

# THE TEACHING OF WRITING IN THE UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET AND MASS MEDIA CULTURE

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**Abstract.** This article considers the impact on the teaching of writing and the curriculum, of changes in culture associated with mass media and new means of communication such as the internet. It specifically focuses on the implications these changes might have for the ways in which writing is taught and practised in schooling today. The article is based on interviews with three Swedish upper-secondary school mother-tongue teachers and presents their views on how the writing situation has changed for their students. According to the teachers, the curriculum faces challenges from students' access to and use of mass media culture and computer-mediated communications. For example, the teachers reported that students currently are less interested in grammar and spelling, and more interested in images and layout. Students also use what teachers consider to be plagiarism in their methods of communication. The article draws on media ecology to understand these reported changes in the sense that students are seen to develop new media practices involving several media-specific competences (Mackey, 2002) which gives them access to new ways of meaning-making in their acts of reading or writing. It is tentatively claimed that students may thus develop alternative notions of authors as well as texts, which affect their own view of text production in school. Other theoretical frameworks drawn on in the article include Habermas' discussion of how the public and private sphere fuse and Ziehe's (1989) perceptions of teachers as 'relation workers' in increasingly intimate school environments.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Internet, the teaching of writing, Mass media culture, Plagiarism, School, Visual literacy, Media ecology.

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**Chinese**

[Translated by Shek Kam Tse]

摘要: 這篇文章闡述了, 因大眾傳媒與新的溝通方式的改變, 文化亦有所不同, 對教授寫作與課程, 有著牽引的影響, 特別是針對現今學校裏, 教授與練習寫作。文章以三個以瑞典為母語的高中女教師的訪問, 了解她們對學生在寫作時處境的改變的看法。據她們所述, 課程面對的挑戰有來的是來自學生對大眾傳媒文化和電腦中介的溝通的接觸與應用。例如: 老師報告了, 現在的學生對文法和串字有較少的興趣, 而對影像和草圖則有較多的興趣。學生更將老師們所認為的抄襲, 放到他們的溝通方法上。這文章勾勒出傳媒的生態學, 了解這正改變的情況, 學生要去發展新的媒體慣例, 包含若干項媒體特定的能力 (Mackey, 2002), 這賦予他們在閱讀與寫作時, 新的意義建造的涉獵。這可暫稱學生能發展出作者與文本的交替的見解, 這影響著他們在學校的文本創作。另一個理論架構取自於 Habermas 的如何在公眾與私人領域中的混合, 和 Ziehe (1989) 在一個越漸熟悉的學校環境下, 老師對「如親屬人員」的觀感。

**Dutch**

Samenvatting [Translated by Tanja Janssen]

Dit artikel gaat over de impact van culturele veranderingen met betrekking tot de massamedia en nieuwe communicatiemiddelen zoals internet op het schrijfonderwijs. In het bijzonder wordt aandacht besteed aan de implicaties van deze veranderingen op de manier waarop schrijven wordt beoefend en onderwezen op school. Het artikel is gebaseerd op interviews met drie Zweedse moedertaaldocenten in de bovenbouw van het voorgezet onderwijs. Hun visie op hoe de schrijfsituatie veranderd is voor leerlingen wordt gepresenteerd. Volgens de docenten vormen de toegang en het gebruik van massamedia en de computer als communicatiemiddel onder leerlingen een uitdaging voor het curriculum. De docenten signaleerden bijvoorbeeld dat leerlingen minder interesse hebben voor grammatica en spelling, en meer voor beelden en layout. Leerlingen maken ook gebruik van wat docenten als plagiaat beschouwen in hun communicatie. In het artikel wordt media ecologie gebruikt om inzicht te krijgen in deze veranderingen: leerlingen lijken nieuwe mediapraktijken te ontwikkelen die verschillende media-specifieke competenties behelzen (Mackey, 2002). Deze geven hen toegang tot nieuwe manieren van betekenis verlenen bij hun lees- en schrijfactiviteiten. Voorzichtig wordt gesteld dat leerlingen zo nieuwe noties kunnen ontwikkelen, zowel van auteurs als van teksten, die van invloed zijn op hun eigen visie op tekstproductie op school. Andere theoretische kaders in het artikel zijn Habermas' visie op hoe de publieke en de private sfeer samengaan, en Ziehe's (1989) visie op docenten als 'relatiewerkers' in schoolomgevingen die in toenemende mate intiem zijn.

