

# WRITING FOR LIFE?

## A CASE STUDY OF AFFORDANCES OF WRITING IN FOUR L1 UPPER SECONDARY CLASSROOMS.

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### Abstract

During the period of 1994–2011 all programmes in Swedish upper secondary school comprised a set of core subjects with the aim to entail equity on the policy level. However, a division between programmes still prevailed on the school level, particularly in the core subject L1 Swedish. The main purpose of this study has been to explore how the teaching of writing in two academic and two vocational programmes differs, which writing repertoires are developed and how writing is assessed. The study is part of a long-term ethnography of writing in upper secondary school (Andersson Varga, 2014). The data produced during the two-year field study contain field notes from writing lessons, lesson observations and talks with four teachers, as well as recorded and transcribed, semi-structured teacher and student interviews, instructions on writing tasks, student texts and teachers' responses to student texts. This article focuses on the preparation for the National Test, the afforded assignments, the realisations of the student texts and the assessment. The teachers in the four programmes handle the national syllabus in relation to the students, resulting in four different curricula in the classroom. Thus, issues of inequity, disparities in curricula as well as different expectations on students, depending on programme, became obvious. To understand the processes of social reproduction, we use Bernstein's sociology of education (1996, 2000) and the concept of the pedagogic device and pedagogic identity. However, we also show one example of interruption (Singh, 2013) in one of the four classrooms. Thus, the main results demonstrate how one particular teacher brings about change to a group of working class girls.

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### 1. THE 1994 REFORM AND WRITING AS A CORE COMPETENCE

Swedish upper secondary school has been subject to several changes in the last decades. In 1994 a reform was implemented with the main purpose of preparing all vocational and academic students for an unpredictable future employment market. All study programmes were made to last for three years and to provide for a general qualification for university studies. Eight core subjects were introduced with the same syllabus for every programme. The mother tongue subject was the most extensive one, studied during all three years, and was concluded by a compulsory national test where students' ability to produce expository or argumentative writing was tested. In spite of the reform's intentions to create a unified and equal upper secondary school, previous research shows that the old (pre-1994) division between academic and vocational programmes still prevailed, particularly in the core subject L1 Swedish (Bergman, 2007; Hjelmér, 2012; Korp 2011, 2012; Rosvall, 2012). However, these studies have not focussed particularly on writing as the core content, but more generally on the subject as a whole.

In 2011, a new reform superseded the more egalitarian ambitions in the 1994 reform and again divided the upper secondary school syllabus into two separate syllabi, one for vocational and one for academic programmes.

The aim of this article is to scrutinise how a system with one shared syllabus and one national test is realised in four different classrooms by four different teachers. The analysis will be supported by using concepts with a foundation in Basil Bernstein's sociology of education.

### 2. THE ETHNOGRAPHY

The present study is part of a long-term ethnographic project (Andersson Varga, 2014) of four study programmes in a Swedish upper secondary school: two vocational (the Business and Administration Programme and the Electricity Programme) and two academic (the Social Science Programme and the Natural Science Programme). The main question concerns what kind of writing repertoires the students are afforded to develop during the final compulsory course in L1 Swedish. The material produced during a two-year field study consists of field notes from writing lessons, observations and ethnographic talks with four L1 Swedish instructors who were teaching in the four programmes. The material also includes recorded and transcribed semi-structured teacher and student interviews, instructions on writing tasks, student texts and teachers' responses to student texts. The field study took place during four semesters (autumn 2008–spring 2010) when the students studied their final Swedish language course. The course concluded with the compulsory National Test (NT).

Some of the study results have previously been presented at the Oxford Ethnography conferences in 2011 and 2013 (Andersson Varga & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Asplund Carlsson & Andersson Varga, 2011).

### 3. THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE DISTRIBUTION IN THE CLASSROOM

In the analysis of the classroom discourse and practice, we draw on Basil Bernstein's theoretical framework. In particular, three sets of theoretical tools have been useful in the analysis. First, the terms *vertical* and *horizontal* knowledge are used to analyse the writing tasks given to the students as well as the content and genres of tests, in particular the NT concluding the final year. Second, we use the concept of *pedagogic device*, which refers to a set of distributive, re-contextualising and evaluative rules for the communication and acquisition of school knowledge in order to regulate classroom discourse (Bernstein, 1996, 2000). The pedagogic device cannot be reduced to just one set of rules but is a combination of all three sets of rules that together determine the transmission of knowledge, politically, epistemologically and pedagogically. Third, we use the concept of *pedagogic identity* as a way of explaining how classroom discourse shapes individual trajectories.

