- c) adult educational efforts for the various groups
- d) basic skills, productivity and economic development

### **Lifeline for Lifelong Reading – A Challenge for Upper Secondary Schools**

Ever since the middle of the 1980s, Swedish educational policy has had as its motto: "Upper Secondary School for All." Upper secondary school is said to be compulsory, if not in principle, at least in practice. Almost all young people continue to further studies, both theoretical and vocational preparatory courses.

There is one group of young people who, despite having gone through nine years of elementary education, still have serious deficiencies as far as basic abilities to read and write are concerned, or who look upon themselves as being outsiders or observers where upper secondary schooling is concerned. There are a number of reasons for this and it is not always a clear-cut question of lack of knowledge. The responsibility of municipal educational authorities to followup pupils who have completed basic education is an important tool in pin-pointing the needs of these young people and stimulating them to carry on with their studies or to enter the job market.

In the report entitled "*Lifeline for Lifelong Learning – Background Analyses Leading to a Pedagogical Programme for Municipal Follow-up Activities*" (1989) Torsten Madsén and Ingegärd Sandström provide a wide overview of what can be done to stimulate young people who risk dropping out from both

studies and work. Typical symptoms for groups included in their study were lack of skills, low self-esteem and school fatigue.

The authors see the most important objective of follow-up activities as being "... partly to alter the view they have of themselves and partly to change their attitude to studies and knowledge." It is both content and communicative competence which should be focused upon, not form, grammar or rigid rules of style. Superficial perusing must be replaced by a deeper more meaningful reading.

### Adult Education

All adults without basic skills in reading and writing are entitled to special programmes in adult basic education (ABE). Courses in Swedish for immigrants are provided all around the country. Literacy and learning is a major issue in a number of folk high schools and study circles. Special attention is also given to adults with learning disabilities. One such example is the provision of easy readers. The Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company has produced a number of programmes for adults with learning barriers or weak educational tradition. Also, the role of trade unions must be mentioned concerning "new" learners. An accurate description of the ABE-programmes is presented in NBE Information 90:12. Our purpose in this context is to illuminate the problem of having reading and writing difficulties.

What measures should be taken in society in order to enhance reading literacy on a broad range? One major condition is, of course, the production of good and readable books. An interesting Swedish experience in this field is published by the Swedish National Board of Education and written by Elsie Bellander and Beata Lundström: "*How to Publish Easy Readers - A Model.*" The ER-books are intended for:

"... the adult reader who experiences reading difficulty of some kind. Some readers find it difficult to understand, others have through injury or illness lost their language or are too weak to read at any length. For another group of readers Swedish is a foreign language.

Many readers need an intermediary, a middleman, who can be a friend or a librarian. There is a need for someone to point out and pave the way to reading pleasure."

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## 7. Current Development in Swedish Adult Basic Education

### Organizational Changes

At the present time in Sweden a certain type of basic education is available to adults (*grundvux*), where people with the lack of proper training in reading, writing and arithmetic can obtain instruction in these areas up to the level of grade 6 in the public schools. The basic training also includes social studies and general science. There is no stipulated course of studies or curriculum. Teaching content and working methods are adapted to suit the participants. The teacher and group together decide what is important to study and how the group will best arrive at the overall goal of taking part in Swedish working life and society.

For those adults who lack knowledge and skills equivalent to the level of the three last years of compulsory education (grades 7-9) there is another form of adult education, namely municipal adult education (*komvux*). This type of education has fixed syllabi and an established time schedule. Courses are offered in twelve different subjects.

For various reasons – among others in order to simplify the transition from one type of studies to the other – these two forms of education will be consolidated, resulting in one single form: *adult basic education*. This change is part of a recent government bill submitted to the Swedish parliament. Swedish municipalities are not only obligated to provide this education to all citizens, but also to initiate outreach activities to meet the needs of the most neglected adult learners.

### New Curriculum

During 1991/92 extensive work will be carried out in order to develop the various time schedules and curricula for the new form of education.

With these goals in mind, ideas and views are being discussed extensively. One central point of debate is to what extent educational content should be established in overall curricula (how detailed and enumerated they should be) and to what extent the course of studies should be the concern of the individual teachers and groups themselves.

As a preliminary part of this future work, a pilot study has been carried out (1990/91) bearing the assertive title: *Process-oriented syllabi for teaching at compulsory school level*. The purpose of the project has been to develop syllabi which to an overall extent specify subject and subject structure, but where each teacher and group are given the latitude to concrete the course and progression

of studies. This is achieved by a teacher/group defining their own objectives, contents, working methods and means for evaluation and it can be carried out in several stages within the framework of the overall curriculum.

### What Are Basic Skills?

Another question that is being discussed while attempting to outline future curricula is how to define the concept of *basic skills*. Should it be expressed subject-wise, e.g. "being able to write using correct grammar and spelling", or in more functional terms, e.g. "being able to formulate a written application for employment"?

In order to provide for a better basis for discussion, a secondary project has been carried out where four under-educated adults have been studied in work and everyday situations. Conditions and circumstances have been noted where the lack of basic skills has hampered or hindered social and working life. At best, the study can be used as a basis for attempting to describe basic skills in more functional terms, i.e. what is important to be able to succeed at – using skills in reading, writing and arithmetic – in various situations.

A matter of discussion in this context is whether the concept of basic skills should also include an individual's confidence in his or her own ability to study, the will to learn, the ability to structure studies and study habits and the ability to work as part of a group.

## 8. Towards a Comprehensive Research Strategy

### Learning Basic Skills in Schools

*The World Declaration on Education for All* presents us with a broad spectrum of responsibilities. As stated before, research cannot solve problems, but research can help in finding ways to political, educational and social decisions regarding means to give every individual the prerequisites for a full life.

The compulsory school form has a special responsibility for giving children basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. But school as an institution cannot and should not decide on its own what is essential in this respect. School prepares children for life and therefore the demands placed upon it must be made taking into account all those aspects of life and learning that an individual will confront after leaving the school environment.

There must never be a limit or ceiling in the structure that school can give its pupils. On the other, hand there must be a foundation or base that is so well constructed and stable that a pupil can stand firmly upon it. To be able to read

and write is a skill that needs continual practice. Learning to read is the prerequisite for reading to learn.

As far as research is concerned there are a number of factors that must be observed. Literacy can be instilled in school, but it must also be developed and cultivated in school. Few areas – with the possible exception of arithmetic and mathematics – arouse such strong feeling in the academic community among researchers as that of learning to read. There are many who think they have discovered THE method and for whom continued research in that method and testimony that it is the only right and true method have become a main ambition and goal.

These controversies in the world of research and the many debates among researchers stand out in sharp contrast to the fact that one billion people in the world today can neither read nor write.

Studies concerning the acquisition of literacy and numeracy – how an individual can learn to decipher a linguistic or numeric code – is a matter of course in the Swedish national programme for research in the field of education. Special attention has been given for several decades to individuals or groups of individuals who for various reasons have more difficulty than others in breaking these codes. In a certain sense we are dealing with comparative studies – groups with differing qualifications and prerequisites of physical, but above all, mental nature. This research is just as necessary for adults as it is for children – although literacy in Sweden is generally at a high level does not mean that there is total literacy or that it is at a high enough level for certain groups of individuals. For many adults, the lack of functional literacy is something acquired – they have been able to read at one point, but have been “allowed to forget.”

### The Need to Assess Adult Literacy Levels

The concept of *basic skills* can therefore not be used exclusively in a school environment – it is equally as imperative that it be observed in working life. In the Swedish labour force there are about 850,000 individuals (of 4.5 million) who still have less formal education than nine years. In ten years there will be about half as many. The number of individuals in the labour force who do not possess the knowledge, skills and concepts that Swedish nine-year compulsory school is supposed to give is, on the other hand, not known. We know that almost one out of five immigrants taking part in basic education for adults does not have any prior education, and one out of every three has three years of schooling at the most. The number of adults with serious reading and writing disabilities is also not known, but the number of years spent in school is of little importance for this group of people. The number of adults who lack the necessary skills and knowledge in order to maintain their rights in society in a competent manner is even more difficult to ascertain.

At this point we do not have satisfactory facts and information to pin-point the whole problem. It will have to suffice to note that reading and writing disabilities of various types and levels of difficulty are to be found in many different groups, for example:

- adults with mental disabilities
- adults with other functional disabilities
- immigrants with little or no schooling
- Swedes with deficient schooling
- young people, who, despite having attended school for eleven or twelve years, lack basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics

The need for increased knowledge is evident. It is still far from being clear how many lack the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare them for working life in the twenty-first century.

Our knowledge of what will comprise necessary basic skills for working life is also incomplete – and thereby also knowledge of the scope and direction of the educational needs that should be met among the adult population. The NBE has estimated that it is not self-evident that a level of knowledge, on par with that taught in compulsory school today, can be used as a framework for what will be considered necessary skills and knowledge in working life of this decade and the decade to come. It is more reasonable to assume that knowledge corresponding to a level of two years in upper secondary school will be required in subjects such as Swedish, English, mathematics and social studies.

The NBE proposes to carry out a more extensive study of these questions within the framework of its research programme – if the necessary funds are allocated. The result of such a study could be used as an important policy groundwork and basis for further decisions. It would be of importance, not only within the field of adult education, but also as far as the continuing development of upper secondary schools are concerned.

For a long time basic general education together with basic vocational training have been considered a function and responsibility of society. This principle has been cited among others for justifying a curtailment of the number of courses that could be struck from the list of those offered in upper secondary school and municipal adult education – in reference to possibilities of commissioned training. The task of guaranteeing all adults basic skills at the above level is, however, of such proportions that a traditional division of responsibility between the public sector, employers and the individual may well have to be reexamined.

### Questions for a Study of Adult Literacy in Sweden

As a foundation for a Swedish study there are several questions to be discussed concerning an analysis of adult reading and writing disabilities and also basic skills:

1. Should a survey be carried out of the population as a whole or should it relate to various sub-groups?
2. What knowledge and skills should be given priority? Should special attention be paid to reading, writing, speaking or mathematic skills? What should be used as a norm in the analysis? Should a minimum level of knowledge be related to a certain level of education achieved in compulsory school, i.e. the eighth grade, or should the level be higher, i.e. completed nine-year compulsory education or even two years of studies at an upper secondary level? Should *other* functional criteria be chosen from areas of work and day-by-day life?
3. To what extent can a self-estimation of reading proficiency be used in such an analysis? What connection is there between a level of education and ability of self-estimation as far as reading and writing are concerned?
4. Which of the above-mentioned methods is most reliable and valid seen from a scientific point of view? How usable are the methods when seen in the light of what result that can be achieved in day-by-day adult educational work? Is there a conflict between a scientifically representative and a pedagogically expedient perspective?
5. Suppose that the AKU\*\* model is chosen as a first step in an analysis and that 2-3 questions at the most are of immediate importance. How, then, should these questions be expressed?

### In Search of a Comparative Dimension

There are other forms of comparative studies that are also needed to enable us to broaden our knowledge of reading conditions for learning. The international comparative studies which have been carried out and which are in the process of being carried out can, if used in the right way, give the world a greater understanding of the varying conditions of a social, economic and structural nature that there are for both individual and society. International comparative studies

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\*\* The AKU-model relates to Swedish labour market surveys which are carried out regularly in order to describe both labour market participation and different characteristics of the labour force such as educational standards and study motivation.

of educational systems are often termed as attempts to compare the incomparable. This is true in cases where only outcomes are compared, without accounting for preconditions for learning in the different countries. What is interesting about comparative studies, especially internationally, is however comparisons of systems and what they can teach us about the importance of economic, geographical and structural conditions for student outcomes.

There is also a need for a more interdisciplinary agenda in order to understand the social implications and costs of illiteracy both in Third World countries and in post-industrialized societies. To what extent are self-experienced reading and writing difficulties a direct factor in social maladjustment in school, working life and in recreational activities? How can literacy, social segregation and economic development be elucidated in a wider social perspective? Can the public costs of illiteracy really be assessed? To be able to answer these questions we need a more detailed and balanced picture of the different steps in the ladder of literacy. This we need in order to acquire a better view of the dimensions and functions of the phenomenon pertaining to both individual and society as a whole.

## **9. The Future Literacy Mission – A Swedish Approach**

### **Sweden and the World**

Both today and in the future the greatest challenge of the International Literacy Year will be how we are to avoid a global learning disaster in the Third World. Active measures must be taken through international organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO and through bilateral channels. In a Swedish context, the international work carried out by the various popular movements is an important contribution.

### **The World and Sweden**

International affairs are an increasingly important factor in schools and adult education. Questions concerning peace, environment, survival and global justice can be illustrated in a large number of ways. It is even important to convey background knowledge and frames of reference in order to understand in a better way current and imminent social, political and religious conflicts. There are great challenges in this respect, both within the frame of adult education and even more so within popular education. An increasing number of new citizens in Sweden coming from the Third World should be a pedagogical asset in popular education.

### **Outside the Classroom**

Basic education for adults and Swedish language training for immigrants are two important areas in the domains of literacy. Many important contributions are, however, needed outside classrooms, in libraries, mass media, welfare institutions and prisons. An especially significant area is within the family and the role it plays concerning reading and dialogue. More attention should be paid to *family literacy*.