**French**

Résumé [Translated by Laurence Pasa]

Cet article étudie l'impact sur l'enseignement de l'écrit et les programmes, des changements culturels liés aux mass media et aux nouveaux moyens de communication tels que Internet. Il se centre tout particulièrement sur les implications que ces changements pourraient avoir sur les manières dont l'écriture est enseignée et pratiquée à l'école actuellement. L'étude se base sur des entretiens auprès de trois professeurs de langue maternelle de secondaire supérieur suédois et présente leurs visions de la façon dont les situations d'écriture ont changé pour leurs élèves. Selon les professeurs, les programmes sont face à des défis quant à l'accès des élèves à la culture des mass media et à la communication par ordinateur. Par exemple, les professeurs déclarent que, actuellement, les élèves s'intéressent moins à la grammaire et l'orthographe, qu'aux images et à la mise en page. Dans leurs manières de communiquer, les élèves emploient ce que les professeurs considèrent comme du plagiat. L'étude tente de comprendre, de façon écologique, les changements rapportés relativement aux nouvelles pratiques de communication des élèves, lesquelles impliquent plusieurs compétences médiatiques spécifiques (Mackey, 2002) leur donnant accès à de nouveaux mode de construction du sens dans leurs pratiques de lecture ou d'écriture. On postule que les élèves pourraient ainsi développer des conceptions alternatives de la notion d'auteur et de texte, qui affectent leur représentation de la production écrite à l'école. D'autres cadres théoriques abordés dans l'article intègrent la discussion de Habermas sur la façon dont les sphères publique et privée fusionnent, ainsi que la conception qu'a Ziehe (1989) des professeurs en tant qu'« ouvriers de la relation » dans des environnements scolaires de plus en plus intimes.

Mots-clés : Littéracie, Internet, Enseignement de l'écriture, Culture des mass media, Plagiat, Ecole, Littéracie visuelle, Ecologie de médias.

#### German

Zusammenfassung [Translated by Irene Pieper]

Dieser Beitrag betrachtet den Einfluss kultureller Veränderungen, die mit den Massenmedien und neuen Kommunikationsmedien wie dem Internet verbunden sind, auf Schreibunterricht und Curriculum. Im Zentrum stehen Implikationen dieser Veränderungen für die Art und Weise, wie das Schreiben in heutigen Schulen unterrichtet und praktiziert wird. Der Beitrag basiert auf Interviews mit drei Muttersprachlehrenden der schwedischen höheren Sekundarstufe und stellt dar, wie diese Lehrenden die Veränderungen im Bereich des Schreibens beschreiben. Den Lehrenden zufolge steht das Curriculum angesichts des Zugangs, den die SchülerInnen zur massenmedialen Kultur und computer-basierter Kommunikation bereits gefunden haben, vor Herausforderungen. Beispielsweise berichteten die Lehrenden, dass die SchülerInnen gegenwärtig weniger an Grammatik und Orthographie interessiert sind als an Bildern und Layout. Die SchülerInnen nutzen außerdem Kommunikationsmethoden, die die Lehrenden als Plagiat betrachten. Der Beitrag greift auf Sichtweisen der Medienökologie zurück und interpretiert die Veränderungen in dem Sinne, dass SchülerInnen neue mediale Praktiken entwickeln, die auf unterschiedliche medienspezifische Kompetenzen zurück verweisen (Mackey 2002). Dies wiederum erlaubt ihnen den Zugang zu neuen Wegen der Bedeutungskonstruktion im Akt des Lesens oder Schreibens. Es wird die These aufgestellt, dass die SchülerInnen so alternative Auffassungen von Autorschaft und Text entwickeln, die ihre eigene Sicht von Textproduktion in der Schule beeinflussen. Weitere theoretische Rahmungen beziehen sich auf Jürgen Habermas – dessen Ausführungen dazu, wie die Übergänge zwischen öffentlicher und privater Sphäre flüssig werden – und Thomas Ziehe (1989) – der Lehrende als Beziehungsarbeiter in mehr und mehr intimen Schulumgebungen betrachtet.