In the case of writing, we understand it as a democratic competence distinguishing the academic as well as the illiterate. Children learn to write before they read at preschool (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). Thus, writing has proved to be one of the most outstanding examples of knowledge and skills developed throughout the complete educational system. Children and students never cease to develop – or at least are expected to continue to develop – their writing skills during their time as students. When students do not write, they fail to develop academically, at least not in the humanities and social sciences. Academically, writing for journals or for a doctoral thesis is still something which has to be learnt and developed, although students at this level take part in very advanced studies. Hence, writing in this sense is part of the *vertical discourse* and a vertical structure of knowledge and skills (Bernstein, 1996, 2000). Traditionally, however, teaching writing also leans on a *horizontal discourse*, in providing writing tasks based on everyday knowledge and personal experience. Although this is more common at lower levels of the educational system, we found the distinction useful in connection with our data.

The *pedagogic device* works and controls the educational system, i.e. the communication and acquisition of school knowledge, via three sets of rules. First, the *distributive* rules determine which kind of knowledge is transferable to which students and in which classrooms. Concerning writing, the teaching of different text types and genres is subject to these rules. According to Bernstein (1996, 2000) it is fruitful to separate the *Official Re-contextualising Field* (ORF) from the *Pedagogic Re-contextualising Field* (PRF). The latter might have an influence on pedagogic discourse which is contrary to the intentions of the former. Again, some knowledge and skills distribution is characterised by a high level of *verticality*, like in the lab report, the scholarly essay or the scientific article. Other skills are more character-

ised by *horizontality*, belonging to genres which are more common and familiar to students, like the personal letter, the blog post, a letter to the editor, the protocol, etc. Texts in the *vertical discourse* make demands on the students to write better structured and more inquisitive and analytical texts, while texts in the *horizontal discourse* are more descriptive and narrative.

The *re-contextualising* rules determine how the pedagogical discourse re-translates, re-articulates and re-contextualises other discourses associated with knowledge domains outside education. In the case of writing, these rules determine what kind of writing is taught, how students are met with feedback on their writing and what teachers' views on the differentiation of writing skills are.

Finally, the *evaluative* rules define the classroom standards and determine the social relations, the teaching and the learning that take place. Again, with an egalitarian syllabus, what actually takes place in the classroom could be contrary to the policymakers' ambitions. The teacher is in control, but the interests of the pupils, the apprehension of pedagogical identities and the public debate also make an impact on the teacher's everyday decisions. Again, the teaching of writing is highly sensitive to these rules. When and how students get feedback and systematic assessment of their texts depends on the three sets of rules operating in the pedagogic device.

Subsequently, we will refer to the pedagogic device in the analysis of the different classrooms in upper secondary school, how it is used to regulate or to sort out young adults for labour or for further education in relation to their writing skills. Here, the concept of *pedagogic identity* serves a purpose. Bernstein (2000:67–77) outlined four different aspects of pedagogic identity as an outcome of the pedagogic device. The four identities or positions are both stable and subject to change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The traditional or *conservative* identity is more in line with traditional values of *Bildung* and status quo in society, while the *neo-conservative* identity makes use of arguments from the neoliberal discourse and connects tradition and *Bildung* with profits and employability. The market-oriented, or *neo-liberal* identity is characterised by a low degree of traditional craftsmanship but is more in line with new discourses on competition and profitability. The fourth identity is *therapeutic* and contains elements of self-fulfilment and individual values. We will use the concept of pedagogic identity in the analysis of expectations and conceptions of student identities reflected in the writing repertoires afforded in the four classrooms.

#### 4. FOUR CLASSROOMS – SAME SYLLABUS BUT DIFFERENT CURRICULA

The four classrooms presented and discussed in this paper are diverse in terms of the teaching of writing, teachers' concerns, testing practices, expectations from students and teachers' expectations of student achievement, pedagogic identity and future careers. Although we have experienced the classroom discourse as characterising four separate discourses, we would like to point out that all students

from the same school take the same course, with one national syllabus and identical targets. The aim of the course is to promote discursive writing consisting of compilation, investigation and argumentation, as well as to promote knowledge about literature, language sociology and language history. Thus, we make a distinction between the syllabus, which is prescribed by the National Agency of Education, and the curriculum, which is how the syllabus is realised in the classroom, through the content, the pace, the assignments, etc.

#### *4.1 Natural science students' writing for the tests and for their grades*

Students in this programme are considered to be ambitious and grade-oriented, having high grades from lower secondary school (Beach, 1999), and they know how to write, as their teacher Nicolas points out. Much of the teaching and the work to improve and develop their writing skills has been carried out at lower levels of education before they moved on to upper secondary, according to Nicolas. He is quite satisfied with the situation, where these students are well equipped for the NT. In other words, they have substantial cultural and educational capital, although Nicolas would never use this concept. The writing assignments are characterised by a high level of verticality in Bernstein's terms.