Reading has deep roots in popular education and it can take on several different shapes and forms such as reading study circles, courses in creative writing or public speaking, study circles concerning various civic questions and democratic participation in decision-making or courses for people with different handicaps and adults with reading and writing disabilities.

### **At the Workplace**

Demands for greater skills increase as the knowledge-based society continues to develop. Current studies and surveys point at the need for good basic skills and general knowledge. Representatives of labour and management stress continually the importance of personnel education and personnel development for retaining competency reserves in Sweden.

On-the-site projects aimed at strengthening basic skills at the workplace provide good examples of how to implement and carry out the goals of literacy.

### **Culture and Media**

Oral traditions have become overshadowed by the extensive amount of written material in all facets of society. Are we again at a new crossroad where the written word will become engulfed by storms of sounds and pictures created in a mass media-oriented society? Irrespective of the mould and cast of public dialogue and apart from which new media take shape, the ability to read with insight and understanding is an increasingly vital goal for adult education. The concept of literacy must therefore be expanded to include the ability of a citizen to take part in, analyze and be well-acquainted with all forms of communication in society.

### **Changing Times – Changing Literacy**

The examples shown in this text outline the broad range of issues with relevance to global and national literacy missions. It also raises a lot of questions. Do we

need more research and knowledge or is it now time for action? The answer cannot be a simple yes or no. We need of course a great amount of engagement in the global perspective in order to combat the world-wide literacy gap. The problems are so complex, however, that we are far away from "the whole truth and nothing but the truth..." regarding literacy and society.

Are we moving from the era of *oral literacy* to the parenthesis of *reading literacy* and on to the new age of *pictorial literacy*? Will the computerization of our communicative patterns lead to a degeneration of our personal memory capacity? And will our expanding and speeded-up "sound and image-culture" allow no space for our imagination and dreams? So far, there might be more questions than answers and much more of an open space for a global dialogue in a world full of words.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is to a large extent based on the report *Reading – A Key to Many Worlds* (in Swedish only). I am grateful to Dr. Inger Marklund, Research Director, NBE, for providing background material on reading literacy in youth education as well as on the IEA-study.

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## WEAK READERS IN THE UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Margareta Grogarn

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What is the very worst thing about being a bad reader in a society where the ability to read is growing in importance and is vital for a well-functioning life? What is the very worst?

Every day during the last 20 years I have met them – the bad readers, now teenagers, those who have suffered from this handicap during their whole schooling. I have met them in the Upper Secondary School and also in a prison where I worked as a teacher for some years. I have listened to them, listened to their traumatic experiences, their feelings of inferiority, their feelings of never being good enough at school and in their families. Not fitting in our society.

These students very seldom put the blame on others. They themselves are guilty of the problems.

So – as I see it today, the very worst thing is that bad reading ability often creates a very low self-esteem and that too many young boys and girls unnecessarily – really! – embark on life with the feelings – the “knowledge” – of not being good enough! It is a very bad start to grown-up life. How could they ever overcome both the handicap of not being good enough *and* of being a bad reader?

In my work as a special teacher in the Upper Secondary School, where the students are 16–20 years of age, I encounter many – far too many – students who are *incapable of reading what they want and need to be able to read*. They are young people, who will soon leave school and whose chances in life are greatly limited by the inability to absorb written information. Since I have also been lecturing at most of Sweden's Upper Secondary Schools for the last ten years and have been privileged to meet thousands of teachers, I am aware of this nationwide problem, which is continually growing.

This trend is looked upon with concern among the teaching staff, and one asks oneself how it has arisen. Many teachers are trying to devise new methods to teach children to read, and in some schools major efforts are being made with regard to literacy and stimulating unimpeded reading.

Also in the Upper Secondary School many teachers have given their very best to help weak readers to do all right in order to pass their examinations and many teachers try to break new grounds for these pupils.

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During the last years quite a heated debate on literacy has been conducted at times, where the combatants have often asserted that they were in possession of the only correct literacy method. According to my experience, however, it is not so much a question of method, but rather of children's possibilities regarding language development during pre-school age.

Many of my students can recall how they – in comparison with other classmates – started school at 7 years of age without a really functioning language. Their parents hadn't the energy or the ability to contribute towards their children's linguistic development. Many of the youngsters are for instance unable to remember if their parents ever read fairy tales to them, let alone took them along to a library.

TV and video have provided the children with fairy tales, through which they have also received their language training. Constantly, when I ask my students if we can read any of the classics, for instance Robinson Crusoe, Huckleberry Finn or Ulysses, they say: "No, I don't need to read it, I've already seen it on TV."

All too many pupils say that their parents are so attached to the TV that they simply don't have time to talk to their children. One young man said to me: "My parents are far more interested in the plastic-figures in Dallas and Falcon Crest than they are in me! They can't imagine that I am at least as interesting as those stereotypes!"

I consider that the parents bear a very great responsibility for the children's language development. School cannot undertake to repair *all* negligence on their part. And it is probably impossible – with 25–30 pupils in the classroom sometimes with many different mother tongues – to compensate children linguistically for what they didn't get during their first four years in life.

Nevertheless, we must ensure that adequate resources are earmarked to prevent *any* pupil from having to leave the compulsory secondary school without satisfactory reading and writing ability.

But we have to start much earlier. As I see it, it is important that all parents very early get information about how to train their children linguistically. Most parents visit the Child Welfare Center with their newborn babies. Consequently that's a good place to distribute not only folders concerning children's books but also information about how parents in an active way can – and as a matter of fact are responsible to – contribute towards their children's linguistic development. To talk together everyday, to cook and bake and talk about it, to play football, go fishing and talk – *together!* We have to ask parents to choose their children before TV-programmes. We have to inform parents that children who start school with a limited language often encounter difficulties in reading and also that children need help with language-training from their parents during their whole schooling.

Later on I am going to talk about my work but first I will say something about my scientific work and about my books.

In two of my books, *Bad Reading*, which is my dissertation from 1979, and in *Tedious Reading*, I have analysed the reading and writing ability of certain groups of pupils in the Upper Secondary School in different ways.

The aim was to describe 500 students who attended vocational lines, their background and general school performances, their attitudes to previous schooling, to the subject Swedish, to books and reading. In particular I discuss the attitudes of the "non-reading" students and I show how various educational factors tend to increase the gap between poor and good readers and to create poor self-concept.

In these books I have also shown how I in my job with "uninterested" pupils practically try to find new grounds in order to improve their reading, spelling, writing and self-esteem.

In my latest publication, *Jerky Reading*, I analyse how 28 students, who are normal achievers but weak readers, tackle texts. The students had to record sections from two very easy junior stage books on tape. Then I studied very carefully what makes their reading so jerky and, in many respects, incomprehensible to themselves.

The study revealed that a remarkably large number of these grown-up students cannot automatically link the right symbol or letter to the right sound. For example they confuse a/e, e/i, u/o, b/p and the most common u/y. This doesn't mean that they don't know the alphabet. It's just that the connection between sound and symbol is not sufficiently trained from the very beginning. This uncertainty with regard to sound means that either they must make a short pause – but still a pause – in the reading and reflect or, what is most usual, guess wildly. This makes the reading slow and creates great uncertainty in regard to the content of the text.

Some pupils have never reinforced their learning of the left-right direction for reading. They "pick up" the letters and "reshuffle" them a bit to suit their idea of what the text is about, e. g. how – who, there – their.

They guess-read, often reading the first three-four letters in a word and guessing the rest. For example, "misfit" is read as "misfire" and "contain" as "constrain". Long words are considered troublesome and give rise to continual guessing. "Effulgence" can be read as "efflorescence" etc.

It's easy for us to understand that this kind of reading causes confusion and that just the sight of a thick book, closely written, with long words, small letters, lots of text, curious names and no pictures can make a bad reader feel sick.

During the past five years I have observed that to an ever increasing degree, pupils guess small words like *if/it*, *where/what*, *to/too*, *who/how*, *were/where* and *the/they*. The commonest misreadings, however, apply to the Swedish words *de/det/den/dem*, *en/ett*, *han/hon*, *sin/sitt/sina* and *din/ditt/dina*.

You might think that small faults like these are of minor importance. But on the contrary! Whenever misreading occurs, it means uncertainty and having to be corrected, the student having to stop and reread. For example, the student reads: "They ... they ... men went away", where it is written "The men went away". Similarly, the student reads: "He did it like you", instead of "He did not like you". The student reads: "She asked with ... of (confusion!) with ... of...", instead of "She asked which of them".

Sometimes the content becomes quite absurd, but the students accept it, as they don't *know* that they have been reading faultily. For instance, they have no idea what significance a slightly misread preposition, pronoun or ending can have for the content. For example the pupil reads: "He has ever been happy" – instead of "He has never been happy".

I consider this type of misreading very serious. It is hard to handle especially for teachers, who know little about dyslexia. For the student this kind of reading creates confusion coupled with poor self-confidence. He or she always has a feeling of being on thin ice. Too many misreadings of that kind naturally make the student lose interest in reading.

Most weak readers are characterized by their slow, jerky reading. Many of them say that this only applies when they read aloud in the presence of others. I permitted myself to be deceived by this for many years, but now I know that reading aloud bumpily nearly always signifies excessively slow silent reading. A slow reader normally uses an extremely slow phonetic reading technique. The majority also make use of some form of silent pronunciation, which means that they read the words silently to themselves, perhaps several times, before they dare to read aloud. This results in disintegrated, hesitant reading and there is a great risk that the reader will lose track of the content, since the short-term memory does not function with excessively slow reading.

Really weak readers are also distinguished by constant repetition of phrases, initial stuttering and reading of syllables. Needless to say, this does not contribute towards pleasurable reading.

In my analysis I also found that the vast majority of weak readers have no feeling for or knowledge of language rhythm. Because, due to their poor decoding ability, their syntax and reversal faults, along with their prosodic, lexical and morphological misreading, they have never experienced any rhythm when reading.

A person who cannot read rhythmically, generally has difficulty in rhyming. My students tend to emphasize that rhyme and poetry is nothing for them. "It's far too difficult, in fact it is incomprehensible" It only causes trouble and unnecessary brain work!" And it is obvious that if all your efforts have to be devoted to the actual decoding of a text, very little energy will remain, either for the content or for the rhythm and rhyme.

However, this does not mean that they *cannot* rhyme! When I help them through reading and verse aloud rhythmically, to their great surprise they generally feel all rhymes easily.

Thus – we shall not take for granted that rhymes are within easy reach of all Upper Secondary School students! If we want to supply poetry, we shall have to reconsider matters and proceed warily.

But bad reading is not only a question of bad technique. Many students regard reading as disinteresting, toilsome and dreary, since they lack words and expressions. And then I am not talking about long and "difficult" words, but rather easy ones, as sinew, carcass, dew etc. Even if they read in an acceptable phonetic manner, the words don't give them any pictures and mean nothing to them. Then teachers and parents are not aware of being cheated by the "good" reading! They hear a fluent reading, they see the clever pupil and they can't understand that the reader doesn't understand what he reads!

Many, many students have told me, that they only read because the *have to* do so. But they neither think about nor pay attention to the content. For them, reading is something disagreeable that has to be carried out and endured. The teacher ordered them to. But, as you know, you can lead the horse to the water but you can't force him to drink! The students have told me, how they just sit there, in a corner, quietly, shifting pages in a "proper" way.

Of course, those who lack words and expressions, and those who battle with extremely poor scanning technique, do not experience the joy of reading. Reading is just hard work! And *boring*! However much energy we adults spend on finding a really enticing book, we can encounter solid opposition. We must accept that a student cannot always, even if he or she wants to, read what we teachers consider to be "good literature".

And now – back to reality, to my job. As I said before, I work as a, what we say in Sweden, special teacher, helping students 16–19 years of age, whose reading and writing problems are so great that they have difficulties to manage in their studies. It is a wonderful job in many ways. First of all it's such a pleasure to work together and to be together with these rather grown-up students. They *always* come to me voluntarily and in their leisure time and that's a good condition for our work. And I never see more than *one* student at a time! That's the only way for me to do a good job! First of all because every student is unique,

and in the second place, after nine years of failures in reading, his or her problems are also unique. If you really want to help grown-up persons with reading and writing problems you can't pack them together and give them the same "medicine". You can not handle auditive and visual dyslexia in the same way and you can't handle dyslexia in the same way as just lack of linguistic and reading training.

Another reason to see one student at a time is the psychological problems which are so connected with reading problems and which often and easily arise during the lessons. And my students behave just like most of you in this room – they hesitate to talk about their feelings of inferiority, when there are other people around them.

As I see it today, it's no idea to work with these "awful letters" if the student has too low a self-esteem, has psychological problems, is afraid of being exposed to bullying, thinking about the the threat of violence and incest at home or – even worse – is occupied by thoughts of suicide. I meet these problems more and more today. To understand this, you can go into yourself and find out how you manage in your job, if you have gloomy feelings of one kind or another!

Now I can hear some of you saying, that not all youngsters with reading difficulties have such bad problems. Naturally not! But there are too many! And you don't know who they are! Many young people are clever at disguising their feelings and you don't become dotted or striped from having black thoughts. It can take 4 months before a young person can rely on you so much that he dares to open up and tell you something about himself. Check yourselves! Then I'm sure you will understand.

So, when I see a student for the first time, we have a two hour long meeting. Even if the student always attend voluntarily, he or she is often very suspicious and without any hope. Learning to read no longer has the magnetism of newness and there are often adopted attitudes of more or less useful and successful cover-ups, which can be very tiring.