#### Greek

Metafrase [Translated by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Το άρθρο αυτό παρουσιάζει την επίδραση των αλλαγών στην κουλτούρα που σχετίζεται με τα ΜΜΕ και τους νέους τρόπους επικοινωνίας όπως το Διαδίκτυο, στη διδασκαλία παραγωγής γραπτού και στο αναλυτικό πρόγραμμα. Επικεντρώνεται ιδιαίτερα στις επιπτώσεις που αυτές οι αλλαγές μπορεί να έχουν στον τρόπο που το γράψιμο διδάσκεται και ασκείται στο σχολείο σήμερα. Το άρθρο στηρίζεται σε συνεντεύξεις με τρεις Σουηδούς καθηγητές της Σουηδικής γλώσσας στο Λύκειο και παρουσιάζει τις απόψεις τους για το πώς η κατάσταση στο γράψιμο έχει αλλάξει για τους μαθητές τους. Σύμφωνα με τους δασκάλους, το αναλυτικό πρόγραμμα αντιμετωπίζει προκλήσεις εξαιτίας της πρόσβασης και χρήσης από τους μαθητές της κουλτούρας των ΜΜΕ και της επικοινωνίας μέσω υπολογιστή. Για παράδειγμα οι δάσκαλοι αναφέρουν ότι οι μαθητές ενδιαφέρονται λιγότερο για τη γραμματική και την ορθογραφία και περισσότερο για την εικόνα και τη διευθέτηση της σελίδας (lay out). Επίσης οι μαθητές χρησιμοποιούν για την επικοινωνία τους αυτό που οι δάσκαλοι θεωρούν λογοκλοπή. Το άρθρο στηρίζεται στην οικολογία των ΜΜΕ για να κατανοήσει αυτές τις αλλαγές, υπό την έννοια ότι οι μαθητές φαίνεται να αναπτύσσουν νέες πρακτικές για τα ΜΜΕ που περιλαμβάνουν ειδικές δεξιότητες (MacKey, 2002) οι οποίες τους δίνουν πρόσβαση σε νέους τρόπους κατασκευής νοήματος στις πράξεις ανάγνωσης και γραφής. Προτείνεται με επιφυλάξεις η ιδέα ότι οι μαθητές αυτοί αναπτύσσουν εναλλακτικές αντιλήψεις για τους συγγραφείς και τα κείμενα, οι οποίες επηρεάζουν τις ιδέες τους για την παραγωγή κειμένων στο σχολείο. Αλλά θεωρητικά πλαίσια που αναφέρονται σε αυτό το άρθρο περιλαμβάνουν τη συζήτηση του Habermas για το πώς η δημόσια και η ιδιωτική σφαίρα συναντώνται και η αντίληψη του Ziehe (1989) για τους δασκάλους ως "εργάτες σχέσεων" στο συνεχώς ιδιωτικοποιούμενο σχολικό περιβάλλον.

#### Polish

Streszczenie Translated by Elzbiéta Awramiuk]

Niniejszy artykuł rozważa wpływ kojarzonych z mass mediami i nowymi sposobami komunikowania się, takimi jak Internet, zmian w kulturze na nauczanie pisania i na programy. Szczególnie koncentrujemy się na wpływie tych zmian na sposób nauczania i rozwijania umiejętności pisania w dzisiejszej szkole. Artykuł opiera się na wywiadach z trzema szwedzkojęzycznymi nauczycielami języka ojczystego ze szkoły średniej i prezentuje ich spojrzenie na to, w jaki sposób sytuacja pisania zmieniła się dla ich uczniów. Według nauczycieli program nauczania wychodzi naprzeciw takim zmianom jak dostęp uczniów do kultury masowej, korzystanie z niej i komunikowanie za pośrednictwem komputera. Przykładowo, nauczyciele relacjonowali, że uczniowie obecnie są mniej zainteresowani gramatyką i

pisownią, a bardziej – obrazami i opracowaniem graficznym. Uczniowie używają także w swych sposobach komunikacji czegoś, co nauczyciele uważają za plagiatstwo. Aby zrozumieć opisywane zmiany, artykuł wykorzystuje ekologię mediów w tym sensie, że uczniów postrzega się jako osoby rozwijające nowe medialne formy, które obejmują kilka specyficznych dla mediów kompetencji (Mackey, 2002) i które dają im dostęp do nowych sposobów budowania znaczenia w ich aktach czytania i pisania. Wstępnie twierdzi się, że uczniowie mogą w ten sposób rozwijać alternatywne poglądy o autorach i tekstach, co wpływa na ich własne spojrzenie na tworzenie tekstu w szkole. Inne teoretyczne podstawy zarysowane w tym artykule zawierają dyskusję Habermasa o przenikaniu sfery publicznej i prywatnej oraz poglądy Ziehe'a (1989) na temat nauczycieli jako "pokrewnych pracowników" w coraz bardziej kameralnych środowiskach szkolnych.

Słowa-kлючe: umiejętność czytania i pisania, Internet, nauczanie pisania, kultura masowa, plagiatstwo, szkoła, obrazkowa piśmienność, ekologia medialna

### Portuguese

Resumo [Translated by Paulo Feytor Pinto]