The NT, which is to be passed in the spring during the final third year, provided a kingpin for the writing curriculum. Nicolas relies heavily on older tests as a paragon for writing. However, there is little evidence of actual instruction when it comes to teaching writing in this classroom. Students are given a few tasks in line with the coming test, and above all their texts are assessed and graded. According to Nicolas, these students should be able to learn from such implicit guidance, and if not, they have chosen the wrong programme of study.

Below are three examples of Nicolas' assignments, which were afforded during the two years of ethnography in this classroom.

##### *4.1.1 Example 1: Animal Farm and Gulliver's Travels – a comparison*

The purpose of this task was to make the students try an old NT assignment. The task implied a comparison between two classical allegories concerning theme, message and form. When giving feedback Nicolas used the original matrix for grading issued by the test-makers and the National Agency of Education. Thus, the ORF reaches into the classroom, and Nicolas relies on the national standard when commenting on the texts. Creativity as well as compliance with the instructions are rewarded. Hence, the natural science students get to know the test in practice, and they also get feedback which is in line with "the real thing". The distributive rules determine the diffusion of knowledge from the national agency straight into Nicolas' classroom.

#### 4.1.2 Example 2: Newspaper publication – writing for life?

This assignment took place at school during several weeks in response to an explicit request from the students. The students were divided into four groups with seven students in each group. The theme of the paper or pamphlet was “human rights”, and the students were allowed to choose subjects for their articles, like homelessness, rights for gays and lesbians, fugitive children in the community, etc. All students wrote individual texts although with a lot of peer support.

When writing for the newspaper publication both the actual writing and research before writing were carried out in a naturalistic way. Like at a news desk or in a news room, students were engaged, read each other’s texts, presented features and commented on the texts in progress. The publication was subsequently printed and handed out, like in real life and not just as a form of practice. This was implemented on the students’ initiative, in order to do the ‘real’ thing. The verticality of this assignment is thus more implicit, since these students are less likely to go into journalism, although the task widened their understanding of writing, which is applicable on a more general level.

#### 4.1.3 Example 3: Sociolinguistics.

In this assignment, students were required to devise their own research questions, carry out a smaller study, and produce a “scientific report”. The conclusive reports were to be defended in a seminar, similar to university. Four students were respondents and four were opponents, and the procedure was as usual: a brief summary followed by questions and critiques from the opponents, where the respondents had to defend their findings as part of the procedure. The whole point with the procedure was to give the students a whiff of what was to come in their future studies at university. Both assignment and feedback are characterised by an extreme level of verticality.

Nicolas is on the whole satisfied with his teaching. He is convinced that his students will do well on the NT and that he has prepared them for all kinds of texts. In an interview long before the test, he says he wants his students to try and write the same type of texts as those in the NT at least a couple of times during the three years at upper secondary.

Some assignments are modelled on the spirit of the NT, and an old assignment is reused in the comparison between *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Animal Farm*. However, no assignment except the newspaper was characterised by social or existential issues as in the real test, which is taken by all students and more in line with the social sciences and humanities. The issues dealt with in Nicolas’ assignments are to a large extent characterised by linguistics – like sociolinguistics – or literary studies, which are both intrinsic to the subject of Swedish and part of the syllabus. Nicolas seems to find a way to test both content and writing skills simultaneously. The only

exception is really the newspaper project which, on the other hand, originated from the students' request and was not part of Nicolas' original plans.

Nicolas' minimalistic and implicit teaching is in line with most of the NT's expectations, and the students are satisfied with this. They feel well prepared.

Noel: [A]nything could come up.... We can write and we can adjust to that.

Nisse: [I]n comparison with the NT, I think about every word.

Noel: I try to think of synonyms.... try to make my language more advanced.

Nathalie: If I enter a debate, I take a strong stand, that is out of line with my own views.

#### 4.2 *Social science students' writing for an academic future*

Students in this programme are also generally considered to be motivated and ambitious and expected to continue their education at university. They are afforded a substantial amount of writing tasks, which are graded and commented on. Their writing curriculum, which they share with the business and administration students, is the most advanced.

In the first year, the teacher Sarah tries to obtain a good picture of the students as writers. Her teaching is explicit, and she introduces tools of evaluation and a competence to discuss qualities of written texts. She gives the students a large number of examples and also makes elaborate comments and feedback on texts.

The teaching focus during the second and third years is almost exclusively on literature, older as well as modern pieces. There is a clear focus on analysis and argumentation. Sarah also makes a point of involving the students in her teaching and assignment planning.

The students are afforded assignments on older and contemporary literature as well as in sociolinguistics. They are likewise encouraged to write argumentative texts where they choose their own subject. The assignments afforded are characterised by an explicit request for the students' own thoughts and experiences. We will give one illustrative example of an assignment handed out to the social science students, which shows the character of subjects relevant to the L1 Swedish syllabus.