For me, the most important thing during this first lesson is to get into real touch with the student. I have to show that I *do* want to help, that he or she is worth going in for and that I will be totally open for all his or her needs.

I give some tests but not more than I need to find out the student's needs. I am especially keen on analysing any kind of dyslexia, so I can avoid mistakes in my planning.

Now the student has an opportunity to talk, freely, about schooling experience and – often – about the trauma of being a bad reader. I am very interested in what happened during the student's pre-school and infant school years and a very useful question is: "Can you remember if you longed to start school, when

you were 6-7 years old?" It often gives me a key to the problems. Many pupils say "No! I wanted to stay at home, playing", and now they can suddenly see that they were not mature enough for school-work. We can talk together about what happens, when a little boy or girl is forced to do something he or she is not ready for, for instance cycling, toilet-training or going up a staircase.

Another good question is: "Do you remember your very first teacher and did you like her?" Too often students tell me that they can't remember any teacher, "there were so many" and we can talk about in what way lack of continuation and peace during the first school years, when learning to read is so important, can damage everything for a little child.

The students have a chance to talk about memories of failures in reading and writing. But, as they say, "It's all my fault! I couldn't sit still on my chair in a proper way ... I was naughty ... and I didn't learn to read as my classmates did ... so I can understand and accept that the teachers disliked me."

This first meeting can be a turning point. For the first time in life the student can get a feeling of and understand that a little child with school problems in general and reading problems in particular *has no guilt!* As the student is mature enough now, I can also show him his or her strong points *and* needs.

And – the most important – now it is *the student's* choice! I can't force anyone to learn anything. And when the student says Yes to help – even if it is a hesitating Yes – it's *his* or *her* decision and that's the hotbed, giving me as a teacher a real possibility to help. And that is what makes it rather easy to work with high school pupils – this free choice of theirs.

Besides this, students 16-19 years of age are more mature for linguistic and logical explanations, they can see their future needs more clearly and they are mature enough to take in that they themselves as well as all other people – including teachers! – can develop linguistically. If this first meeting is well accomplished, it can give the student a new insight and a new hope and in addition also the very first step towards greater self-confidence.

After this first meeting I make a tailor-made training programme for each student, as everyone has unique needs.

When working with spelling I never use any ready-made material, no stencils, no spelling-exercise-books or computer-programmes. I use an empty exercise-book, a pencil, the student and my own experiences and knowledge. The intention with this training is first of all to give the student a linguistic consciousness. I want him to understand, how our Swedish language is constituted, I want the student to be able to generalize out from logical thinking and when this is at it's best, the student can get a glimpse of the pleasure of being able to rule over one's mother-tongue and to trust oneself using it.

When working with dyslexia, among other things I use a reading and writing programme called the Witting-method. Maja Witting from Uppsala here in Sweden is a scientist and a teacher, who has developed this training-program for very weak readers. In my opinion it functions very well, because it trains *everything* that people who suffer from dyslexia really need. (Here I have to point out that most of the students I have met during the last 20 years do not suffer from dyslexia. As I see it, it's just one to two per cent of those who have reading and writing problems who are dyslexics.) The Witting-method is, so to speak, all-embracing. It trains concentration, attention, pronunciation, articulation, speech, slow reading, silent reading and (if you wish) quick reading and reading aloud, listening, writing, handwriting, letter-sound-letter, left-right-reading, fantasy, creativity and linguistic consciousness.

Naturally it is also important to show the students how interesting, engaging, thrilling, fantastic, wonderful and romantic books can be. Many of my students have never read a whole book! And they'll never do it!! And that's that. It's a highly delicate task for me to introduce the right book at the right time in the right way to a refusing young boy or girl. Sometimes I have to read the first chapter aloud for them, sometimes we read the book together and sometimes I have to read the whole book aloud. For some pupils it's the only way to get any content.

My experience is that teachers and librarians often have too high aspirations in regard to the literary quality. They seem to have forgotten what kind of books they themselves enjoyed many, many years ago, but everyone – even grown-up students – have a right to a devour-period and if they didn't have it, when they were 11–12, then they need it now.

Sometimes – not very often – I meet with students who can not read at all, and then – thank God – we have the talking-books! These books give these, often very intelligent pupils, a good chance to meet with good literature, give them an opportunity to take part in discussions in the classroom and an experience of the unique excitement of reading. In order to give even the weak readers a chance to read “good” literature, I also translate and revise classics.

Today I often make use of relaxation and sometimes of light hypnosis in order to make the students let go of their tensions at the prospect of reading or to help them overcome their negative attitudes towards their own reading ability. It has been received very positively by everyone who has had the opportunity to try it. Twenty minutes of active relaxation can do miracles.

Some students often are blocked by their decision from long ago of being “word-blind” and the “fact” that it is inherited and thus irreparable. It can take a very long time, up to one year, to overcome this obstacle. That means that I have to work on two levels at the same time – both a logical and a psychological level. At the same time as I work with reading and writing, I have to help the

student with self-acceptance, help to show distortions in self-judgement and furthermore – the most difficult task – against all odds I have to help the student trust his or her own ability to invest in learning to read once again.

If the student is willing to do that, I myself have the absolute responsibility to bring about successful results. In one way or another, I have to use all methods I know to make each student a better reader and speller and at the same time help develop a better self-esteem. Otherwise the student will leave school as a *half reader* (able to read, but at the same time not read), which gives him or her *half understanding* and *half knowledge* along with feelings of *half attainment* in life.

Unfortunately our decision-makers do not yet realize how devastating it is for a nation that a large group of people are unable to assimilate written information, are unable to obtain the requisite knowledge, and are unable to participate in our cultural activities, simply because they are weak readers!

Maybe we can not help all students to be good readers, but I know that we can help everyone to be a better reader. *But* – to let bad reading create feelings of inferiority among young people is absolutely *not necessary*! It's a shame and I do hope, that we can affect the decision-maker to understand that. But then they have to think not only with their brains but – which will be the greatest challenge – they have to think also with their hearts!

This lecture was a greeting from my students to all of you and to all grown-up people all over the world. They wanted to say: See us! Listen to us! We need you – today more than ever!

## ALPHABETA VARIA – SOME ROOTS OF LITERACY IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

Egil Johansson

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In this small paper I want to give an outline of a project supported by the National Research Foundation. The theme of the project is: *Alphabeta varia – early ABC-books in various church traditions*. The aim is to study in a tentative way the shift from reciting by heart to some kind of reading of printed text in Sweden and other countries, as reflected in early printed material in various church traditions.<sup>1</sup>

### 1

My starting point is an old missionary scene from the counties where I am living and working. Ramsele in northern Sweden has become a most important place for historical research. At SVAR, Swedish Archive Information, in Ramsele, the Swedish National Archive, Stockholm, produces and collects an increasing amount of filmed materials, which are being accumulated from the whole country and from oldest time to the present day for some sources. Microfilmed sources, most importantly the famous Swedish church records, are transferred to microfiches, which are cataloged, copied and made available to researchers, libraries and individual scholars. Beautiful Ramsele, on the border between the provinces of Ångermanland and Jämtland, has become a center for research and conferences, welcoming visitors from near and far.<sup>2</sup> – This small village was in older times situated close to the border between Norway and Sweden, as we know from the old protocols according to the landmarks of the 13th century.

In a 13th century treaty there is a passage relevant to our subject, as follows. "At that time no-one in Straumi knew his Pater noster." Together with other delegated men, a farmer named Loden, in the 1230's walked the border between 'Rafnasill' (Ramsele) and the settlement in 'Straumi' (Ström). Later on, at the court in Sveg, 1273, he indicated the Lord's Prayer as marking the border of both the nations and the parishes, namely that "no-one knew his Pater noster in Straumi".<sup>3</sup> Pater noster, the Lord's Prayer, was thus one of the indicators of

<sup>1</sup> The project is going on for three years, 1989–91.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding SVAR, see, for example, Hur går vi vidare? Ett exempel: Forskningen och SVAR, ASF 1986, p 93–100.

<sup>3</sup> Handlingar rörande gränsen mellan Sverige och Norge. 1973?, O.S. Rydberg (ed.), Sveriges traktater med främmande magter jemte andra dit hörande handlingar, 1, 822–1335, Stockholm 1877, p 244. Compare the comment in N. Ahnlund, Jämtlands och Härjedalens historia, 1 (to 1517), Stockholm 1948, p 124, 181.

church life in the wilderness surrounding the little chapel raised on the brink of the river in 'Rafnasill'. That is our missionary scene from my home districts.

## 2

In this way, evidence of religious instruction – in the first instance knowledge of the Pater noster and Credo (the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed) – can serve as indicators of the life of the church, its functioning and spread at various times and in various countries. I became strongly convinced of this while working with publications corresponding to the earliest ABC-books within the Roman Catholic tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of 'ABC', 'Alphabeta' proved to be the proper term of entry into the relevant bibliographies. From among many finds, I wish to present one especially, located in the most lovely old quarters of Carolina Rediviva, the University Library in Uppsala. There – high on the shelves, in a collection of Italian books from the 18th century – were two small collected works cataloged as 'Alphabeta varia'. Filled with suspense, I examined the books and found them to contain a number of slim pamphlets from various periods, published by the mission-ary department of the Catholic Church in Rome and bound together in two volumes, 'Alphabeta varia', 1–2. The volumes contain seventeen 'ABC-books' in various languages, some with lengthy introductions in Latin outlining the alphabet, the system of writing and the linguistic forms of the language in question. Nearly all provide as a first reading exercise the Pater noster, Ave Maria and Credo, sometimes both in Latin and in the language concerned.<sup>5</sup> These pamphlets are clearly related to the perspective from 'Rafnasill', representing interpretable indicators of the life of the church, and the roots of elementary reading.

A list of the pamphlets with titles, years of publication and number of pages provides a rough idea of the contents of the two volumes. According to the title pages, all were published in Rome by the Church's department for the propagation of the faith, 'Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide'. Several covers depict a group of people listening to a preacher, a missionary, with the device: 'Euntes in universum mundum predicate evangelium omni creaturae' (Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature).

The aim of the project is to test and study elementary instruction according to that device in various church traditions.

<sup>4</sup> E. Johansson, På läsbräda, mikrokort och dator – eller kyrkolivets böcker i gammal och ny undervisning, Föreningen Lärare i Religionskunskap Årsbok 1986, p 89–100.

<sup>5</sup> Alphabeta varia, 1–2, Collected volumes, Rome, 17th and 18th century.

*Table 1 Alphabeta varia. Vol 1-2. Two collected volumes of 'ABC-books' printed in Rome during the 17th and 18th centuries. Table of contents.*

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Vol 1.

- Alphabetum aetiopicum sive abyssinum. 1631. 16 p.  
 Alphabetum arabicum. 1715. 15 p.  
 Alphabetum armenum. 1673. 16 p.  
 Alphabetum barmanum sev bomanum. 1776. xvi + 51 p.  
 Alphabetum brammanicum sev indostanum. 1771. xx + 152 p.  
 Alphabetum chaldaicum antiquum Estranghelo dictum. 1636. 16 p.  
 Alphabetum chaldaicum. 1634. 11 p.  
 Alphabetum coptum sive aegyptiacum. N.d. 11 p.  
 Alphabetum graecum. 1771. 15 p.  
 Alphabetum veterum etruscorum. 1771. 38 p.  
 Alphabetum hebraicum addito samaritano et rabbinico. 1771. 16 p.  
 Alphabeto del Protoparente Adamo ... N.d. 16 p.

Vol 2.

- Alphabetum Hieronymi et Cyrilli Illyrice. 1753. 78 p.  
 Alphabetum ibericum sive georgianum. 1629. 32 p.  
 Alphabetum grandonico-malabaricum sive samscrudonicum. 1772. xxviii + 100 + viii p.  
 Alphabetum persicum. 1783. 24 p.  
 Alphabetum tangutanum sive tibetanum. 1773. 138 p.
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This table of contents is taken from the two most complete volumes in Uppsala University Library. A third volume contains an undated Alphabetum persicum.<sup>6</sup> The many pamphlets seem to be arranged alphabetically according to language.

A chronological arrangement gives a better picture of the over-all strategy of publication, and can at the same time indicate some of the contents of the pamphlets. The last pamphlet in the first volume and the first in the second volume fall outside the main theme and are therefore omitted here (Table 2).

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<sup>6</sup> Volume, 18th century, Italy, 1:1-2, Uppsala University Library.

Table 2 *Alphabeta varia*. Vol 1-2. Two collected volumes of 'ABC-books' printed in Rome during the 17th and 18th centuries, arranged according to year of publication and giving language, contents and number of pages.