Este artigo trata do impacto, no ensino da escrita e no currículo, de mudanças culturais associadas com os mídia e com os novos meios de comunicação, como a internet. Ele centra-se especificamente nas implicações que estas mudanças podem ter nos modos como a escrita é hoje ensinada e praticada na escola. O artigo baseia-se em entrevistas a três professores de sueco língua materna, no último ciclo do secundário, e apresenta as suas perspectivas acerca das alterações observadas nas situações de escrita dos alunos. Segundo os professores, o currículo está diante de desafios suscitados pelo acesso dos alunos e o seu recurso à cultura dos mídia e à comunicação mediada pelo computador. Por exemplo, os professores disseram que os alunos estão geralmente menos interessados em gramática e ortografia e mais interessados em imagens e configurações. Os estudantes também recorrem, no seu método de comunicação, àquilo que os professores consideram plágio. Este artigo recorre à ecologia dos mídia para compreender estas mudanças, na medida em que os estudantes parecem desenvolver novas práticas comunicativas envolvendo várias competências específicas de cada meio (Mackey, 2002), o que lhes permite o acesso a novas maneiras de criação de significado nos seus processos de leitura ou escrita. Tenta-se mostrar em que medida os estudantes poderão desenvolver noções alternativas acerca de autores e de textos que afetam a sua perspectiva acerca da produção de textos, na escola. Outros quadros teóricos apresentados neste artigo incluem a discussão de Habermas sobre a fusão das esferas pública e privada, e a percepção de Ziehe (1989) de que os professores são "trabalhadores de relações" em contextos escolares cada vez mais intimistas.

Palavras-chave: literacia, internet, ensino da escrita, cultura dos mídia, plágio, escola, literacia visual, ecologia dos mídia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Former writing norms are currently under threat in different ways in what Castells (2002) calls "The Galaxy of Internet" and are being replaced by new norms. Thus, abbreviations, written language saturated with spoken language, blurred boundary lines between written and spoken language - are all features connected with the influence of computer-mediated communication and the internet (Svenningsson, 2002). Researchers agree that what has become known as "networked discourse" employs a language that lies somewhere along the continuum between spoken and written language (Hawisher & Selfe, 1998). The conventional, linear way of telling a story and script culture used in the art of the novel are facing challenges on a wide front from hypertextual structures that demand from the reader more engagement with reading (Murray, 2000). In this instance, the demarcation between writing and reading is dissolved, and the conventional view of text, reading, writing and authorship, challenged. The authoritative author becomes more of a collector and arranger of text, which is turned into something more fluid and non-static (Tuman, 1992).

The influence of the written text diminishes at the same time as institutions become more visual and less dependent on written texts. Pictures and lay-out have become especially important. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1996: 15), this “new visual literacy” is developing throughout society.

Historically, we can see that from the 16<sup>th</sup> century reading ability was connected to Protestantism (Tyner, 1998). At the time of the establishment of the Swedish elementary school in 1842, most of the Swedish population could read even if restricted to texts sanctioned by the church, i.e. the Bible and Luther’s catechism (Johansson, 1977). A symbiotic relationship thus was developed between church, school and literacy. Up to recently, the strong relationship between script and schooling has continued, not only concerning curriculum content but also in the sense that written text remains the norm for communication. Tuman (1992) claims that essays remain at the centre of school-based literacy as late as the twenty-first century largely because they are viewed as miniature books which reflect the commitment of print culture to the task of generating and comprehending focused texts. There is a historical and metaphorical connection between teacher and author. Both have tended to see the imposition of authority as an essential part of their work, and themselves as primary sources of knowledge, if not instruments of social control.

The conception of literacy has also been enlarged in the sense that literacy now includes other modalities. For example, from the 1980s onwards researchers have regarded literacy as but one of many discourses in an increasingly multicultural and multi-linguistic society. New concepts have been introduced such as “computer literacy”, “information literacy”, “technology literacy”, “visual literacy” and “media literacy” in order better to understand the expansion of the range of competencies needed in a multi-modal society (Tyner, 1998). Indeed, Australian, American and British literacy researchers from different fields established The New London Group in 1994 (Cope & Kalantzis, 2002), which identified two important basic changes in literacy in school and education more widely: first, a range of different and multi-modal ways of expression, such as linguistic, visual, audible, spatial, multi modal patterns, and how each related to the others.; and second, the development of local differences simultaneous with the increase in global connections and contacts. As a consequence the Group introduced the concept of “design” to the study of literacy including the ‘grammars’ of e.g. various semiotic systems, languages, film, photography, and gesture.

It has also been common to perceive media culture as equivalent to media ecology (Mackey, 2002). From a media ecological perspective, (young) people produce texts in different ways to accommodate their own narratives (Bearne, 2003). Young people’s inner conceptions of images, colours, sounds, movements etc. are transformed into written words which can, following Bakhtin (1986), be understood as voices, genres and speech styles which can be traced in the written text.

