Who owns the words?
Teaching vocabulary in a multicultural class

Gudrun Svensson*

Abstract
The increasing diversity of Swedish society is affecting the Swedish school. Applying the perspective of critical literacy (Janks 2010), this study examines how teachers’ attitudes in a multilingual classroom affect the ability of pupils to develop semantic and critically reflective competence. The study shows that the class teachers hardly considered the pupils’ multilingualism and cultural background when devising a procedure using literary tests to engage pupils in talking, listening and writing and to increase their lexical knowledge. With its one nation, one people and one language (May 1999), the Western cultural heritage seems to be taken for granted as natural. The teachers’ domination, the pupils’ powerlessness, and the lack of diversity do not give the pupils access to the learning that the teachers expect, and the pupils are not provided with an opportunity to develop critical-analytical thinking. The study also shows that the teachers feel inadequately trained for teaching in a society of diversity, and often experience powerlessness in their role as teachers, searching for good tools to guide their pupils.

Keywords: diverse society, multilingual classroom, critical literacy, teacher education

In the last few decades Sweden has turned into a society marked by increasing diversity and multilingualism, as is also reflected in the Swedish school, whose pupils now represent 120 different mother tongues (Skolverket 2011a). Despite a number of investments in language support for pupils with a first language other than Swedish, statistics from the National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2011b) show that one year after another multilingual pupils are over-represented among those pupils who do not fulfil the goals of the final year of the compulsory school, clearly demonstrating that schools have not succeeded in giving multilingual pupils the same opportunities as monolingual pupils.

Language is an important instrument of power in school as well as in society, and those who possess the language also possess the implied world, a fact stressed for decades by researchers from different disciplines (see e.g. Fanon 1952 on the basis of post-colonial theory, May 1999 from the point of view of critical multiculturalism, as well as Freire 1972, Cummins 2000 and Janks 2010 with critical literacy as a
starting point). Freebody & Luke & (1990) and Luke (2003), who have elucidated the relationship between language and power in schoolchildren and adult Aborigines in Australia, argue that true access to society requires being fully literate. Full literacy means not just competence in decoding texts and the semantic competence to create understanding, but also pragmatic competence for daily life and competence in being critically reflective. All four of these components are necessary and ought to pervade the teaching. Like Freebody and Luke, Janks (2010) regards literacy as a combination of cognitive skills and social practice. Being able to reflect and act calls for knowledge of words (Freire 1972; Janks 2010), and the ability to change the world requires the ability to name it. Access to language is thus linked to issues of power, and the way teachers give instruction in literacy therefore has political implications (Janks 2010). The teacher’s attitude determines whether pupils gain access to the language and can handle it in such a way that they can be critically reflective and creative in relation both to themselves and to their world (Janks 2010).

In school a school-related language is developed. It differs from the everyday language in filling its function as a tool for learning and critical thinking (Lindberg 2006). Still, it takes a great many years to develop school-related language proficiency in a second language (Collier & Thomas 1999) and hence teachers must facilitate the learning of multilingual pupils by highlighting and making explicit these elements in their teaching in a much more distinct way than what is required for monolingual pupils (see e.g. Kuymcu 2004).

Teachers in multilingual schools therefore have to work actively to build up a school-related vocabulary including subject-related as well as less frequent subject-independent words (see Enström 2004). Even less frequent everyday words are important for the ability of multilingual pupils to develop critically reflective thinking. This includes typical written-language words associated with non-fiction, which are not acquired via the spoken language with its restricted lexical variation. The group of less frequent everyday words also contains words and expressions that often occur in fiction, which may be, for example, variants of adjectives describing persons, and verbs of motion (Enström 2004). Such words are not so prominent when reading school textbooks but are very important when describing experiences and emotions. According to Langer (2011), literary language is particularly valuable for pupils’ identity formation and critical-analytical thinking, and she emphasises that literary texts can generate horizons of possibilities (Langer 2011:27).