YEARS	LANGUAGE	CONTENTS (READING TEXTS)	PAGE
N.d.	Coptic/Egyptian	?	11
1629	Iberian/Georgian	PN Ave Credo Decal Opera Sacr*	32
1631	Ethiopic/Abyssinian	PN Ave Credo Decal	16
1634	Chaldean	PN Ave Salve	11
1636	Chaldean/Syriac	PN Ave Credo	16
1673	Armenian	PN Ave Credo	16
1715	Arabic	PN Ave Credo	15
1771	Greek	PN Ave Credo Decal	15
1771	Hebrew/Samaritan	PN Ave Credo	16
1771	Etruscan	?	38
1771	Hindustani	PN Ave Credo	172
1772	Malay/Malabar	PN Ave Credo Decal	136
1773	Tibetan	PN Ave Credo Decal	138
1776	Burmese	PN Ave Credo Decal Magnif	96
1783	Persian	PN Ave	24

\* The Iberian text also contains Magnif. and 'Litaniae Virginis'

Abbreviations:

PN	Pater noster. Oratio Dominica.	(the Lord's Prayer)
Ave	Ave Maria. Salutatio Angelica.	(the Hail Mary)
Credo	Symbolum Apostolorum.	(the Apostles' Creed)
Decal	Decem Praecepta Decalogi.	(the Ten Commandments)
Opera	Opera Misericordiae corporalia.	(Seven works of mercy)
Sacr	Septem Ecclesiae Sacramenta.	(the Seven sacraments)
Magnif	Canticum B. Mariae Virginis.	(the Magnificat)
Salve	Salutatio ad Mariam. 'Salve Regina mater misericordiae'	

The missionary strategy is clear. First come a group of pamphlets intended for countries with ancient Christian cultures: Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, Armenia, Georgia. These are followed by the three major languages Arabic, Hebrew/Samaritan and Greek (plus old Etruscan). Some special copies in other printings are much earlier. Eight of these ten pamphlets are slender, containing merely

11–16 pages, exactly like Protestant ABC-books from the same period. The more recent pamphlets are longer – one hundred pages or more – and are intended for mission fields in the Far East. Long introductions in Latin give these latter pamphlets the character of extensive handbooks for learning the foreign language. The textual content of two pamphlets is unclear, since they lack explanations or headings in Latin. The remainder contain at least headings – sometimes complete texts – in Latin as well. It is strikingly evident that the contents conform to traditional oral instruction prior to baptism and confession, consisting as they do of the Pater noster, Ave Maria, Credo, and, in six pamphlets, also the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments). The Iberian/Georgian pamphlet is richest in content, including additional classical material for instruction of the congregation.

What was the purpose and function of these small publications? Much remains to be investigated: for example, the extent to which these texts were actually distributed in the countries in question. The intended recipient groups may have been at least three in number: firstly, missionaries who needed to learn the language of the country; secondly, native priests and their helpers needing texts for self-education; or perhaps, thirdly, even laymen, who could reinforce oral instruction by reading textual material as well.

This kind of printed material is well known, for example in Germany, Holland, England and Norway as ABC-tablets, fibeln, lesebrettern, horn-books or ABC-books of eight or sixteen pages. An English one, probably printed in 1538, is in both Latin and English and contains on its sixteen pages the alphabet, the vowels and syllabarium, In nomine, Pater noster, Ave, Credo, graces before and after meals, prayers, the Ten Commandments in rhyme.

All these would correspond to similar usages in Sweden, where ABC-books for use in schools, for missionaries in Lappland and for the public at large were generally similar in arrangement and content: the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, words of baptism and communion, morning and evening prayers and grace to be said at mealtimes. However, elementary books for use in schools were, of course, in Latin. Texts intended for the people were distributed (often in the form of loose pamphlets) in Swedish, Lappic and Finnish. Missionaries to Lappland thus had to manage with the aid of Swedish-Lappic ABC-books or seek the help of an interpreter.<sup>7</sup> This was the way of working, for example in the small village of Straumi over the course of time.

In Europe, even beginners' textbooks in Greek were of the same general character. An 'Alphabetum graecum' printed in Antwerp in 1534 contains on its sixteen pages (after the customary introduction presenting the alphabet) the classical reading texts in both Greek and Latin: the Lord's Prayer, Ave, Credo,

<sup>7</sup> T. Forsgren, *Samisk kyrko- och undervisningslitteratur i Sverige 1619–1850*, Arbetsrapport från pedagogiska institutionen, Umeå universitet Nr. 36, 1987.

Magnificat, Nunc dimittis (Simeon's song of praise), part of the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:39-48) and Salve Regina (a prayer to the Virgin Mary. See footnote to Table 2).<sup>8</sup>

Compared with this, the missionary pamphlets from Rome appear to be rather limited in content. They reflect the oral tradition and the most elementary instruction prior to baptism, i.e. the knowledge that was tested annually in confession and which, in principle, was a requirement, at least after the middle of the 16th century, for receiving Holy Communion and contracting marriage: the Pater noster, Credo and Ave Maria. Knowledge of these became increasingly widespread during the period known as the 'counter-reformation'.

### 3

Evidence of popular spread can be found, for example, in protocols of the Inquisition in the archdiocese of Toledo, 1540-1650. Of approximately 1200 protocols, over 700 contain information on religious knowledge, rated alternatively as 'bene', 'mediocriter', or 'male' (good, fair or poor). According to these, hardly anyone was totally unfamiliar with the Pater noster, Ave and Credo; nearly all subjects were judged to have answered well, 'bene', with respect to these first of the 'four prayers', as this classical group of texts is often called. Even for the 'fourth prayer', Salve Regina, nearly all were rated 'bene' toward the middle of the 17th century. On the other hand, only half knew the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) in 1565, the year knowledge of these began to be recorded. But toward the end of the period, nearly all could recite the Commandments well.<sup>9</sup>

This process in reciting by heart may be reflected for example also in the Italian parish records. *Liber status animarum*, from the same time.

This period of stabilization clearly parallels the Swedish church's efforts and requirements for receiving Holy Communion and contracting marriage during the same period. In both Spain, Italy and from the beginning in Sweden religious education was primarily promoted without dependence on the ability to read. In the Spanish material referred to, literate subjects had only a slight advantage over the illiterate with respect to memorization of the 'four prayers' - 86 and 73 per cent respectively were rated 'bene' during the period 1575-1650. The difference was more marked for the Ten Commandments.

<sup>8</sup> *Alphabetum graecum*, Antwerpen apud Michaelum Hillenium, October, 1524.

<sup>9</sup> J.P. Dedieu, "Christianisation" en nouvelle castille. Catéchisme, communion, messe et confirmation dans l'archevêché de Tolède 1540-1650, in *Melanges de la Casa de Velasquez* 15, Paris 1979, p 261-224.

The Swedish experience can be illustrated by many examples from the parish records in the 17th century.<sup>10</sup>

Thus far, from the beginning instruction in the most important religious texts was a matter for voice, ear, heart and memory. That was enough for a long time in the catholic tradition. However the new technique of printing was soon able to make the message available to the eye as well. In the Protestant churches popular reading and catechetical knowledge increased dramatically during the 17th and 18th centuries. But under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church the same old texts went out across the world for missionary work in many languages.<sup>10</sup>

But the overall program in the 'holy catholic church' was the same, with the Lord's Prayer and the articles of faith in primary place, both in 'Straumi' and 'Rafnasill' high up in the north and abroad in faraway lands, spread by means of those curiously interesting little pamphlets, 'Alphabeta varia'.

<sup>10</sup> Compare, for example, E. Johansson, Den kyrkliga lästraditionen i Sverige – en konturteckning, in *Läskunnighet och folkbildning före folkskolan. Mötesrapport III*, Nordiska historikermötet 1981, Jyväskylä 1981, p 193–224.

A shorter version, "Pater noster i Rafnasill and Alphabeta varia. – Eller några av kyrkolivets tecken", is first published in *Arkivet, Historien, Rörelsen. Festbok till Sven Lundkvist. 60 år*. Stockholm 1987. Pages 139–144.

I

### **III DIFFERENT WAYS TO WORK TOWARD A GOOD READING LEVEL**

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## I HAVE READING AND WRITING DIFFICULTIES

Eva Karlström

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I am a person who has had all the good things in life, that are supposed to form a happy childhood and a good life. My country has had peace for very many years. I have had a house to live in, food to eat and a nice family. I have also had the possibility to go to school and to get an education.

In spite of all this I left school without the ability to read and write properly. I have been living with this problem for nearly 30 years so I really know what it means.

Sometimes we accept simplified theories like:  
"If all children go to school they will learn how to read and write. If they don't there must be something wrong with them, maybe they are just stupid or lazy or both ..."

Since 1979 I have been working for FMLS (Förbundet mot läs- och skrivsvårigheter [The Swedish Association for Eliminating Reading and Writing Difficulties]). During the last five years in a project, here in Stockholm, called "The Writingknot". Everyday I have met and talked to children and adults with reading and writing problems. We know that in Sweden there are about 50,000 persons with more or less of these difficulties and they are not immigrants but born Swedes.

Our school-authorities say that about 10 per cent of all pupils have R and W problems. So, today I know that I am not alone, but many painful years passed before I got to know that.

The first thing, and the most important, we have to learn at school is reading and writing. To me, my first experience of school was a failure. I did not understand the system of letters. I could draw them and tell their names but not put them together into words.

This made me very disappointed and worried. *Disappointed*, because I really longed to be able to read. *Worried* because I understood that R and W was something you just had to be good at. That is what everybody expected and that is the base on which the whole schoolsystem is founded.

For eight long years nobody talked to me about my difficulties. The only thing I understood was that I was unintelligent, nothing but stupid.

Every day this was proved to me. I got poor results and low grades in all subjects. Arithmetic was no problem, but solving problems that were presented like short-stories was impossible. Foreign languages, history, science – everything is impossible in school if you can't read.

The one thing I was really good at was to cheat and to hide my difficulties. I learned to be non-existent – as gray as the walls in the classroom – invisible.

At the end of grade 8 I had a nervous breakdown. I refused to return to school. I hated school. I was allowed to leave school by then. That is how my adult life began.

I do not think that people who can read and write ever are able to understand what it means to have difficulties with these things. Our everyday life is full of situations where you are supposed to read or write;

- you get information from authorities and others
- you are given forms to fill in
- you get notes from people
- newspapers, TV, telephone books, timetables, price-lists, menus, advertisements ... you name it!

If you can't take part in all this you are put aside, excluded. This is a question of democracy.

It is also a question of how people look at you. I have many times met prejudice. People can easily accept if you are no good at handicraft or music but if you don't read and write properly they will react strongly.

I know that I would not have been alive today if my parents had not supported me the way they have.

I also know that I would never have been standing here in front of you if I had not, as a grown up got proper help.

I have been lucky!

Frightened and scared, I finally took the step to start again. I went to a school for adults that had a special class for people with reading and writing difficulties. There – for the first time –

- I met others who had the same problem as I had. It was wonderful to talk to people who really understood! And they were not stupid or unintelligent!
- I met teachers who knew much about these problems.
- I got a name for my difficulties: I was word blind, I had dyslexia.
- I learned a lot about what this meant:

- I was met with respect
- I was encouraged to try again.

For one and a half year I stayed at this school. That was my turning point to a better life.

Today I am still a slow reader and not very good at spelling but I read and write and I have accepted my handicap and learned how to live with it. I also have a self-confidence and the knowledge that I am good enough as I am.

Helpful in this is the association FMLS that my classmates and I started in 1979.

This association is meant for people with reading and writing problems.

Our aim is       to support and help each other  
                      to give information about the handicap and  
                      to take away the prejudice about it  
                      to work for a better and more understanding school  
                      to collect knowledge about dyslexia

This is why I have gone through this last half hour! I think you are a very important group of people for us dyslexics. I hope I have given you some new thoughts and better understanding that you will bring back to all the different places you come from. Thank you for listening!

## PARENT'S ROLE IN CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Berit Almqvist

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Parents are far more important for the child's success in school than they are aware of. Eva, for instance, never believed that she had a role in her son's literacy development.

When Eva's son, Anders, began school, the teacher informed the parents about a reading project in her class. The project was not possible without a daily involvement by the parents. Eva, as a lonely mother, put up all the defences she could think of: job, time, siblings and the fact that "it was the teacher's job to educate children – not mine". Eva even phoned the local Home and School Association and complained about the teacher.

However, the teacher convinced Eva that her help was necessary. All she had to do was to listen to Anders 15 minutes per day when he was reading the assigned pages in the reading book. Reluctantly Eva agreed.

Three years later Eva is far more active in school. She knows that she has a very important role in her son's progress in school. The teacher's active part as a promoter and a supporter of Eva's parental role had a great impact on both Eva and Anders. Anders learned to read faster and "loves books", and Eva's confidence as an active parent grew.

The Swedish Home and School Association works to get all the parents interested and engaged in the school life of their children. Both Swedish and international research shows that there is a strong connection between the parents' interest in their child and the child's progress in social life and knowledge.

As was the case with Eva, being a parent does not automatically mean that you are involved in what is happening in school. You have to be active in some way. You need to know about the methods and projects. You need to be asked for. You need to know that you are important.

The picture in front of you (a child telling his father about a mushroom-picking excursion) shows some of the problems we are facing in the communication between the school and the parent. Our picture of the school does not match. The parent is often critical of the school because of the knowledge he has. He tends to judge school on the basis of his own experience. So was the case with Eva. She was afraid of the school because of her own study-results and was also emotionally negative to parents' involvement because of her background.

Parents need access to school. The Belfield Reading Project in Manchester, Great Britain, was designed to involve parents of young children much more systematically and intensively in their children's reading development. The project was set up to give parents the opportunity to share, in a specific way, in their children's education. One further aim was to build on existing links between the school, the child and the home.