Concurrently with the development of computer-mediated communication, new forms of social relations have been promoted, in schools and elsewhere. Habermas argues that in modern society it is difficult to tell the difference between what is private and what is public. The private has become more public and the public more private. There is nothing that cannot be a potential subject for media discussion. The border has been dissolved between what Habermas (2003) calls the “public sphere”

and the “intimate sphere”. Schools are affected by these influences in various ways. Ziehe (1989) claims along with Habermas that during the modernisation of society in the late twentieth century, schooling moved away from its traditional point as “cold”, i.e. working with the dehumanised body, towards another point “made hot”, i.e. taking a more personal and subjective stance. This leads to a paradox: teachers who wish to improve the former dehumanised situation are compelled to develop their personal skills and ability, thus becoming “relation workers” (Ziehe, 1989: 128). At the same time, the former more hierarchical way of working is replaced by the development of more horizontal relationships between teachers and students, which also affects patterns of communication. These changed circumstances create the context for all school activities including the teaching of writing.

## 2. THE TEACHING OF WRITING IN A SWEDISH UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Each municipality in Sweden is required by law to provide access to upper-secondary education to all students who have completed their compulsory schooling (*The National Agency for Education /Skolverket/, 2007*). Upper-secondary education is free though optional in Sweden and gives students up till their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday the possibility of acquiring the basic skills needed to live and work in the community, and to prepare them for further study. The most recent curriculum (Lpf 94) for upper-secondary schooling which came into effect in 1994, includes the identification of the school's basic role in achieving the stated objectives. The published curriculum includes fundamental values as well as basic guidelines and objectives, such as program objectives, course syllabi and grading criteria. Each municipality is also expected to develop and adopt a local school plan which manages the 17 national course programs, all of which are three years in duration. The course programs provide a broad general education plus eligibility to enrol into university or post-secondary level. Each program gains its character from its specific subject orientation, e.g. natural science or social science. Some are vocationally oriented, others more academic or theoretical.

Patterns concerning access to computers in Sweden in 2003 offer a good illustration of how “screen” culture has developed outside school. According to *Internetbarometern Nordicom ( 2003-06-13)*, 73 percent of the Swedish population aged between 9 and 79 years had access to a computer in their homes; and 66 percent additionally, access to the Internet. These are the average figures. For those of school age, the percentage having access is higher. Of nine to fourteen years olds, 90 percent had access to a computer; and 81 percent, additional access to the Internet. During an average day, 76 percent of the Swedish population accessed the Internet in 2003. Alongside such new and extended means of communication, everyday life is also invaded by mass media culture, and global information and communication networks.

### 3. THE INTERVIEW STUDY

#### 3.1 *Linguistic form*

The study which forms the basis of this article took place in May 2003 when a two-hour long and mini disc-recorded group interview was arranged between the author and three mother-tongue teachers, Mona, Siv, and Karin, in an upper secondary school in a small town in the north of Sweden. The interview focused on the situation of the teaching of writing in the school. At the time the meeting took place, Mona and Siv had two and three years teaching experience respectively, and Karin over thirty years. Despite this difference in their length of time as teachers, their views did not diverge in any profound sense. Neither did they see significant differences between the behaviour of the students in vocational programs from the students in more theoretical programs. We need to be cautious about making general conclusions from this admittedly limited material. Yet, these teachers' observations serve to remind us that the teaching of writing in school is currently facing challenges that are only beginning.

Different views were discernible between the three teachers about how computers and new media technology affect students' writing. Karin, for example, argued that students' language is "coloured" by the language they use when chatting informally or writing sms-messages. They use shortened forms of words and expressions, and various means to reduce their language use. Comparing practices of today with those of a decade ago, Karin claimed that the students now use more abbreviations:

If it is because they are chatting on the internet and then use these, then it is some sort of mini language they use and this so-to-speak comes out. There are many "nd" (i.e. "abbreviation for "and") and many other abbreviations. They leave out words like "to" and "so" when they write.

Mona added that the students often use numbers instead of letters, for example, "1 boy" rather than "one boy" as might be seen in sms text messages. From the teachers' perspective, things are getting worse. Mona said:

I have not been a teacher that long and I don't know if things have got worse each year, but I find that many students have very poor language. If I'm allowed to be thorough, I can push very hard with these things. I have clever students, but paragraph and sentence connections! It makes you crazy. They never use a full stop. They just line up words with a comma between. Sometimes it is difficult when you want to correct things. You never know where to start. There are so many factors that affect content. But you can't criticise everything. Often they have good ideas and a story to write.

There are two variations to this, Karin claimed; those who never use paragraphs, and those who turn each line into a paragraph. Mona suggested one explanation; that students do not want to hand in too many pages and therefore try to pack everything into a small space. Every sentence represents a new line of thinking. Earlier, students would not have dared to do anything like this because they would have been afraid of it impacting on their grades. Students today, the teachers suggested, seem to be more daring than in the past.