##### 4.2.1 *Der Erlkönig (The Erlking) by Goethe*

This assignment is based on the classic poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and is traditional in the sense that students are asked to draft a literary analysis. Sarah provides an explicit instruction to the assignment, with several questions and advice about the global structure of the text to be handed in, with detailed instructions concerning introduction, conclusions, transitions between sections, etc. The task is explicitly within a school genre and in line with the syllabus and the criteria

for a pass with honours on this course. The students are expected to use explanations and arguments, and a personal reflection on the poem is also called for.

In the initial interview, Sarah comments on her writing teaching as the most demanding task for her.

This is the most difficult part, although I find it rewarding. Maybe I demand too much of them. I can feel frustrated, there is no quick fix here and I find that both students and myself put a lot of work into this and to what ends? Searching for ways of working and thinking a lot about it [I] see it as a mission and maybe a personal commitment.

Sarah thinks that the main point with L1 Swedish is to help students develop their written as and oral communication skills. The purpose of writing is to prepare students for life, to be able to write argumentative texts, and to be able to take part in society as citizens. She believes that every student in this programme could and should become a good writer.

She admits that the NT governs her teaching and the design of the assignments and tasks given to the students. The students have to be able to recognise the texts to be written on the test. "I feel it would be unfair to the students if they weren't allowed to practise every type of text at least twice before the test. It would be grossly unfair to them."

A scrutiny of the whole list of 18 assignments handed out to the students shows that Sarah has high expectations of her students and their achievement and performance, as demonstrated by the substantial amount of texts asked for in the assignments, the rigorous feedback to the students, as well as the focus on analysis and argumentation. She involves the students in evaluation and assessment.

In the final interview, she admits that she really has no idea how teaching is carried out in the other classrooms, and she looks at the amount of tasks she has given out as a substantial workload: "OMG, what a lot we achieved; it's like we just rushed through everything, as I tried to cover it all." She also reflects on the communicative conditions for school writing:

I do feel that the texts they write are so schoolish, it makes you cry. How can you create situations that are more real? What is important to assess in a real context? This is very traditional, and schoolish, and yet they want to go to uni, and they must have a functioning language when they move on.

Sarah gives a lot of thought to the communicative aspects of writing and is conscious of the fact that the social science students need a pre-academic language to handle university studies. She is also highly ambivalent concerning the NT. On the one hand, the NT restricts the students and the interaction. On the other hand, the test is a guarantee for equal assessment and an input to her development as teacher.

After the test she comments on the results of her students "as expected, and two did better than expected". She also remarks that the task in the test was too easy, and the students' reactions confirm this: "Well, this was nothing, and you demanded an analysis of Der Erlkönig!" Several students think that the subjects



afforded in the test were far too simple and did not reflect the advanced teaching they had met previously. “Maybe it would have been better if Sarah had given us simpler tasks. We felt as if the test wasn’t really going our way”, according to one of the students.

Sarah’s writing curriculum is characterised by Swedish as a school subject and a requisite for higher education, although her wish is to provide students with communicative competences for life. Again, the curriculum is characterised by a high degree of verticality, although the parts of the NT which reflect a more horizontal discourse leave the students with a sense of ‘overkill’.

#### *4.3 The Electricity Programme students writing for the teacher*

The students in the Electricity Programme are mainly boys with working class background and an expected working class future. According to teachers in this and in other vocational programmes attracting boys (cf. Korp 2011, 2012; Rosvall, 2012), the vocational students are not very ambitious; they are on the whole less interested in getting good grades, but they are aware of the labour market demands for having finished upper secondary school.

Their teacher, Eva, is also less ambitious than both Sarah and Nicolas, but she wants to create a classroom with a nice and friendly atmosphere. She does not want to put too great demands on the boys (and the one girl), but she is anxious about the upcoming NT and wants them to pass, but she is satisfied with them only just passing.

How does Eva prepare her students for the test? Among the afforded tasks which we have taken part in during the ethnography, only half of them were assessed and graded. The explanation for this was that the case of writing “A summer memory” meant that the students had written in a personal style, and Eva found it difficult to mark their personal memories, characterised by a horizontal discourse. Only three of the graded assignments were commented on. Among the afforded tasks none reflected nor tried the targets in the syllabus, nor did the tasks in any way resemble those generally given in the NT.

##### *4.3.1 Example 1: “Instead of a book review”*

Here, the students were offered an opportunity to write a short text for a book cover, a letter to the main characters of the book, or to the author. This resulted in a number of very short texts. The comments were mainly positive like “Go on like this”, “Good”, “Very good”, “What a nice letter”, “Good content, but you must work more with your language”. The comments do not really serve as constructive feedback, except maybe for the last one, in a vague way.

#### 4.3.2 Example 2: "Final presentation of the renaissance"

This assignment consists of ten concepts or names that the students were to describe and elaborate on. Their texts resulted in several short paragraphs and are graded with a pass if handed in. Eva gives no comments except for the grade, and the level of pass is extremely low.