When the Swedish Home and School Association got to know about the project, they realized that this was a brilliant idea to get all the parents involved in school – even the indifferent and reluctant ones. The project was adapted to the Swedish setting and started in 1985 on a trial basis in some schools. In 1986 the Swedish Home and School Association produced a TV-program and a Video in Växjö. Two of the teachers in the program wrote a manual for the program. To date more than 20,000 copies of the manual has been sold and the program has also been adapted in Finland, Norway and Denmark.

The approach is simple – and needs to be simple! I will now outline the procedure and the information about the program as well as the method itself.

It is of great importance that the school informs the parents before the child enters his first grade. Eva's problem was that she did not receive any information in advance and therefore was not ready to get herself involved in the program. Preferably the information should be given before the summer vacation.

The school library or the public library has a key role to play. They can make book lists for both parental reading and children's easy-reading-books.

The next step is to give information and instructions to all the parents during the first parental meeting of the fall. The main idea is presented: The parent reads for his child until the child itself has learned to read. The following hints are suggested to the parents:

- 1 Let the child sit closely beside you, so that he can look in the book while you are reading.
- 2 Talk about the pictures in the book.
- 3 Let the child point out the letters he recognizes.
- 4 If the child asks how a letter sounds practice that.
- 5 Let the child count the amount of phrases in a paragraph.
- 6 How many paragraphs are there on the page?
- 7 Let the child try to read some of the words he or she recognizes.
- 8 Talk about what you have read.

When Eva found about these easy "rules" she of course felt secure in the program.

Quite soon, when the child has learned to read easy phrases, he gets his first "home-reading-book". This is an important day for the child. One girl refused to carry the "home-reading-book" in the school bag. She wanted to show the whole world that she knew how to read.

During the whole process, the progresses, difficulties, questions etc are written down daily in a weekly "contact-book".

In almost every class in Sweden there are immigrant children with another mother-tongue than Swedish. Simret from Eritrea is a good example (see video). Simret's father understands a little Swedish but Simret's mother understands only Tigrina. Simret reads the "easy-reading" books for his parents and translates to his mother. In this way Simret learns Swedish as well as his parents. In many cases the library has purchased children's books in immigrant languages.

The interest in books has grown among children due to the program. As the video-program shows the children are eagerly discussing the choice of books. The eight-year old boy carried five books home for the week-end – "this is normal" says the teacher. The speaker of the video asks the boy how he reads these books. He replies:

- I'm reading for Lina, my little sister.
- Does she understand?
- Not a bit!

During the process of the project the teacher meets the parents occasionally in smaller groups. In these smaller groups it is easier to discuss difficulties and successes. Eva would never had open her mouth in a larger setting. Now, the small group gave her the possibility to express herself among other parents. She dared to open up, she dared to admit that she did not follow the program daily and she felt the support from others and regained new energy to continue.

In many cases parents have started to ask how they could be of help in the process of other subjects like mathematics, geography, biology etc. Since the approach is simple it is easy do adapt the program to other subjects.

So, what did Anders and Eva get out of the program?

- Anders learned to read faster which was good since Anders, like any other child, is impatient and eager to learn – actually, he wanted to learn to read, write and count the first day of school.
- Anders gained a larger interest in reading fiction.
- Eva felt that "she could make it". Her academic background had nothing to do with it. Eva's confidence as a parent grew due to the program.

Studies have even shown that children with “least abilities” have achieved the best results. The gap between under-achieving and high scoring pupils has been smaller due to parental involvement.

The parents’ role in children’s literacy development is an important one. It is not only important how to learn to read technically and how to use your reading as an instrument for learning and knowledge, but also – and even more so – how to enjoy your reading.

## **COPING WITH DYSLEXIA IN A LITERATE SOCIETY**

**Working Strategies Used by Students at Härnösand's Folk High School**

**Berit Östman**

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### **Härnösand**

Härnösand is a small town on the north coast of Sweden. At this time of the year (summer) it's a beautiful place. We don't have the midnight sun, but the nights are short and never quite dark. There is no real spring in Norrland. Summer explodes suddenly at the beginning of June.

We deserve the light and the beauty, for the winters are very dark and very long. So if you plan to visit the north of Scandinavia, do it in summertime.

Like many small places in the North, Härnösand is getting smaller and smaller. Factories close down, firms move south and people find that they need retraining, if they don't want to move or become unemployed.

There is a variety of non-academic adult education in Sweden. In Härnösand, for example, and it's neighbourhood, we have labour market training, a state school for adults, municipal adult education, at least five adult education associations and the folk high school.

Dyslexics of course, haven't so much choice.

But every urban and rural district have to provide basic education for adults, both immigrants and native Swedes. Twelve folk high schools arrange courses for dyslexics.

### **Folk High Schools**

Folk high schools are a Danish idea. They are very Scandinavian and very special. At least everyone says they are special, but no one can quite explain what is so special about them.

They are a very old form of adult education.

They are residential schools, normally situated in the country. Students must be of age, that is, at least eighteen. (There is no upper age limit.) The teachers have never worked with children and they have their own teacher training.

The first Swedish folk high schools came into being during the second half of the 19th century.

It was local people who joined together to provide their youngsters with more knowledge and education than elementary schools at that time had to offer. (People in towns could put their sons in secondary schools. If they could afford it, of course.) At the beginning of this century popular movements were emerging and it became necessary for them to provide training and inspiration for their members and future leaders. That is how affiliated folk high schools came into being.

Nowadays there are 128 folk high schools in Sweden. 50 of them are owned by county councils, the rest by popular movements: for example, free churches, the temperance movements, the labour movement. Härnösand's folk high school, where I work, is owned by the Swedish Missionary Society.

Folk high schools are very free, by Swedish standards. They have no curricula laid down by authorities. The starting point is the needs of the students. The schools are part of the free and voluntary folk development education sector in Sweden.

### The Folk High School Ordinance

But there is a Folk High School Ordinance, where the objectives are defined. It has been given statutory confirmation by the Government.

The Ordinance states as its first and main point that

"The task of folk high schools is to promote general civic education"

Further it says:

"The form and content of folk high school activities should be such as to

- Increase the student's awareness of his or her own circumstances *and* those of the world at large;
- Deepen and enlarge the student's sensitivity and experiential capacity;
- Develop critical sense, independence and capacity for co-operation;
- Develop the student's creative potential;
- Strengthen the will and ability of the student, in solidarity with others, to play an active part in working life and the life of the community."

The statutory provisions defining the objectives of folk high schools were written in the mid-1970s, but the underlying ideas are older.

Now, in 1990, there is a Government Commission investigating the future of the Swedish folk high school. I think that the difference between folk high schools and municipal adult education will be more clearly defined and schools will be demanded to give explicit descriptions of their aims and evaluation of their work.

### **Different sorts of courses**

Every folk high school has to organize a general course with a wide selection of subjects. Students can complete their upper secondary education at folk high schools and get a study assessment which shall refer to the student's capacity for pursuing studies.

Most folk high schools also offer general courses with a speciality, where up to half the teaching time is devoted to a particular field, such as arts, sports, or computer science.

Then there are courses with a specialized study program, but at least a quarter of the instruction must have a curricular content resembling that of the general course. People must not get too specialized at a folk high school.

Most students at folk high schools attend short courses, from two days up to a couple of weeks. They are mostly organized in conjunction with various organizations, e. g. popular movements or trade unions.

### **The Reading and Writing Course.**

#### **The Beginning**

At the folk high school in Hämösand we have all sorts of courses. One of them is "*The Reading and Writing Course*", where the target group is dyslexic adults. It started in 1975, so we were among the pioneers. We started it as an experiment. There was some pressure on folk high schools to provide education for students with special needs.

None of us knew much about dyslexia then, but we were a bit optimistic and told ourselves that at least we could spell. If we had known then what we know today, we probably wouldn't have dared.

We put an advertisement into the evening papers: "Word blind?"

Seven people came.

Meeting them was the shock of my life. I had worked as a teacher of Swedish for many years and had of course had some dyslexic students. But I had never stopped to think what happened to them after school.

What these seven people told me about their school years, their struggle for jobs, their vulnerable social life, their feelings of shame and dread of being exposed made me so angry that the anger still lasts.

They also talked about their dreams and expectations. They believed that this course, and I as their teacher, would change their lives. When I had taught them to read quicker and to spell, they would live happily ever after.

I was terrified. And so were they. We shut ourselves into a classroom and talked about our fears for three weeks. Afterwards I have understood that these weeks gave me the best in-service training I have ever had.

### **Things are better now**

Fifteen years ago reading and writing difficulties among adults were almost unheard of.

There was no teacher training concerned with adults and dyslexia. There were no teaching materials for adults.

No one had any experience, so there was no one even to ask. And it was by no means easy for the students to get study grants.

Things are better now. Many people are aware that there is such a thing as reading and writing difficulties. There are some opportunities to get in-service training, there are some (not many) teaching materials for adults.

There are colleagues all over the country to discuss with and ask for advice.

But now it is even harder for dyslexic students at folk high schools to get study grants than it was before.

The most important change is that there was a law in 1978 which states that every local authority in Sweden has to offer basic adult education at intermediate level to everyone in need. People have the right to take some hours' leave from their jobs every week to attend municipal basic education.

They get paid per hour, about 40 Swedish crowns, in order not to lose too much money.

People who are unemployed still get some money to attend, without losing their unemployment benefit.

### **Why choose a folk high school?**

Why do some people choose a folk high school instead?

When I ask my students I get different answers.

One reason is that they want full-time studies.

The north of Sweden is a thinly populated area, and the distance can be very long from their homes to the school where they can get municipal basic education, sometimes more than a hundred kilometres. You don't drive so far twice a week to get a couple of hours' training.

Besides, people with severe reading difficulties often fail to get a driver's licence.

In some places basic education is housed in the same school building where the students went to school as children. As a rule it is not a place they love. Sometimes they even meet the same teacher.

On the whole, folk high schools have a good reputation. They have existed for so long, that almost everyone knows someone who has studied at a folk high school.

As we make up our own curricula in consultation with the students, we don't have to compare ourselves with compulsory school all the time. We have always known that knowledge can't always be found in books and that untrained readers can be good thinkers and skilled workers.

Especially for dyslexic adults it is often a relief to be spared comparisons with the different levels of compulsory schools. I can't see how anyone can relate school levels to the real life and real needs of grown up people.

Many students also stress the need to get away from home, to start afresh. Also, when someone asks them about what they are doing nowadays, they can truthfully answer that they are studying at a folk high school. They don't have to explain about their reading and writing difficulties.

There is still a lot of shame around this problem. It's a pity.

### **What are the students like?**

Our current Reading and Writing course is of course different from our first experimental try. But in some ways it hasn't changed, the underlying principles are still the same. Even if we didn't have much knowledge then, we must have had some insight.

From the start we said that dyslexia is a handicap in it's own right. That means that we don't admit people with other handicaps, which could explain their reading and writing difficulties. For people with impaired eyesight or hearing there are courses at other folk high schools. The same thing applies to the mentally handicapped. And we have always felt that we can't cope with immigrants, who have problems learning Swedish.

No folk high schools admit people who have problems with drugs of any kind. At a residential school drug addiction can be infectious. Besides, studies are quite meaningless because a drug addict will always put the drug first and studies last.

We can take around 12 people in the course, and they can stay as long as they need. That means that every term there are both old and new students, and it's a great help for the new ones to have some "old hands" around. It doesn't present a problem, as no two students are alike and most of the time they have their own individual work.

But we have learned that students shouldn't attend the course for more than two years. They tend to lose some of the self-confidence they so laboriously have acquired. Perhaps their environment becomes too familiar and sheltered so they feel that they can't cope with life outside school. Then it's high time to change schools or get vocational training.

I often get the question what students in the Writing Course are like. What sorts of people are they?

It's impossible to answer. They are quite ordinary people, with just two things in common: they have reading and writing difficulties of some sort, and as a result of this a frail self-confidence.

Most of them are men.

Otherwise they are as unlike each other as other people are. Nearly all have finished the 9-year comprehensive school, where most of them received some special training. About half of them have also completed their upper secondary education.

Some of the students come to us because they are unemployed or have been made redundant, or have got an occupational injury and thus are in need of re-training.

Some are employed, but feel they can't cope any more because of new technology, or because their job tasks have changed.

Some are interested in trade union matters, and would like to take an active part in trade union work, but don't dare to volunteer.

Some want to be able to help their own children at school and want to learn how to.

But quite a few come to fulfill an old dream: to be able to read and write as a natural thing, to be equal to others.

It seems as if it's worse to feel inadequate in social life than in working life. And often it's a wife, a girl-friend or a sister who takes the first contact with our school.

### **Do people change?**

What happens to people when they come to a folk high school and a writing course?

Different things, of course, but let me cite an example:

Once a wife dragged her reluctant husband to me to talk about the course. She was the one who talked all the time. He sat on the edge of a chair, quite pale and ready to flee. He didn't answer my questions, just nodded or shook his head. Let's call him Bill.

When the new term started, Bill was there. Pale, trembling and suspicious, but there. And now, for the first time in his life, he met other people with similar difficulties and feelings. They talked and talked about their experiences of school and jobs and clever brothers and marriage and politics and, well, everything. He learnt about dyslexia and that everything hadn't been his own fault.

A good thing about folk high schools is that you meet all sorts of people there, and people with other handicaps, too.

To have a handicap is regarded as a matter of course.

*You* are in a wheel-chair, *you* can't see, *you* can't spell – so what?