The aim of this article is to use critical literacy to shed light on the way teachers’ attitudes and strategies when working with literature can affect pupils’ opportunities to develop their semantic and critically reflective competence in a multilingual classroom. The material comes from some sequences of teaching Swedish as a second language in grade 4, where the class teachers have set up a working procedure to get pupils engaged in talking, listening and writing, and to increase their lexical knowledge.
Critical discourses and teaching

Today’s critical discourses originated in the 1970s when established views of society and school were being called into question. Through his book *Black Skin, White Masks* from 1952, Fanon was the forerunner of what would be called post-colonialism (see e.g. Said 1978; Hulme 1986; Young 1990; Loomba 2005), which pinpoints how colonial structures are shaped by emphasising the contrasts between Europe and the so-called Third World. These historically and socially created hierarchic notions of different cultures have survived in the Western world, and are upheld by those who have the power of words. Post-colonialism also shows that all expectations assign differences in power, rank and opportunity to people, which not only erects barriers between groups of them but also form their identities. Although Sweden has only had a few and short-lived colonial territories, researchers in post-colonial theory have proved that colonial patterns of thought have existed and still exist in Swedish society. Such notions, which are seen as both obvious and natural (Lundahl 2002; Wikström 2007), put their stamp on everyday life and affect the activities of the Swedish school (Torpsten 2008; Svensson & Torpsten 2012; also see Cummins & Schecter 2003 from an international perspective). According to May (1999), Western thought is permeated by a cultural heritage resting on the foundation of one nation, one people and one language.

In 1972 the Brazilian pedagogue Freire presented his theories of a critical pedagogy discourse in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In contrast to established views of learning as communication and programming, he maintained that critically reflective literacy, problematisation, is the prerequisite for creating awareness in marginalised groups and making them take command of their own lives. Similarly to and roughly simultaneously with Freire (1972), the social and cultural conditions for working-class youth were studied in the English Birmingham school, which also stood for a critical education discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). In their classroom studies, Sinclair and Coulthard test the characteristic model of mediation pedagogy, IRF, a teacher-led educational form mainly consisting of no more than three features: *initiative* (from the teacher), *response* (from the pupil) and *follow-up* (by the teacher), and conclude that this method makes pupils passive and leaves no room for reflective thinking.

The critical discourses have many offshoots, which partly overlap or coincide, and partly focus on different areas. The critical discourse analyses of language as a social practice (Fairclough 1989) have, for example, an application adapted to the classroom through Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough 1992), with its heavy emphasis on the relation between language and power. The relationship between language and power is also emphasised by representatives of critical literacy (see e.g. Janks 1993; Luke 2003). According to Janks (2010), the concept of literacy has usually been associated with technological progress or decoding ability and, unlike *critical literacy*, is not connected to issues of power. Janks says that a literacy teacher works with the
pupils to create meaning from texts, while a critical literacy teacher is interested in what texts do with their readers and listeners, and in whose purpose the texts serve. The teacher helps the pupils express themselves and their situation, tackle problems and act, even if it is only on a small scale, to make the world a better place (2010:19).

The traditional perception of literacy as the ability to read and write has been questioned by researchers within New Literacy (see e.g. Kress 2003; Gee 2008) who criticise the concentration on the written word and the lack of multimodality in schools. Gee (2008) states that literacy is a heterogeneous concept with its foundation in social and cultural practice and it should be viewed in terms of semiotic domains such as the written word, pictures, graphic figures, music and gestures. He shows, for example, how computer games can have greater potential for learning than traditional teacher-steered lessons (2008).

The multilingualism researcher Cummins (2000) asserts that the ability to develop critical literacy is necessary so that multilingual pupils can understand how power is exercised. They have to be able to read between the lines and grasp the real message in advertisements and political rhetoric. He advocates a teaching model that takes both diversity and identity development into consideration. It also has to be cognitively challenging and focus on contents as well as language and language usage. Janks (2010), who has particularly studied linguistic power structures and teaching practices in the multilingual South African society, argues, like Cummins, that a consideration of diversity is of great significance for pupils’ learning potential. She highlights, moreover, how factors such as taking available semiotic resources and dominance into account can affect the pupils’ access to the teaching.

**Material and method**

The basis of the studies presented here is the teaching of Swedish in a class in Year 4 in a municipal school in a segregated housing area. Of the 24 pupils in the class, only one has parents whose first language is Swedish. The majority of the pupils had been through the Swedish preschool for a longer or shorter period while others had arrived later, even as late as the beginning of school. In the nine-year compulsory Swedish school, children in Years 3, 6 and 9 sit a national exam to compare the level of the class with the national average. In that national test, in Year 3 about 50% of the pupils in this class achieved the prescribed aims for the subject of Swedish.

The class has two teachers with long experience but no training as teachers of Swedish as a second language. In this study, one of the teachers had the main responsibility for carrying out the teaching sequences, while the other functioned more as an assistant.