#### 4.3.3 Example 3: "Report from practice"

The students were asked to report on their vocational practice and were rewarded with grades and comments on their assignments. Eva gives positive and negative feedback like "Nice language, mainly correct language, think of using a bit more variation (use other words than 'rather' and 'very' now and then)".

These three examples are the only written preparations for the final NT where students are asked to write a text, and only one is met with an elaborate feedback. None of these examples is in any way similar to the texts asked for in the NT nor do they try the targets in the syllabus.

Eva is happy with the students if they hand in their assignments, but she is not eager to comment on their texts or to grade them. Process writing or peer response is not practised, but sometimes she uses the grades as a form of teaser or even mild pressure. She says, in an interview, that she gives the students a lot of oral comments during writing in order to produce drafts that are corrected once. Spelling, punctuation and choice of words or synonyms are in focus, and she mainly uses the expression "make corrections" when commenting on her feedback.

Thus, the writing tasks are characterised by little feedback, mostly in the form of corrections to linguistic errors, comments on colloquial language, or lack of variation. No feedback is given on structure, style, length, etc. Handing in a legible paper is in most cases enough for a pass.

Eva tells us that it is important to have touched upon different text types, how to write references and how to organise a written text. She thinks that the NT is governing both teachers and students in a positive way. With 'touched upon' she does not mean actually having written texts in different genres, but she organises a kind of pretend writing, i.e. talking about the expected text types in the NT.

Eva, therefore, spent four lessons during the third year to prepare for the written part of the NT. The first one was carried out in September, more than 6 months before the actual test. The test consists of two parts: oral and written communication, the latter in the form of a discursive text. Somehow both the oral and the written performance presupposes a high degree of reading comprehension, since the texts provided for in the test are complicated. These texts are to be read or listened to approximately one week in advance and should be referred to in the written test. There are stories and poems, articles and internet blogs, facts and fiction as well as diagrams and tables. Eva lets her students listen to some of texts rather than read from the booklet itself. Then, Eva introduces the subject:

Today we will practise how to write now and then we have to freshen up our memory here. The texts in the booklet were about Swedish X-factor, private schools, an excerpt from the novel about the girl called Kickan. You can have the booklets again, but now we will proceed to stage two. We will go through different techniques. It is not a matter of merely writing."

Eva hands out the booklets with texts and tasks (nine of them) from an old NT and starts to go through various texts in the booklet, their names and genres. She talks a bit about the procedure around the assignment, that there are different grades attached to different tasks, and she underlines that it is "super important to follow the instructions and do what is expected or else there will be a fail – terribly important". One of the students reads the instructions aloud.

Eva: Why can you not get a pass with distinction (an A) on this one?

Edgar: No own views. No reasoning.

Eva: Yes, reasoning is more difficult. Here you don't use the booklet with texts. This assignment is not so difficult, but you cannot get an A since there is no analysis.

The next task is called "Heredity and environment". Another student reads the instructions and Eva comments:

This is more complicated, and to write an essay is more complicated than just writing an article. I will show you an essay later.

Eva quotes from the instructions and definitions of various text types provided by the test group, but she adds, "and besides it should be a bit artistic".

Egon: Difficult words.

Eva: You have to know this beforehand – artistic and personal way. If it says essay, this means that it is quite difficult to write – do you think you have the strength to continue this?

Egon: Yes!

Eva is surprised that the students are capable of listening to the instructions and her review of the booklet's nine tasks. She continues guiding the students through the tasks and navigates them into lowering their ambitions to more realistic levels and thereby keeping the students down. Both the issue of the essay and the form are considered to be "too complicated", whereas the other task which is considered more in line with their expected ability does not really test the targets of the syllabus. She concludes the hour by mentioning that she might let the students try some writing, at least introductions to the different tasks. However, this is not carried through, and Eva thinks that this way of preparation is the only possibility in this group of students.

Nine days before the test, in April the following year, Eva wants the students to listen to an audio CD containing some of the texts that will be part of the NT. She reminds the students of the lessons given more than six months ago, and Evelina – the only girl in this classroom – says, "We never wrote any texts." Eva defends her-

self: "No, but we talked and you worked with preparations for writing." Some of the boys disrupt the conversation, and Evelina is silenced.

After the test, Evelina returns to the fact that they had not been prepared for the test. She is aware of the shortcomings in her own skills of referring to other texts, making quotations and the whole 'onset' distinguishing an expository or argumentative text. Edvin says, "I think we have written other types of texts than those tested in the NT." Eva, the teacher, on the other hand, is quite content that everyone showed up and did the test and worked hard with writing, and she expects them all to pass. But she is also aware of the fact that the students on the Electricity programme are not on the same level as students from other programmes, since she considers them to be less mature and less skilled. She partly blames their attitude towards writing. Other teachers have marked her students' texts and found them faulty. Being part of an ethnographic study and forced to talk about her teaching, her students, and the testing practices, Eva feels a bit low after the test. However, she does not blame her own (lack of) teaching.