We have a course for physically handicapped people, with sports as a speciality. They often have to try and train things they didn't think they could do, or were afraid of. They have to expose themselves at the swimming-pool, for example. Their fighting spirit is contagious.

So after a while, Bill could feel that there were many things he was quite good at, other things he was rather bad at – but so what? He could train himself, couldn't he?

He was able to say: I have a handicap. So O.K. But I'll be damned if I will let that make me handicapped.

Believe it or not, but after about ten weeks Bill's wife called me and said that enough is enough. Bill had become so self-confident and domineering. Their roles as wife and husband were changing so rapidly that she felt quite confused. Could I please make him pipe down a bit?

What often happens is that students begin looking back at their school years in a different way. They begin to understand that school authorities and teachers haven't been out to destroy them. Teachers weren't evil, but probably well-meaning. A bit ignorant, perhaps.

So students often go back to their old schools and talk to their former teachers. I think it is a very healthy thing to do. Hate and bitterness are bad companions. But the teachers are often quite shattered by the visit. They had had no idea of what that quiet little Bill or John had really felt. How could they? Bill and John had no words for their feelings then.

Perhaps the most handicapping thing about being a non-reader is just that: not to have words for your feelings.

## How do we work?

In the writing course the students study many general subjects, but as it is a general course with a speciality, Swedish is the most important subject. If there are twelve students, there are two or three teachers at a time, so that it is possible to work individually or in small groups.

Other subjects are Maths, Social subjects, Nature conservation, Religion, Artistic and practical subjects, Sports. Students also learn how to use a wordprocessor and how to hold a meeting. We don't encourage students to choose English or any other foreign language during the time they attend the Reading and Writing Course.

Together with each student we try to make a diagnosis to find out their strong and weak points. Most of them just complain about their spelling problems. Spelling is either right or wrong, and they all remember with pain all the red marks in their exercise books at school. It seems as if both they and their teachers have had a fixation on spelling. It isn't strange. They think perhaps that good spelling equals good writing.

Probably I am unjust, but it seems as if school hasn't bothered much about how they were able to express themselves coherently both verbally and in writing. In the Swedish language most words are spelled just as they are pronounced, or rather, they are pronounced just as they are spelled. But it doesn't help much if one has auditory problems, as most students have. A lack of linguistic awareness is also what most students have in common.

Reading aloud was trained at school, but what about reading comprehension? Many of our dyslexic students are passive readers, they don't even notice when they don't understand. If they notice, the only remedy they can think of, is to read the whole text once again. They read everything in the same way, as if it has never dawned on them that texts could be read in different ways, depending both on the text and their motives for reading it.

At school and perhaps later in life dyslexics have learnt to be passive. If they write something, it's up to the teacher or someone else to correct their texts. When they did their home-work at school, it was the teacher who formulated questions on the text, to check up on the pupils.

Grown-up people have to take control over their own reading and writing. There are lots of reading and writing exercises that can be used. But I think that adults also need to work with things that are important to them, not just exercises. Most people have things at home that they need to read or write. Of course it's excellent to bring them to school, to work with, individually.

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The strength of a group of people is that they are a group. We always encourage students to work for a common goal. When the writing course started in 1975 very few people knew anything at all about dyslexia, especially among adults. We felt that here was a group of experts, who really knew what it was about, and that it was their duty to go out and talk about it and explain. Also to encourage others to stop feeling ashamed but get out and claim their rights in society. That's how The Association for Eliminating Reading and Writing Difficulties came into being in Härnösand 11 years ago.

Now when it has grown harder and harder to get study grants, "my" students have worked intensively to inform politicians and authorities that they exist and should have a right to choose a folk high school course without having to take loans. They say: We are strong, because we are a group. We must try to do something for ourselves and for others.

During the last school year I think they have written 100 letters, to ministers, to members of parliament, to trade unions, to civil service departments, and so on.

They have contacted newspapers and given interviews. They have phoned ministers and become quite chummy with their secretaries, they have arranged seminars and meetings, and there can't be many Swedish politicians who have escaped them.

They have worked together, and besides having had a lot of fun, they have learnt lots about writing, how to express what they mean, in a way that the reader of the letter can understand and hopefully sympathize with. They have learnt how to check their spelling and other formal things. They have almost worn out our word-processors.

And as they actually have got answers to their letters, often written in official jargon, they have had lots of reading exercise. Perhaps the most important thing is that they have learnt to read between the lines.

### **What every educator should know**

I spent the week before midsummer together with five dyslexic women. All of them had experiences of adult education. I asked them what they demanded from schools and teachers, what they would like to say to educators. No one said a word about diagnoses and teaching methods, perhaps they took professionalism in that respect for granted.

They talked about attitudes. Not just kindness, niceness. But respect, consideration, concern.

They wanted time and scope.

There is a crisis at the beginning when you have to look into yourself and recognize your handicap. Stop dreaming of standing at the top of the staircase, but accept that you will have to start at the bottom and walk up, step by step.

They said that there is another crisis, when you begin to succeed. It threatens your self-concept, and that is something most people fight to defend. The most timid person can react with aggressiveness then.

You also have to reconcile yourself to the fact that you will never be perfect, that you will still be a person with lots of troubles.

My dyslexic friends wanted all educators to understand, respect and make room for this process.

## THE WITTING METHOD – A METHOD FOR READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

Ann-Katrin Åkerman

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The Witting Method is a method for reading and writing instruction at different levels in use in Sweden since the 1960's. It has been developed by Maja Witting, who is today retired from her work as researcher of education and teachers' educator at the Uppsala University. She is still active practicing and lecturing on her method. Her most recent project is a program for the college students at the Linköping University who cannot continue their studies at the university because of their reading and writing disabilities. This is a twin-project to the one in progress since 1977 at the Uppsala University.

This brief introduction to the method handles some of the theories the method is based on, the actual classroom work, the development of the method and some of the different areas where it is practiced at present: first time learning being one and re-learning for persons with reading and writing disabilities being another.

### **The reading and writing processes: technique and contents**

The analysis of the reading and writing processes attached to the Witting method does not differ greatly from the way the processes are usually presented, but its consequences in the classroom work are less usual.

The reading and writing activities can both be divided into two parts of a quite different nature.

#### *One part is the technique itself:*

The reader or writer has to *master the system of relations between the letters and the sounds*. There is no room for hesitation when decoding the letters into the sounds which they stand for. The reader who is uncertain in this respect can not get full enjoyment out of the message. Putting his energy into the decoding itself leaves him no room for feelings and associations aroused by the content of the text.

Likewise the writer will be handicapped, unable to speak from the bottom of his heart, if part of his energy is preoccupied with the technique.

When reading a combination of for example the letters T, U, B you should be able to concentrate on the meaning of the word and not use energy wondering what sounds they stand for. When you want to write about a "tub" nothing but the thought of the tub should be in your mind.

The letters also have to be decoded and written *in the correct order*. If the text says TUB it doesn't say BUT or UTB or anything else. In Swedish, English and several other languages the reading direction is from left to right and from top to bottom. This happens to be our convention for written communication, and when communicating in these languages you have to apply by the rules in order to be understood.

A third distinguishable element in the technique of reading and writing is *continuity*. It can't quite be regarded as reading when for example the reader pronounces the word [t] [ub]. The sounds have to be kept together if they are to become an understandable word. When writing the letters have to be kept in groups forming words separated from other words.

*The other part* of reading and writing is what makes the two activities such wonderful adventures. It is far from technique. It is in no way mechanical. It is instead creative, dynamic and personal. It *is the content*.

When reading you are taking part in the writer's fantasies or facts, learning about the times past and the times we live in.

When writing you are sharing your thoughts with others and using your possibilities to influence the world around you.

### **Two parts with disparate characters demand two different approaches**

These two parts, the technique and the content, are recognizable both in reading and writing. They are of *totally different characters* with separate demands and separate possibilities for the reader and the writer.

*The technique* requires accuracy but is not really difficult. What you have to learn is rather limited. Simply put, you need to master a certain number of letter-sound relationships. Most human beings can learn the technique even if some need a lot more time than others do.

*The content* is different.

There is no external limit to what you can develop in this respect. The limit is within the reader and writer himself. You can enjoy the content of any text that handles things you are familiar with; you can write about the things you know. It is all a question of your experiences and your personal intellectual level.

To the Witting method it is obvious that these two different aspects of reading and writing have to be treated in totally different ways.

When working with establishing the firm technical base the results will not be improved by free, creative activities. If you are on the contrary able to concen-

trate on the different letter-sound relationships, without slipping away into other thoughts and activities, this quickens the process and ensures a safer learning.

When working with the content the students ought to be able to use their full capacity freely and not be limited by not mastering the technique.

If you want to be able to fulfill these different requirements, built into the reading and writing processes themselves, you can not work with words and texts successfully in the initial stages. The mingling of form and content will make it difficult for the students where it should and could be easy learning and limit the students where they should be free.

This is where the unique feature of this method shows its strength.

### **The content neutral language structures**

The heart of this method, and its unique feature is the "content neutral language structures".

This term need some explanation.

The structures are *combinations of vowels and consonants that conform to the language* in question. As for the Swedish language this means that certain consonants do not appear together and others do, a vowel is usually not followed by another vowel. The letters are always used in their basic letter-sound relationship, avoiding sound laws that produce irregularities in pronunciation. All deviations from the basic alphabetical one to one relationship between letter and sound are excluded. A "k" is always [k] and an "e" is always [e].

In Swedish this gives us combinations such as: si, pa, se, ym, of, kry, sme, dru, klam, svip, lepa, buti.

They are all structures that appear normally in the Swedish language: they are language structures.

Like the Swedish language most modern languages are alphabetical. In every such language there is a kernel of phonetical spelling. Time has changed the pronunciation and spelling revisions have interfered with the alphabetical system, but it ought to be possible to find the kernel that constitutes the material for content neutral language structures of these languages too.

The structures are treated as *neutral to their content*. The structure itself means nothing until the student handling it changes his or her approach from form to content and examines it in search of content. "Do I in my own experience and

vocabulary find a word corresponding to this structure?" Until this point the structure is not meaningless, but neutral to its content.

With the help of the content neutral language structures it is possible to work with the technical part of reading and writing in a manner suitable to its character, and to handle the creative, free and personal part, the content, according to its demands.

The structures also help the students to acquire a linguistic awareness: There are sounds in my own personal spoken language, and these sounds are represented by letters in the written language.

### **The actual classroom work:**

The design of the work in the classroom is a consequence of the analysis of the reading and writing processes and of the existence of the content neutral language structures.

### **The technique**

When working with the content neutral language structures the techniques of reading and writing can be regarded as basically the same activities but in reverse order. It is a question of interpreting letters into sounds or transforming sounds into letters in accordance with the given rules of the language.

*Reading is more demanding than writing.* When reading, time is an important factor. If a letter is misinterpreted the mistake is at once obvious. If the sounds are pronounced in the wrong order you lose the correct meaning. If you can not interpret the letters quickly enough the sounds you find will not melt into meaningful words. You will in all three cases lose contact with the message in the text.

When writing you can always take your time, listening to the sound and choosing the right letter before putting it on paper. All you need is to be able to keep the sounds in your head.

The Witting method takes advantage of the fact that writing is easier than reading and chooses to *teach the technique* of reading and writing first of all *through writing*.

The technical part of the work consists mainly of what could be called "**attentive writing**". The content neutral language structures are used in an exercise where the students transform sounds into letters.

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Only after having been thoroughly introduced to the students, a sound-letter relation is used in the exercise. This means that in the exercises with the content neutral language structures the students always work with a material well known to them.

The work routine lets the students listen with great concentration to the teacher pronouncing a combination of known sounds. The students themselves then pronounce the sounds with distinct articulation. They then listen to the sounds within themselves and convert them into the corresponding letters at individual speed. At last with no time pressure the students form the letters on their paper and examine the language structure comparing it to the sounds they started out with. When each individual has completed his work with the combination in question the teacher serves another content neutral language structure.

This work routine differs greatly from normal dictation exercises. In the case of attentive writing the result is always correct. If not it is not the fault of the students. The mistake lies in the choice of structures: they are too difficult for the students and should be left out for the time being.

The routine vouches for a pure technique training. The students can not use memorized pictures of words but have to rely on listening and can thereby practice and firmly establish the relation between sounds and letters. In other words we can be sure of giving them the technique which leads to the possibility of freely using one's total capacity to experience and express contents in future reading and writing.

### Separate but together

It is important that *the training of the technique is separated from work with content*, but it is equally important that it is *closely connected to and accompanied by work with content*. Therefore the so called "attentive writing" is always followed by work of a totally different character.

### The content

This part of the work can be called "**the associative routine**". It represents the creative and personal part of the reading and writing processes. It is part of the work where the individual should be restricted only by his or her own limits. The life a person has led, his or her experiences and interests will come alive and be important in this work.

It is now a question of letting the individuals use, examine and develop their own language.

The students learning to read and write for the first time should not be limited by the fact that they have not yet mastered the written language. They are all in possession of a spoken language and as long as they are still learning the system of transforming the sounds of their spoken language into written language they are free to work with their personal language only if most of the work is oral.

By closely observing their spoken language, the students become aware of its structure and its laws. This prepares them for the more precise written language and for their free use of the written language in future.

“The associative routine” *starts in the content neutral language structures.*

In our “attentive writing” we may have been working with, for example, these structures: pa, is, se ym, of, un.