The major part of the material was gathered at three similar class sessions during the same week, consisting of classroom observations, audio recordings corresponding to a playing time of 2 hours and 20 minutes, three chapters from a book for reading
Who owns the words? Teaching vocabulary in a multicultural class

aloud, *Samariasjöns hemlighet* (“The Secret of Lake Samaria”) by Mia Söderberg with illustrations by Katarina Strömgård, as well as the pupils’ own written down retellings of a text read aloud. Apart from the material collected during the lessons, there are two audio-recorded interviews with both teachers, each lasting a quarter of an hour. My transcriptions follow an orthography close to the written language, with pauses marked by the # symbol and xxx indicating that something is inaudible.

The analytical model comes from Janks (2010), using her four orientations based on critical literacy. I place the emphasis on the *domination* orientation, which exposes power and influence in the classroom. *Design* reveals how different semiotic systems are used in the classroom and whether the teaching situation is based on creative solutions that create meaning in learning, while I apply *diversity* to highlight whether and, if so, how linguistic and cultural diversity is reflected in the classroom. Based on *access* I discuss the pupils’ opportunity to gain access to and assimilate the teaching.

In a classroom *domination* (Janks 2010) can be defined from many different angles and on different levels. From a macro-perspective, one can describe the overall power structure as regards power over curricula, the size of classes and the like, while the micro-perspective can demonstrate power relations between different actors in the classroom action. In the following I consider the teachers’ planning as a macro-perspective, while teachers’ and pupils’ interaction in the concrete classroom situation is a micro-perspective.

**Implementation of teaching stages**

The teachers stated in the interviews that they would have liked to apply a varied arrangement, training pupils in the separate skills of listening, talking and writing. Hence it could be said that this structure largely met the different curriculum requirements (Skolverket 2011c). With the aid of a literary text they wanted to stimulate the pupils’ engagement, to develop their lexical knowledge and make them interested in training the skills. They had therefore arranged the teaching in different stages, the first of which involved going through the words used in the literary text. Doing this before the reading was intended to arouse the pupils’ curiosity and increase their vocabulary. In the next stage, the teacher read aloud and then the teacher, together with the pupils, drew a mind map of what they had read. In the final stage, the pupils retold in their own written words the chapter that had been read to them.

On all three occasions, the teaching was conducted in a similar way in the different stages. To begin with, the curtains were half drawn so that the room was semi-dark and one of the teachers stood by the board as if she were in the spotlight while the other teacher stayed in the background and was more of an assistant. During the first stage, the teacher went through words of her own choice from the book which she wanted the pupils to learn and had thus written on the smart board.
The teacher took the words one by one for discussion, passing questions around to the pupils who remained sitting at their desks, which were all placed so that the pupils faced the teacher. Nobody made any notes during the word presentation and the words were erased by the teacher as soon as they had been presented.

In the second stage, the teacher read a chapter aloud from the book. The reading was done with energy and enthusiasm, with the teacher accentuating events and experiences by means of intonation and body language. While one teacher was reading, the other projected illustrations from the book onto the smart board.

In the third stage, the teacher proceeded the chronological train of events and asked the pupils questions about it. They gave short answers which were entered as key words by the teacher into a mind map that looked like a cloud with the heading of the chapter in the centre and outgoing lines for inserting the events. These were the words written into the mind maps:

Table 2. Words in the mind map

| Day 1                | Day 2                        | Day 3                             |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| holiday              | distinguish                  | about an hour                     |
| hearty               | concealed                    | a good hour                       |
| discussion           | lush                         | a further hour                    |
| backyard             | silhouetted                   | air pockets                       |
| deserted             | stern                        | continuously                      |
| Mallis = Mallorca    | cloudburst                   |                                   |
| pure paradise        | restless                     |                                   |
| passed               | dogged                       |                                   |
| took a short cut     | hail                         |                                   |
| main entrance        | terrified                    |                                   |
|                      | alternative                  |                                   |

In the fourth stage, the pupils individually retold the chapter in writing on their computers, which they used as typewriters. Meanwhile, the mind map remained on the board. While the pupils were writing, the teachers walked around helping them
both with technical problems and to make progress with their stories. Some pupils had difficulty putting the story together in their own words and mainly wrote only what was on the board. Some could not manage the writing and formatting on the computer, while others said that they did not remember. Finally, the pupils saved their work in a dropbox.