The writing of students mirrors their spoken language, but not consistently. They mix things up, Mona said. Spoken language dominates a student's creative writing. Yet this is not problematic for Karin, who was convinced that the students are playing with language:

There are a few every year in every grade who play around with language and who want to do something that no-one has done before. It is a little difficult. Should I reward them or should I remind them that it is not appropriate in this context?

According to Karin, motive is important for students when writing a text. They are likely to be more careful and make more use of spelling as well as grammar software if there is a possibility of getting their text published. However, if their text is not likely to be published, much of their writing will remain preliminary and draft. Thus purpose and function are both important.

Under these circumstances Mona found it difficult to understand why students do not care more about the formal aspects of writing texts, especially since word-processing programmes automatically draw attention to rules and patterns. Students know these tools are available and how to use them. Still they choose not to. It should be stressed, however, that as with other aspects discussed here, these teachers do not claim a direct, causal connection between students' use of the computer and Internet, and their perceived writing habits. The teachers were suspicious nonetheless.

Levels of difficulty in writing were also raised as an issue. Mona claimed, for example, that students find it more difficult to write texts now than was the case only some years before. She illustrated this claim by referring to an oral language exercise, previously written, that has recently been introduced in the first year of secondary school and which was strongly resisted by the students. Recently, the numbers of oral language exercises have tended to increase. She thought that was a good idea for many reasons, not only for the students who struggle with their writing, but also for teachers who need more time to read and correct written assignments. Oral assignments are viewed as less time consuming.

Teachers seem to be somewhat restrictive when it comes to students' use of computers for school essay writing, although the computer is generally seen as a very important writing tool. There were two main reasons given: on the one hand, teachers were concerned about possible plagiarism, and on the other, there is student resistance to using computers for essay writing. In fact, many texts produced in schools are not written on computers, and indeed students used the computer less in their third year than they did in their first year. The situation is however complex. Students are undoubtedly keen to use computers, and the first thing they often want to know when they start their first year is where they can find the computer room. At the same time, Siv claimed, there seems to be resistance towards, and even fear of, computers. Younger students often prefer to hand write their texts. Also, teachers cannot take for granted that all students have a computer at home, even if, as is claimed, it is the case for nine out of ten students in Sweden. There is, it seems therefore, no automatic connection between computer access and computer and internet use.



### 3.2 *Narrative form*

From the teachers' perspective, students also break rules in terms of school narrative conventions. Karin reported:

There are actually all sorts of texts. There are always, every year, those students that absorb everything and also try to apply it. But they are not that many. These tend to turn out to be a little bit stiff. Those who listen and absorb good advice and who also can apply it on their story, they always manage well.

But the shadows may hide lighter sides. Siv suggested that much can happen between poetry and prose: "I have read one that was exactly like a new form. It is almost artistic".

It seemed obvious to Siv that students often want to do something that is a bit different:

The word I remember is "poo-poo". The students invent words that nobody has heard of. No punctuation is necessary and you can write a whole paragraph without a full stop or any punctuation.

My question to the teachers was, how did they cope with this situation? Did they find it refreshing and positive, or did they feel that it is inappropriate in the current school context? Karin referred to a recent example:

This example [of writing] was definitely a violation of the genre rules. You did not know whether it was a long prose poem or an attempt to write a story or if it was just a matter of thoughts coming out willy-nilly. You can't always criticise. You must tell the students that in certain contexts it is OK if they want to express something and it is their way of saying it, but perhaps not to write a debate article in the same way.

In different ways, then, the interviewees found that students currently have less respect for genre borders. From the teachers' perspective, students consequently have problems when confronted with having to produce different writing styles.

### 3.3 *Visual mode*

Linguistic forms have not only changed; but their importance seems to have reduced in relation to the image or visual mode, as also claimed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) and the New London Group. As Siv said:

Sometimes, when the students are about to write a report, some want to fill up the whole report with pictures and just a few lines of text. Then you have to decide to allow only some of the pages to be filled with pictures. They want so many pictures, which is perhaps not very practical if it is intelligent writing that you are looking for.

Students download and process texts from the Internet, using different programmes. Siv was unsure whether this is because students prefer to work with pictures rather than written texts:

I can't say that they think that, but they want to, they like it when there are lot of pictures, rather than elaborating the text and explaining and describing. But a picture: "This illustrates well what I have written", they claim. I have had groups where I have had to place a limit and say that they mustn't have so many pictures. Otherwise it turns into a comic strip.

For many students, format and layout are very important. However, Siv suggested that pictures are more often used in vocational programs than in theoretical programs. Similarly, it is argued that students on academic programs are more aware of the importance of written content, because in these programs the relation between script and schooling is stressed and written text is the norm for communication. One consequence of this is that not only is script linked to content value, but pictures are disconnected (or separated) from content value.