Teaching writing in the form of meta-literacy but not trying to write in different genres typical of the NT proved to be less successful. The message to the students was that writing argumentative and discursive texts is too difficult for them. Write for a pass at the most, but do not try to show off. In fact, do not try to meet the demands of the course or the targets in the syllabus. Moreover, her teaching has not been in line with the course syllabus but follows a curriculum based on her assumptions of the students, student reactions and other factors. The high degree of horizontality in both assignments and feedback does not help the students to pass the test, although there are some tasks they may choose that are characterised by some horizontality.

Regardless of the prescribed syllabus, we ask ourselves whether the students in the Electricity Programme are taught to write texts for working life or for life in school. What are the requirements of writing skills for an electrician? Eva seems to think there are no such requirements for this part of the labour force. However, the policymakers behind the 1994 reform were convinced that manual work is not the only future for an electrician, but that an active citizenship requires skills in writing, in argumentation and in critical thinking.

#### *4.4 The Business and Administration Programme – working class girls write for their future*

Hannah has worked as a teacher for many years and is genuinely interested in teaching and in her students. She asserts in several interviews that she finds it more interesting to teach so-called 'weak' or low-achieving students. Hannah is willing to discuss her teaching and the grounds for her choice of writing assignments. When asked about the main purpose of teaching writing, she says that she wants her students to "technically be able to write various types of texts.../.../...to

consider writing as a tool of expression". Thus, she believes in writing as a tool for all students regardless of planned future careers.

In quantitative terms, Hannah equals the teacher in the academic Social Science Programme, Sarah, in the number of writing assignments handed out to her students. There is no substantial qualitative difference between the assignments for the BA and the SS students. In fact, the BA students are met with the same demands as the students in the academic programmes.

An analysis of the writing assignments afforded to the BA students, who are mainly girls, reveals that they are neither simple nor basic. Hannah's adherence to the intentions of the national curriculum serves as a motor in providing assignments both as a preparation for further writing and for their own private benefit. The genre repertoire thoroughly covers different text activities (Holmberg, Karlsson & Nord, 2011), like explanation and argumentation, that demand analytical skills and the ability to explain causal relationships and motivate points of views. Thus, the BA students practise their writing by working with assignments that process contents within L1 Swedish, from other school subjects and more generic, eligible ones. Hannah uses the writing assignments both as a tool for control as well as a tool for widening the girls' writing repertoires, making demands that are both academic and generic as a preparation for citizenship. If the girls were to choose more freely, the students' choices would no doubt be to take the easy way out (more contemporary texts and subjects). However, Hannah's resistance to handing over power or control to the students has certain consequences for the girls' careers and futures.

In a second interview, Hannah confirms that she designs several writing assignments when it comes to genres, after what might turn up at the NT, and some are 'filled with' contents relevant for the subject of Swedish.

Pernilla: What was the purpose? What did you want the students to develop, to learn?

Hannah: The main purpose from my point of view was to learn the features of an article.

Pernilla: Yes, then we have the argumentative text with an optional subject. What was the purpose there?

Hannah: Freshen up using sources and writing an argumentative text, since this will for sure be part of the National Test to come.

P: Then there was Sociolinguistics. You cooperated with Sarah, teaching in the Social Science Programme. The purpose of that?

H: The purpose was to study sociolinguistics but also to perform a 'dry swim', preparing for the National Test since we included assignments resembling the ones that usually turn up on the National Test. Again they have difficulties referring to other sources, using somebody else's text and to think independently. It's difficult and it sifts the wheat from the chaff very quickly.

Hannah expresses a somewhat ambivalent attitude when it comes to teaching advanced text production to vocational students, for instance how to write expository

texts, which is what the NT calls for. She makes the following point when asked in the first interview with her whether or not the NT inhibits her writing teaching:

The National Test inhibits my teaching to a certain extent, but at the same time, what it calls for are good skills to master but I am very critical to the fact that all students attending all programmes are expected to master all text types. I don't know. Once I taught a guy in the vehicle programme. He said, "Hey, this is so ridiculous, us writing debate articles. I'll do it because you tell me to do so, since I know it will turn up on the National Test, but seriously speaking, how many times do you reckon I'll be leaning under the hood writing debate articles?" "No I don't think you'll be doing it very often". I question the uniformity. When I started teaching, vocational Swedish was taught in the vocational programme but now as far as I understand we will go back to that. I think everybody should master writing a letter to the editor, maybe a consumer complaint, stuff like that. Maybe it isn't that important writing essays on the Gaza conflict or even knowing what an essay is. Writing a CV, a covering letter – these are things that everybody must be able to master.