The question now is if there are *any words among these structures*? Swedish students of different ages will most certainly find the word “is”, which is the Swedish word for “ice”.

Well then, what do you think of when you hear the word “is”? *What is ice to you?* Every person has his or her individual experience of the phenomenon “ice”. The word does not mean exactly the same thing to any two persons. The question opens up the individual inner language and also leads to a broadened view of the word when listening to what others have to say about “ice”.

At different ages you get different answers from the students. Its their “ice” not a certain “ice” in a book.

I think of skating on the ice every winter holiday on the lake where grandma and grandpa live.

I think of ice hanging from the roof – icicles.

Ice is hard and you can see through it.

Or it can be almost white sometimes on the lake.

There is ice in the refrigerator – ice-cubes.

I used to love carefully breaking the thin ice layer on the puddles of the road to school.

Kurt Vonnegut invents “ice 9” in one of his books. It threatens to turn all water on earth into life-killing ice.

I take four ice-cubes with my whiskey.

The structures are *also used to create words*. “Do you know of any words where you can find the sounds [pa]?”

Working together in a group or individually you will find a lot of words, some very familiar and others harder to focus. Using “pa” you will get words like “par”, “tulpan” and “hoppa” (the Swedish words for “pair”, “tulip” and “jump”)

placing [pa] in different positions. The young student might have heard the word "paragraf" ("paragraph" in English) but is not quite sure what it means. A grown up person might wonder what "empati" ("empathy" in English) really means.

Well-known words are discussed and used in sentences. Their usage as well as their inflection might be analysed. Words from the students' passive vocabulary are carefully examined in search for their correct meaning, the students using their all-round knowledge about their language and of course dictionaries.

*All of this work can be done orally.* No part of the content training has to be put in writing by the students in order to be useful and relevant school-work. A lot of this work can of course also be saved on paper. *Whether or not it is written by the students depends* on how far they have come in their learning the technique of reading and writing. The young students having worked with "is" (ice) in their "attentive writing" already know how to write the word. If they make up words with letters they do not master, they are quite happy with just discussing the word.

Any questions of spelling are answered by the teacher and the students can always be sure that the words and texts they have written are correct.

Grown-ups with reading and writing disabilities have the freedom to write when they feel comfortable and may use the teacher as their secretary when that is preferable.

The creative part of the work is of course not limited to this. Using the words the students have made, you can go on with discussions, sorting the words, drawing pictures and stories, writing stories, examining the grammar of the language, taking part in other peoples' writing etc. The Witting method also includes a program for the non-phonetical spelling of the Swedish language, to be used when the students have acquired the basics of reading and writing. All the usual elements of the subject are of course part of the work, but in a different manner.

### **The development of the method**

The process that led to this method is in itself important because it gives us an understanding of the climate and the basic principles characterizing the activities in the classroom work.

The idea of separating form and content when working with a language is breathtaking. Language is first of all communication. It seems impossible to at any time ignore the content and still claim to be developing the student's ability to read, write and use his or her language freely and correctly.

During the development of her method Maja Witting also rejected the thought several times and it is therefore interesting to note how she finally came to accept the idea.

The separation of form and content was not a theoretical construction on her part. On the contrary it came about as a result of close contact with the students and almost as a demand from the students in question.

Maja Witting was fairly new in her profession as a teacher and was asked to teach reading and writing to a student whose earlier efforts had been in vain. The more experienced teachers could not present any untried methods, because to their knowledge everything had been tried. And so it came about that Maja Witting had to rely on the student and his reactions when trying to find a practicable way to work.

*She made an agreement with the student. He was to give her all the information he could about his difficulties. And it was surprising how accurately he could describe his situation.*

They then decided to step by step try different elements in the work he had earlier been subject to, and the student agreed to give his teacher truthful reactions to the different things they tried. Realizing that the student was her best source of information Maja Witting kept a close record of his reactions and little by little they together formed a working routine, eliminating every negative element, saving the parts that might function and adding on new material.

The way to help the student give accurate information was using questions like: Do you feel comfortable doing this? Are you learning now? Is this too difficult? Is it too easy? Have you had enough exercise now? Do you know this well enough now? Do you feel secure?

Have decided to take the student's reactions seriously Maja Witting could in the long run do nothing but accept the fact that the material to work with had to consist of what came to be called "content neutral language structures".

Once the idea had proven itself useful in practice it wasn't difficult to find support for it when analyzing the processes of reading and writing.

Developing the method itself was a process of about ten years and several students were involved.

### **The students and the teacher as true partners is the process of learning**

The close cooperation between the students and their teacher during the development of this method is still one of the characteristic elements of the method. The students are learning and the teacher is their professional guide.

The students are aware that their information to the teacher is of the utmost importance to the result of their work:

"This is too difficult for me."

"I need to practice that more."

The students are always aware of what they are doing. They know how far their knowledge goes and they know what remains to be learned.

"I won't write that word because I don't know how to spell it. But I can draw a picture."

"Is 'hoppa' spelled with two 'p's'?"

It is clear to the students that the attentive writing uses sounds from their spoken language and that they are using words and phrases from their own language in the associative routine. They know that they have the responsibility to ask for the teacher's help when they need it and to find other important occupations when the teacher is busy helping others.

This means that all the work that is in process in the classroom is a consequence of a true partnership in the process of learning.

### All ages and all levels

The active and responsible student is a consequence of the method. It is also part of the reason why this method can be used in many different situations.

It makes no difference if the students are young or old, mentally retarded or belonging at the university. It is of no importance if they have never encountered writing, or if they have, and the encounter was disastrous.

What makes this possible is the existence of the content neutral language structures. They are neutral even in this aspect: since they carry no meaning in themselves, anyone can use them.

If you choose to work with texts it is close to impossible to adjust the content to the student's level and at the same time keep the technical demands within the limits of the student's knowledge. All books of reading instruction have to restrict some of the students and offer other students texts that are technically to difficult. It is even more important to note that a book can never meet with or capture the language of every individual student.

Using the Witting method makes it possible for every student to individualize his work himself. The attentive writing offers the use of all senses, one by one, and the student is free to use what is his or her strength and at the same time

develop other parts. And it is easy to see that the "associative routine" gives room for everyone's individuality.

### **First time learners**

One of the main target groups for the method is students learning to read and write for the first time – "first time learners".

It is then irrelevant if some of the children already know most of the letters and can be regarded as almost-readers, while others meet the letters for the very first time. Side by side these children can work individually with building a firm technique and developing their ability to express thoughts and feelings.

### **Re-learners**

The method is also used for "re-learners", those who once went through instruction at school but did not develop the ability to read and write needed in a country like ours.

The students who have used this method to conquer their difficulties to read and write can be found anywhere in society.

In fourth grade they might have been the trouble-makers.

In high school they might have been the ones who studied 24 hours a day to keep up their grades.

At the university they hardly ever finished their theses. The work required so much thought, that they didn't have the energy to keep their inadequate technique under control.

At an industry it might have been the worker who refused to be promoted into a job with paperwork.

In the management group of the same company you might have found a director with a competent secretary and an interesting ability to make his associates give oral accounts and to handle things by telephone.

Among the mentally handicapped we also find those who *are* able to learn to read and write but failed the first time. They too are "re-learners" and have been helped.

**Other areas**

The method is used as a follow-up strategy to strengthen and develop the language capacities of students at any reading and writing level.

It is used when introducing the Swedish language to illiterate immigrants as well as to those who can read and write in their own language.

It has also been used in the efforts of aphasics to reconquer their lost language.

It seems likely that other areas of use will occur in the future.

It is always the same method: using the attentive writing and the associative routine. It is always based on the content neutral language structures, and on a dialogue between the student and the teacher sharing the responsibilities of the process of learning.

## WRITING BOOKS THAT CHILDREN READ

Inger Sandberg

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This is the first time I am going to deliver a speech in English in Sweden. But it feels like treading on thin ice. To keep the deepest meaning within ones control, one has to use the mother tongue. I also think that it is the first time I am going to speak about picture books in my own country without my other half, my husband, artist Lasse Sandberg.

Mostly I write texts for picture books. Authors of picture books are used to being extremely careful with their words. The only thing I am able to compare our situation to is that of a poet.

A picture book contains the text and the pictures. Together these two elements form a special language where you have to read text and picture as *one whole*. The picture book differs from every other kind of narrative art. The academic word for analysing text and pictures together, introduced by Kristin Hallberg at the University of Stockholm, is *Ikonotext*. Kristin Hallberg is writing the first doctor's thesis about an authorship which includes both picture and text: our picture books from 1953 and onwards.

It is a stroke of luck that as an author I also love to draw and love pictures. When an idea appears in my head it comes first as pictures simultaneously with words. But I am not able to draw them. In my work with Lasse Sandberg we have formed a kind of unity where I start by writing to his unborn pictures.

Have you ever thought about the similarities between cooking a tasty dinner, knitting a beautiful sweater, or writing a book? For me there are very few differences. They are neither intellectual activities nor therapy. You always need something beyond an intellectual structure, such as improvisation and unconsciousness, to make a work of art. Of course I have to know what I want and I must have the techniques to accomplish my purpose. The surprises which occur on the way from start to finish while I am busy with one of these three activities, I would like to call a creative, sensuous process. Leftover food, old scraps of yarn and bits and pieces from my childhood are the elements I mix together with what is new and available, plus observations of life around me today, to create dinners, wearable art and new books. Everything connected with these three activities brings me a great deal of joy and satisfaction.

1991 is the four-hundredth anniversary of the first Swedish children's book in the modern sense. I mean, a book that was not written for adults, nor for use in school or church.

In the year 1591 only four books in Swedish were published.

One of them was a book for children.

Every year Sweden publishes about 1,100 titles of children's books and 50 per cent of those are translations.

In the last few years the English books that have been published here are just as many as the Swedish ones.

There are nearly a 100 publishers in Sweden.

Each year the Children's Department at our publishers, Rabén & Sjögren (R & S), gets around 1,500 books and manuscripts for consideration. They publish about 120 new books a year and about 40 per cent of those are translations.

At the publishing company R & S, the picture books are printed in editions from 4,000 to 10,000 copies. Only a few are as high as 100,000, such as special editions of Astrid Lindgren. An average number of picture books printed in Swedish is 8,000 copies. Thanks to the Children's Book Club our last four books have been in editions from 45,000 to 90,000 copies.

Swedish children's books have a tradition that dates back to the late 19th century. Some very good artists like Elsa Beskow, Ivar Arosenius and Ottilia Adelborg dominated the scene up to 1945 when Astrid Lindgren started her fantastic career. Swedish children have a wide range of classical books to choose from. The references are the same for great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children.

The old books are still loved by children, and they are published in new editions year after year along with the new books. Lasse Sandberg and I are now among the so-called old picture book artists in Sweden. This year, 1990, marks 40 years since we got married and began our collaboration with books. It gives us an odd and funny feeling to be called old picture book artists when one compares our 40-year-involvement with the 400-year history of children's books in Sweden.

During my childhood and in my teens I never thought I was going to become a writer. Writing was something I had occupied myself with since the age of six. It was great fun, it was make-believe and it was justified lying. Born in a puritanic country, I was sure that I had to struggle very hard to make a career as an adult. I could not believe that writing could be a serious profession. The grown-ups around me wanted me to become a singer. I was very shy and hated to perform on stage. Singing was not *my* decision. Singing was out!

At the age of 18, I started at art-school in Stockholm. All by myself I had decided to become a sculptor. The first term contained nothing but copying the old masters – unbelievably boring. Not even as a child had I enjoyed doing what I was told or to make copies of other people's work. So – when I met Lasse Sandberg, we got married and settled down in the country.

Lasse Sandberg was already a well-known cartoonist. Like many other cartoonists, William Steig, Tove Jansson, André François, Tomi Ungerer, and others,

Lasse Sandberg wanted to work for children. One of our big dailies used to send stories to Lasse for illustration. Since some of these stories were not particularly interesting, I made my first tentative efforts at writing a few stories for the Sunday editions. We also began putting together books for children.

We felt a need for other types of books suitable for our own children and their friends. We wanted to show the possibilities and opportunities in children's everyday lives, in their flats, their playgrounds and schoolyards, in cities designed by ignorant grown-ups, how children's creative imagination was able to change the areas they were restricted to into a place where they were able to find magic.

In 1950, we would never have dreamed that by 1990, we would have had published a number of story books and more than 80 picture books. Neither would we ever have dreamed that little kids from all over the country would write to us to ask for the telephone number of Little Ghost Laban or Godfrey. Or: how many meters the Tall Uncle was when he was born? What is Dusty's favorite food? Where does the father of the little Thumb live? And who could have ever dreamed about the lifelong commitment to children and books, during those first 8 years when all but two of our books were rejected. We received printed rejection slips from every publisher in Sweden. A person once reprimanded us for not keeping all those rejection slips. Who on earth would save rejection slips for possible scientific use with such an insecure future ahead?

It's always interesting to write for children because their opinions and tastes are not yet formed. Children generally have a very open attitude towards art and literature. From the very first, we decided not to change anything to suit the opinions and tastes of others. After all, we were making books for children, not for grown-ups.

Lasse and I have always worked on a book totally isolated from other people. We have never showed any synopsis to a publisher. We have always presented the whole book when it is ready for publication. Text, pictures, layout, cover – everything is ready. It is impossible for them to make any alterations. This is good because if it is a fine book *or* a bad book, then it is our own responsibility totally.