### 3.4 Plagiarism

During the interview an intense discussion started about the fact that it is all too easy to download texts from the internet, a vital issue for the teachers. The situation has become “crazy”, Mona said, “It is this plagiarism off the internet”. This has led to a more restrictive attitude among teachers about allowing students to complete their work at home. In support of this shift, Mona said:

It is devastating for creativity to have to sit in this boring room and write. But I want to see something that I know they have written by themselves, in order to have something to compare with, when they write at home.

Karin remembered the situation as being very different some ten years previously. The problem, it seems, has “crept up on them” due to the “cunning” of students. Earlier, efforts to plagiarise were more transparent. She recalled one of her colleagues’ receiving a text ‘written’ by a student, at the bottom of which was “click here for more information”. These days plagiarism is more subtle. Karin claimed that the students are better at disguising what they are doing by picking up something here and there, using the same source.

The teachers’ strategy here was to give students more opportunity to write in school, even though the students are allowed to prepare beforehand what to write and the main points they want to make. But they must do the writing at school. Assignments therefore need to be devised which meet these requirements. Nevertheless, Karin said, using such means students are made aware of how seriously plagiarism is viewed and that it is illegal.

The interviewees were asked whether they had tried to highlight this form of plagiarism consciously to develop students’ ability to make use of different kinds of texts in order to create something original. Karin responded as follows:

Yes, when they are expected to collect information from different sources and make a text of their own. When we worked together in Civics about the death penalty, the students had to put arguments together. What was for and what was against.

It is also a question of ethics as Mona pointed out:

I also teach Religion and we work hard with ethical and moral issues. We talk about cheating. Many students are really laissez-faire about this. Their attitude seems to be: ‘cheat as long as you don’t get found out’. They talk a lot about tests and what is “cool”. You try to be clear. Many students don’t think they are stealing anything. ‘It is OK since it is only my grade that it affects’.

In contrast, Siv suggested to her students that they can “crib ideas”. But she also stresses that they must write in their own words and not ‘steal’ expressions. They

have to make use of and develop their own language. Students certainly have difficulties in this respect when they look up information. A whole paragraph can easily be transferred from the original into the students' texts. It is often difficult to distinguish between the student's own words and those which have been "borrowed" or "stolen".

#### 4. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

It is clear that the language teachers interviewed for this study held different views about how computers and media culture have influenced students' writing. Students' written language seems to be "coloured" by their experiences of informal chatting and sms-messaging. They use shortened forms of words and expressions, and various different means of reducing their language use. They also seem to prefer abbreviations and figures to letters. Students' writing seems in that sense to epitomise spoken language, but not consistently. While they mix things up, spoken language dominates student's creative writing and students now play more with language.

The teachers in the study find it difficult to understand why their students care so little about the formal aspects of writing, particularly as the rules of grammar are automatically highlighted in most writing programmes. Earlier, students appreciated more the importance of grammar to their grades. Students today seem more daring. The teachers also find that their students have less respect for genre borders. Not only is their writing coloured by oral practices and the language rules mixed-up, but students also want to down-load and add pictures, and fragments of texts from the internet. All these practices are linked to different communication norms, which, according to teachers, are inappropriate to the communications norms accepted in school.

It is not possible to draw more general conclusions from this limited study of conditions for the teaching of writing in upper-secondary school in the age of mass media and the Internet. Students of all ages in all schools no doubt have created and continue to create texts that are impaired by mistakes and errors. What is clear from these three teachers, however, is that change is more manifest and more explicit than previously. Students are more "daring" and "challenging" in their approach to writing norms of different kinds, they say. It seemed to the teachers that students care less about the "quality" of the texts they produce in school these days than they did in the past.

Three intertwined aspects suggest in different ways why these tendencies in the teaching of writing in upper secondary school are occurring. Firstly, students' more "challenging" and "daring" attitudes, as described by the teachers, may be understood from a media ecological perspective (Mackey, 2002), in the sense that students are seen to develop communication competencies for different media spheres. Students carry these competencies from one medium to the next. Thus, linguistic features are transferred from one context to another even though the students are aware that the school writing context, for example, differs substantially from that of sms-messaging to a friend. A good example of this are the abbreviations, criticised by the teachers, that seem to be transferred from sms-texting to essay writing.

Following Halliday (1994), all texts can be defined according to three multifunctional interdependent meta functions: the ideational, which means that all texts are representations of the world, i.e. represent a world view; the interpersonal, which means that texts represent and to a certain extent express a (power) relation between a writer and a reader; and the textual, which highlights the fact that all texts have different textual features, for example grammatical features. So when students “read” and “write” in one format they may not only transfer textual functions, but also draw on interpersonal and ideational functions. This might explain why, when writing school essays, students may bring with them functions that are connected to the sms-situation, for example those involving intimacy and privacy. These functions are not usually associated with a more official and formal language that students are expected to practice and acquire in school (Teleman, 1997).