In the second interview Hannah simultaneously acknowledges the fact that the NT enhances the level of teaching and the expectations put on her students.

Pernilla: As I understand it there are many assignments that you've presented in the classroom that prepare for the National Test?

Hannah: I don't want them to come to me and say that this is not at all what we have been doing during the Swedish lessons. [the National Test] is something 'big', something they must get through.

Pernilla: And then, the kind of knowledge and skills they carry isn't totally of the wrong kind or is it unnecessary? There are those who want to get rid of the National Test.

Hannah: I don't think so. It keeps them on a level. They must practise what will be tested on the National Test!

Thus, from the very start of the study, Hannah is aware of the complexity in teaching writing for a test with a group of students whom she considers to be low achievers and has little interest in future academic careers.

Hannah: There is no development, it's difficult, this particular programme, the BA programme. These students don't have, some have of course, but they don't rely on their own thinking. They show poor confidence when it comes to writing.

Two years later Hannah reflects on her own students:

It's not easy for the vocational students to make connections. They have difficulties using sources and using somebody else's text and thinking independently.

In a field conversation over the disappointing results of an assignment where the students were to analyse a piece of lyrics written and performed by their favourite singer, Hannah claims,

It's because of this particular programme. The Swedish lessons are not enough. They don't live in that kind of home environment where these kinds of issues are discussed.

How can we understand Hannah's sometimes contradictory attitudes towards teaching vocational students more advanced writing skills? On the one hand, she

claims that it is a waste of time and unnecessary to teach advanced genres like debate articles and essays to vocational students. On the other hand, this is what she does in practice. The answer might be found in the first interview. When discussing upper secondary students in general, she says,

Here clusters of students are gathered in certain programmes, and there are many boys who do not master [these skills]. I think the difference between gender is huge [but] then there are the clever boys as well.

Hannah relates her teaching and the writing assignments to her students' future careers. She hints at the fact that some (or even a majority) of her girls will not use their writing skills, although some of them will. For instance, some of them will go into politics or work with their trade unions, although it seems that Hannah does not take this into consideration. She has a somewhat superficial view of what the future might have in store for her girls. Similar to what is taught in the academic programmes, the curriculum Hannah has designed is characterised by a high level of verticality, both in content and in form.

#### 5. TEACHING WRITING OR NOT?

Research shows that elaborated instructions and explicit surveys of different texts and their structure, style, expectations, etc. are rare in the classroom of L1 Swedish. At the same time, there is a prevalent tradition among writing teachers to make written comments on the good and bad points in written texts once they have been produced.

What did we see in the examples above? Nicolas uses paragon or model texts and presumes that these examples will teach the students how an ideal essay should be written. He also uses subsequent commentary and grades to point out the excellent and the subpar parts of a written text. He uses language which the students are expected to understand, and much is implicit. If they do not understand, they are studying the wrong programme. His teaching is a good example of an invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000).

Sarah, on the other hand, uses a visible and explicit pedagogy of instruction, feedback and student involvement. Her curriculum is overloaded with writing assignments, and she thinks that if they did not write this much, she would not be able to enhance the students' writing skills. Although she sets an example of going through the history of literature with an emphasis on older as well as new and contemporary literature, the students are disappointed with the ambitious writing curriculum, and they find the NT to be less demanding than expected and "a piece of cake". Hannah is also preparing her students for the test with the same demanding assignments and giving them a real opportunity to pass the NT with distinction. Indeed, the BA students all passed the test, and 12 out of 26 students passed with distinction. They do not find the test to be so challenging.

Eva's strategy is to stage an instruction of meta-literacy: she constructs a survey of different text types, and the students are asked to work in groups and present the most prominent features of the various types. The impression we get from this lesson is that the students are engaged, are able to make good presentations and are well aware of the writing demands. However, knowing what is not the same as knowing how. Since the electricity students are not given an opportunity to try writing in the different genres typical of the NT nor are they given any substantial feedback, they are not really prepared for the test. They also find the more demanding tasks far beyond reach, although they all passed their final exams without ever having written one single text in the genres normally tested in the NT. This kind of teaching is at best semi-visible, since the students get a glimpse of the demands and expectations but are not coached into meeting them.

Stephen Ball has coined the expression "terrors of performativity" (2003). However, we think that neither Eva nor Nicolas feel this pressure, while both Sarah and Hannah admit that the NT is conclusive when designing their writing curriculum. Nicolas is quite relaxed, because he relies on the students. They should pass with distinction, and they have been taught how to write on lower levels of the education system. Eva feels some pressure, but she shows more signs of resignation than real despair. We also have the notion that being part of an ethnographic study is doing more for her anxiety than the actual test. Nobody expects much from an electrician's writing anyway.