We wanted the books to be readable to the child, who must be regarded as a separate person, filled by words, pictures, scents and sounds from a private world of experiences. Today I refuse to read a book to one of my five grandchildren if I feel that it is made without heart and meaning or if it is made to fit into a fashion trend.

In 1952, our first child was born and our first book was accepted for publication. We called our daughter Lena, and the book was called "Woolrik the Sheep Gets a Medal". We got less than \$100, once and for all, and the original drawings

disappeared. In the meantime, during the 50s, I trained as a primary school teacher. Lasse went on working, doing mainly satirical cartoons during the nights. During the days he took care of our daughter Lena. He was a "Home Daddy". We had another child, our son Niklas, in 1955.

Our next book did not appear until 1959. This is not to say that we weren't working on any books during all those years. "This Is Where I Live", for instance, was written in 1955, but it was not published until 1962.

Then came the 60s, when things suddenly started moving for us. The 60s were a wonderful period for us, full of encouragements. Children, critics, publishers, librarians, all supported us. We received lots of prizes and awards. Best of all – our third child, Mathias, arrived as a Christmas present in 1962.

One question that Lasse and I are often asked is: How do you make your books? How do they see the light of day? It varies of course from one book to the next. *Little Anna* for instance came about in a very special way. The way she was born was unusual but I want to tell you about it, because it is Anna's 25th birthday as a book figure.

When our daughter Lena was three years old, she was given a doll's house for Christmas. In the doll's house there was a bookshelf, among other things, but there were no books. So Lena went up to her Daddy and ordered a book. Lasse took a couple of business cards, folded them – like this – cut them and taped them together. "Here you are". "Such an ugly little book", said Lena. "It hasn't got any pictures."

Poor Lasse, what was he to do about pictures for such a very tiny book? He drew a little girl, sitting on the hat of a man. The girl was looking far away, into the rest of the book. She only saw one thing on each page: a bird, a cat, a sun, a house. After a few years Lena got tired of her doll's house and the whole thing was put away in the attic. Everything except the little book. That stayed in a drawer among the rest of our paper material for years.

In 1962 when we were expecting Mathias, our third child, I suddenly felt very emotional. I wanted to make tiny books for tiny children. Books which they could cope with physically, emotionally and linguistically. Books which we could not buy in the shops during that time. While waiting for Mathias (who I thought was going to be a little *Anna*) we made five books about the fine relationship between the long Tall Uncle, representing the kind, supportive, but sometimes helpless adult and a very young and strong person, *Little Anna*.

The first little *Anna* book was actually published in the US before Sweden, in 1964. Over the years *Anna* has appeared in about 20 books. They have been written during an intensive period and not as a serial, one year after another. To be curious about a figure again, we had to take a pause for about seven years.

The Little Anna books are all on backlist.

*"The little SPOOK"*, or, in the US, *"Little Ghost Godfrey"* has his 25th birthday this year as well as *Anna*. He was born during the 50s and the story is based on a real situation in our family, where one little boy got terrified of ghosts. We wanted to vaccinate children against the fear of ghosts and darkness as well as counteract the conventional idea that all little boys necessarily have to grow as big and strong and clever as their Dad. In the case of the Little Ghost – why must he be as big and awful and terrifying as his father, the Daddy Ghost? The Little Ghost cannot grind his teeth because he has lost his front teeth, his ghost sound is like a mouse squeak, and worst of it is, that he is frightened of the darkness.

In 1974, we were urged by 60 school children in Gothenburg to write new books about the Little Ghost. They insisted in the Little Ghost having a baby sister. We started to make more books about the Ghosts. Five small books and three big picture books were created within the next years.

The text is very scanty but the pictures are vivid and rich, both painted and in Lasse's collage techniques.

Looking back, I find that the line in our work through these 40 years is to make the books we needed for our own children and now the books we need for our grandchildren. Linguistic stimulation has always been vital and often we wanted to teach something important without making this the main purpose of the book. There were so many different themes in our books published in the 60s. How to look after yourself in the traffic and also integrate disabled children in day nurseries and kindergarten. During the 60s our children never met these little children in their play-schools. We also wanted the children to have a decent playground and schoolyard and the grown-ups to show respect for their most important work: to play.

I worked as a teacher for five and a half years and resigned in 1963. But once you are interested in education it makes it natural to stand up for the children against rigid ways of teaching and to support the happy, efficient ways of learning. There are many persons who have inspired me through the years: A.S. Neill, Sylvia Ashton Warner, Betty Edwards, Henry Pluckrose and Eliot Wigginton. Four of them I have had the privilege to introduce to a wide Swedish audience. Travelling and lecturing in Europe, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Latin-America and USA, has also given us many friends who all are dedicated to children and their books.

In several of our books we have discussed school environment and other topics of interest i.e. dyslexia, allergies, ethical issues such as atheism contra belief, and also stealing in one book about a young person called Johan, age seven.

In 1968 it seemed important to talk about the destruction of our environment. We could not find one single book about this important matter. When our publisher tried to sell our book to other nations, they, and we, got upset rejections from England and Germany telling us that the environment is nothing for children to bother about. Iceland, clean Iceland though, bought the book "*Filurstjörman*" that is "The Planet of the Scamps".

There were two things we wanted to avoid in that particular book. We did not want to frighten the children so that they stopped drinking the water or started to hold their breath as soon as they went out. Nor did we want to swamp them with the failure of our generation: "Look how we have messed things up for you, children! Now it is up to you to put it all right again." Therefore we staged the action on an imaginary planet.

Another environmental problem occurs in 1971 in "*Where does all that smoke come from?*". It is conceived as a weapon in the hands of small children faced with adults who persist in force-feeding their children with tobacco smoke. It gives the children some awareness of what advertisers are trying to do to them. And above all, they are informed what a cigarette really is. The enlightened people in the book are the children, who are the leading characters. Through them the manipulated dragon gets help. This book was our first about smoking. We made another one in 1979 about the Little Thumb and his Mother.

Talking about didactics, there are some other books with clear messages I want to show you briefly, "Hej, välkommen till mej!" "*Hello, Welcome to me!*" is a book about what you are exposed to when you come as an immigrant. The frustration when you are unable to ask the questions you want to ask, when you do not understand the jokes, how desperate you feel hostility. We put two Swedish children in an immigrant situation outside our country to make it easier to identify with the exposed ones.

We have made another book about this problem. It was called "Tummen och Tossingarna", "*The Thumb and the Square Ones*", and only our most intelligent reviewers discovered what it was all about. It is a book about language. It was published in 1982 and it has been out of circulation for years. This year our Immigration Department plans to reprint it in 50,000 copies to be given away to young children in our schools.

As I look back over our work and try to analyze why we made the kind of books that we have, three factors seem to emerge as important ones; Firstly, Lasse and I were young, but still we were way past our childhood reading.

Secondly, we did not know what a children's book looked like, nor what it ought to look like. That was a great advantage.

Thirdly, we found that the reality *our* children shared with a great many others – i.e. city life – was rarely found in their literature. Children growing up with

elevators and high rise apartment blocks in small flats could rarely identify with children in their stories.

I would like to say something else about the text in picture books. One has to control one's adult boastfulness. There is no point using any long and involved words and phrases which we have saddled ourselves with over the years. Simple words but not stupid. One must try to find the straight forward tone without any insinuating cuteness to address the child with all the respect one feels for him as an individual. The text must not require clarification by the person reading aloud. In picture books the text and the pictures must merge into one whole and never be at odds with each other.

And now something about the pictures: Lasse can go through weeks of thought, worry, depression, excitement, before he finally finds the form and tone which fits the book he is about to start. But when the actual drawing starts, it means an intensive, concentrated working period when he works from early morning right through the night. All his frustration goes away, as he constructs each image with artistry and playfulness.

We often get the question: Why do the children from less than one year old love Lasse's pictures so much? We don't know. One answer is perhaps that Lasse's people are simple but with expressions and feelings. They are open to the world with their arms open for a hug and they have eye contact with the little reader. In the big picture books the background, the environment, is often artistically complicated and stimulating to the children's imagination. I think they can feel when an artist is honest in his work and loves what he does.

In the late 50s Lasse started to use collage in his books and he has many followers inspired by his unique work. I am a very privileged writer because Lasse refuses to illustrate any other author working for children.

There is so much we want to *do* with children's books. Our aims are always high. We want above all to make entertaining books which give great opportunities for identification. We also want to activate children and stimulate their own creativity. Linguistic stimulation is important, and books should contain certain points or problems which can inspire a continued conversation with the adult who is reading the book to them. And adults will learn a lot about children reading picture books.

But I am afraid if I go along telling you about the old books, I never will come to the books from the 80s.

For ten years I had been thinking about a picture book about an allergic child. I was very occupied myself with two young boys who suffered from allergy. I remember that I asked two other writers why they did not write *The Picture*

book about this fast growing illness. Nothing happened. But finally in 1980 our book "*A Fine Day for Johan*", was ready for publication.

An allergic person is always at the mercy of others. In this book the most important thing is to strengthen the classmates' loyalty towards Johan. I hope it will soon be reprinted because it is recommended by physicians and people try to get hold of it through our private phone.

"*Tiny Nought and All the Others*" is a book from 1985. It is a book about numbers. But it is also about something else: how to be regarded as a nobody – a nothing – and how in the end the worthless one turns out to be the most valuable and respected person of them all.

In "*White and Black and All the Others*", published in 1986, every picture is made in the collage technique that Lasse started to use in the 50s. On the surface "*White and Black and All the Others*" is a book about colors. The story is about another world and in another time where there was a land where only butterflies lived. The white butterflies lived in the upper part, the black land. And the black butterflies lived in the lower part, in the white land. Between the two lands there was a thick and high stone wall. Of course the butterflies could not see each other or visit one another. The wall collapsed and in the end the situation was that that no one could build a wall ever again.

The most important thoughts in "*White and Black and All the Others*" is understanding among people, how to find your own identity and be able to live together with other people. This book is used for the very young 1–2 years old to look into and point and discover colors. Older children get the message about being friends and about a world where no walls exist anymore.

"*The Sandbergs ABCD*" is the story about the alphabet and it includes most of our characters appearing in our books through the years. The main characters are the Little Spook and Tiny Spook. One day they come to visit the witch who *thinks* she can do magic. She is not professional at all and her newest unique invention, the letters, has just vanished, out through the window.

And finally after meeting figures from our other books they are bringing back all the letters to the witch. The ghosts start to teach her how to use them. She wants to hide them in her mattress, but the prince and the spooks tell her that she is stupid to do that when it is possible instead to combine the letters into a big and small, long and short, and happy, positive words like kiss, house, my mum, dog, cat, ghosts and goodnight story.

The Sandberg ABCD was meant to be our last book but in the summer of 1987, I was out in the forest totally alone. It was beautiful. Lots of birds, no mushrooms to pick and the wild raspberries and blueberries were not yet ripe. It was peaceful and suddenly a story which had been in and out in my head for years,

was just there. It was the story about tough childhood, about life, about death and about love.

The title of the book is "*The Boy, the Princess and Green*". It is the story about a little boy with a poor background and a princess, who was not very happy even though she lived in a castle. The boy hates everything green.

I am not going to tell you about the *Boy, the Princess and Green* because it is full of symbols, jokes and strong feelings and the story operates on different levels which is what we always try to do in our big picture books.

Many magazines and newspapers and those who know us look upon *The boy* and *The Princess* as our autobiography. Everything an author does is biography even if it is disguised as very small picture books or big ones.

When "The Boy, the Princess and Green" was published by Sweden's most prestigious book club, the surprise was enormous when books started to return from upset parents with comments like; "I don't want my child exposed to the realities of alcoholism". Of course, it was their own fears and inabilities to deal with alcoholism that caused such strong reactions. Some did not want their children to ask questions about their own drinking habits. Alcoholism is important in this book but it is just one of the habits exposed.

Above all an author of children's books must know what she wants with the books and where her loyalties are. What we see and experience we use, just like other writers use their own special environment.

An environment where the big and the small play together and work together.

An environment in which the little ones are rightful citizens with rights and responsibilities.

In the book you will find someone who thinks like you, who has the same life and problems as you, who acts like you and you can feel that you are really worth something.

The child always swings between happiness and unhappiness  
between reality and imagination.

i wish that the book would function like a pendulum  
between safety and adventure.

I don't think that any book for children can explain our complex, mad world to a child. Hopefully, the good book can explain a bit of what is going on, and make the world i.e. everyday life – more understandable and happy.



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The United Nations' International Literacy Year 1990 was the starting point for a variety of actions to combat global illiteracy during the 1990's. This book deals with Swedish contributions to this urgent mission of education and learning.

The book reviews global challenges in respect to literacy, Swedish research initiatives as well as ideas and methods to promote reading and writing in Sweden. In short, illiteracy cannot be reduced to a Third World problem. It is also a problem in industrialized and postindustrialized countries characterized by growing demands on literacy skills for all citizens. More attention has to be paid to individual experiences of being illiterate or having reading and writing problems in different societal settings.

The authors were specially invited to speak at the International Reading Association's 13th World Congress in Stockholm, July 1990. This volume is based on their presentations. The editor, Britta Ericson, is assistant professor at the Department of Education and Psychology, Linköping University, Sweden.