Historically, reading and writing have been intertwined activities in schooling. The ability to read books has been an assumed prerequisite for developing ability in writing (Krashen, 1984). In our media rich society, however, students may also learn how to write and structure texts by watching films or playing computer games. They learn how to transform images, colours, sounds, movements into written media (Bearne, 2003). This may have an effect on how written texts are structured. According to the teachers in the study, their students not only challenge linguistic norms, but also the traditional way of writing school essays. While the teachers did not go into detail, they indicated that students’ organising principles differ from the usual ways of structuring linear text. One teacher, for example, referred to a text that she recognized as a “new form” and “artistic” where the student apparently invented new structures that could be anything between a “long prose poem or an attempt to write a story”. Following Bakhtin (1986) this may be understood as voices, genres and speech styles, but here identified in written text. Following also Tuman (1992), the students not only seek to challenge the essay form, which has lain at the centre of school-based literacy for more than a century, but also the real and metaphorical connection between the teacher and the author. Both teacher and author have tended to see the imposition of authority as an essential part of their work, recognising also themselves as primary sources of knowledge.

*Secondly*, in the age of screen culture and the Internet, students’ notion of written text has altered at a profound level. Text is no longer regarded as something stable and long-lasting. Rather, it is regarded as temporary, fleeting and short-lived, and as containing samples of text, combined also with a distinguishing feature of hypertext – it encourages the reader to trace different routes through the text.

The significance of written language thus is seen to have decreased, at least to an extent. The interviewed teachers offer an example of students about to write a report. Some clearly wished to fill the whole report with pictures, leaving just a few lines for text. For many students, layout is now very important, the teachers stressed, even if this may vary from program to program. This could be seen as resistance to written language. However, it could also be argued that it is an outcome of the important role of the image in our increasingly visual and screen-based society (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

An altered view of text includes an altered view of the writer’s and the reader’s role in the meaning making of that text. Although the reader as an interpreter of a

text has always also been a creator of that text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), the relationship between the writer and the reader has changed recently from hierarchical to vertical. In our screen culture the relationship between the writer and the reader has a tendency to dissolve. It is also difficult for a writer to claim copyright when texts appear temporarily on screen and in a minute or two are changed or when texts are added from other contexts or a picture is inserted from the Internet.

Plagiarism is, according to interviewees, a sensitive question for schools currently. It is clear that the internet has increased possibilities of information access, which have caused problems not least when students' texts are assessed and graded. This in turn has resulted in teachers adopting a more traditional and product-oriented way of teaching about writing, such that students are not allowed to submit drafts and text written at home or on a computer. At the same time youth culture contains many examples which support a culture of plagiarism. Rap-music, for example, is based on the idea of using already existing rhythms and melody loops, which are then overlaid with new accents.

Thirdly students' challenge to school writing norms could be related to Habermas' (2003) interest in how the private and public spheres are merging as well as Ziehe's (1989) conception that school has become more "hot" and "personal". Thus students' adjustment to a more intimate atmosphere, has also required an adjustment to their use of language. With reference to Gee (1996) the barrier between 'primary' and 'secondary' discourse thus seems to have diminished.

Private communication at home, between friends and family members, may involve language inaccuracy of different kinds; for example, parents' messages to the children, messages between the young people, e-mail messages between wives and husbands, sms-messages and so on, may be strictly inaccurate but still not hamper understanding on the part of the receiver of the message. It might be asserted that errors to a certain extent are *part* of the message, and therefore functionally correct. This phenomenon could be compared to the clothes we wear in different situations. In the presence of strangers, we generally wear more formal clothes to stress who we are and to follow certain conventions. At home, we dress more comfortably. Such choices are also made with regard to spoken language, which may be perceived as a free zone in which language is most likely to develop and change.

To summarize, students' challenge to the writing norms of the upper-secondary school in Sweden may be associated with new and enlarged possibilities to communicate meaning within a media ecology, where competencies are being transferred from one format to another, and new understandings are developing of what constitute "text" and "author". These new views have developed in a school environment that has become more intimate and personal, and thus in a subtle way, encourages more private communicative behaviours. With a reference to the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2002) students' challenges to written norms could also be interpreted as an act of design, i.e. not only do their challenges involve written text, but also pictures and other types of illustrations, which includes the 'grammars' of various semiotic systems, not only the grammar of languages. In that sense it is important that educators seek to understand the changes and work with their students to achieve the goal of educating fully literate individuals.

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