#### 6. HOW THE PEDAGOGIC DEVICE RULES THE WRITING CLASSROOM(S)

As Basil Bernstein (1996) argues, we need to understand how the distributive, re-contextualising and evaluative rules determine the communication and acquisition of school knowledge in classroom discourse. In this case, on the expressed orders from the Ministry of Education and the National School Agency, the test-makers – the Scandinavian Language Department at Uppsala University – determine the rules as to what is legitimate knowledge for students in Sweden's upper secondary schools. What counts as legitimate knowledge is thus the same for all students regardless of programme. However, Bernstein (1996:28) makes the point that the reason that the pedagogic device cannot be seen as overly deterministic is because it "creates its own inherent contradictions". Teachers and students form a kind of adjustment or resistance to the distribution and re-contextualisation of knowledge. As Nylund and Rosvall (2011) as well as Korp (2011, 2012) have shown, vocational students are well aware of the labour market demands on the required knowledge and skills when working as a car mechanic, an electrician or a builder. Thus, as Bernstein (1996:28) makes it clear, "it is possible to have an outcome, a form of communication which can subvert the fundamental rules of the device".

In a comparison between the targets and the outcome in the four classrooms, it is obvious that although the course and the national syllabus are identical, there are different curricula at stake in the four classrooms. Only one curriculum is char-



acterised by horizontality (in the Electricity Programme) while the others are characterised by a high degree of verticality. The distributive rules in the ORF govern the syllabus and the NT, while the rules of the PRF govern the teaching, the local test practices and the social relations in the classroom. In an intricate web of evaluative instances, the teachers have to make decisions on a day-to-day basis to make everyone happy. Thus, assessment, grading, test procedures, feedback to individual students and teaching are governed by the pedagogic device, leaving a lot for the teachers to decide. The device, although functioning in an egalitarian system, may both uphold and accentuate the differences in the labour force, thus unequally distributing the writing skills.

When answering the question of whether students are writing for life or for school, we have to consider the pedagogic identities ascribed to the various classrooms and groups of students in a shared upper secondary school. The teachers have clear opinions of different student trajectories and the role of writing in these trajectories. The social science students are subject to a curriculum based on traditional and conservative values and thus ascribed with a conservative identity, in line with the syllabus but not tried in the NT. This is the main reason why these students find their teacher's ambitious attitude to writing more demanding than necessary. The natural science students, on the other hand, are met with a more neo-conservative teaching and do well on the NT, while the therapeutic identity in Bernstein's terms is ascribed to the electricity students, where well-being and low demands characterise the teaching, will not provide them with tools necessary for passing the test nor for leaving school with a minimum of writing skills. A more neo-liberal identity, as Hannah ascribes to her students, provides them with the necessary skills and the satisfaction of having succeeded on the test.

On the whole, what we see in the preservation of social and pedagogic identity formed by expectations of trajectories both in the form of further education and further working life in three of the writing classrooms, complies with the reproduction of gender and class dispositions. Working class boys training for jobs as electricians become working class men with little or no need to play an active part as writers in a democratic society. Students in the academic programmes are either taught to write in the social science classroom or expected to do well when graduated from the Natural Science Programme. In contrast, Hannah's ambivalent but effective tuition and practice, her feedback and visible pedagogy, serves as an interruption to the preservation of the social order. The girls who are training for work in business and administration are at least given an opportunity to write expository and argumentative texts and thus take part as writers in civic society as rightful (and write-full) citizens.

In 2011, a new upper secondary school reform superseded the more egalitarian 1994 reform, once again accentuating the differences between vocational and academic programmes. Nowadays, students in vocational programmes are only required to take one course in L1 Swedish. The amount of course points is half the previous amount, and they are not automatically able to apply for university stud-

ies, unless they choose to take additional courses. Students in the academic programmes study three times as much as the vocational students in the subject L1 Swedish.

In the first course studied by all students, writing is characterised by argumentative text making. The students are expected to write for communication, learning and reflection. The ability to use quotations and correct referencing as well as correct language is accentuated. These are skills all students in upper secondary education – academic as well as vocational – are expected to master. In the second course of the new syllabus, the students aiming for higher education are expected to write exploratory and argumentative texts like in the old system of 1994, and the third course is expected to teach the students “scientific writing” as a preparation for higher education. In the most recent syllabus, there are no signs of the importance of students’ ability to use language as a prerequisite for further education nor for an active and responsible participation in society, particularly concerning vocational students. Thus, writing is reduced to a skill for education and not for life.

In the new upper secondary school, Eva, Nicolas and Sarah will find that their teaching, as shown in our study, is more in line with the ORF. Hannah, on the other hand, will have to reconsider her curriculum, and in line with the new division between academic and vocational education, reduce the chances for working class girls to become writing citizens.

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