**Domination**

From a macro-perspective, the overarching arrangement of these work stages is under complete teacher control. The teachers decided on the book, drew up the procedure and implementation of the stages, determined which words the pupils should learn and how they should be taught. At no stage did the pupils have any influence on how the work stages should be implemented, nor which words they wanted to or thought they needed to learn. They did not choose whether to work individually or in groups.

Using a couple of brief sequences from a discussion of the word *silhouette*, I illustrate domination from a micro-perspective in the interplay between teacher and pupil in the classroom from two points of view. One starts from how the teacher follows up the content of pupils’ suggestions and the other from what backing in the form of praise or non-praise the teacher gives the pupils. As a background observer, I noted that the atmosphere between teachers and pupils was friendly. The pupils did not have the chance to decide how they wanted to carry out the different stages of the task but, viewed superficially, a benevolent consensus seemed to emerge between the teachers and pupils that the work should be done via teaching with a typical IRF structure (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975): the teacher asks questions, the pupils answer and the teacher follows up.

In Sequence 1 the first part of the teacher-pupil interaction is shown. The teacher has singled out the word *silhouette*, the last word remaining on the smart board, and turns her back to the class to draw something on the board when Zenya calls out that she knows. The teacher turns to face the class again, and the following discussion starts, with the other teacher intervening and interpreting, and Zenya receiving praise for her associations.

**Sequence 1. Discussion of the word *silhouette*.** Zenya associates, the answer is rejected but she receives praise

1. Teacher: now there’s one word left # then I’ll draw the silhouette of something
2. Zenya: I know # I know
3. Teacher: you know
4. Zenya: I think so
5. Teacher: well
6. Zenya: things you take coffee with # you take away these
7. Teacher: what are you thinking of # the way you take coffee
8. Zenya: yes with coffee like
Teacher: what are you thinking of # what does it look like
(9)
Zeny: well it’s xxx like silver # and then it’s like a round circle
(10)
Teacher: maybe you mean a strainer like the one you pour tea into
(11)
Zeny: yees
(12)
Teacher: oh
(13)
Teacher 2: oh
(14)
Teacher: a strainer # a tea strainer # oh it isn’t that # but you started
well # but silhouette is something else # I’ll show you a
silhouette of # a dog’s head
(15)

Zeny is thus praised for making an association with the sound of the word *sil* (Swedish for “strainer”), but her suggestion is neither followed up nor further developed; instead, the teacher draws a silhouette with a round head and two big round ears. She laughs at her picture and says that it is a dog’s head and some pupils join her in laughing, and someone says er. In the next sequence (see below), the teacher goes on drawing and the pupils guess that a *silhouette* means that you draw or copy something on a board or that it is something black. The teacher offers different explanations, but no one seems to understand. On the contrary, for Alin the confusion seems to grow because she does not even understand the words the teacher uses when explaining.

**Sequence 2. Discussion of the word *silhouette*. All answers are rejected, no one is praised**

Teacher: the silhouette of a dog’s head # now I’ll draw a silhouette of an
apple # what’s a silhouette # Maiza
(16)
Maiza: you draw something
(17)
Teacher: no # this one
(18)
Iasmin: you draw something on the board
(19)
Teacher: well it doesn’t have to be that
(20)
Maiza: you copy something you are thinking of like thinking that I’m
drawing this so then I’ll draw this eh #
(21)
Teacher: you just draw the actual form # what it looks like # an apple #
how easy it can be # now this was a bit slovenly
(22)
Someone giggles
(23)
Elmedin: black
(24)
Teacher: what # apples aren’t black, are they
(25)
Elmedin: no
(26)
Teacher: no # but silhouettes you can see that they only have black # if
someone is standing behind a curtain that is a bit transparent
(27)
Alin: how do you see transparent
(28)
Teacher: then you can see the silhouette through # you don’t exactly
see clearly but you just see the form of whoever is standing
behind the curtain # you see
(29)
Zanna: no not quite
(30)
Teacher: this pen was no good
(31)
Every suggestion from the pupils is rejected and the teacher never asks for clarification, but the teacher invents her own examples and starts new explanations several times to sort out the meaning of the word. The teacher provides the solution herself and then comments on the pen she has used to draw on the smart board. Radi fills in the teacher’s answer and then the discussion peters out.

**Sequence 3.** Discussion of the word *silhouette*. Radi fills in the teacher’s suggestion and receives confirmation

(32) Radi  you see the background and the forms
(33) Teacher:  yes you only see the edges or forms # that’s right
(34) Pupil:  xxx forms
(35) Teacher  yes that’s right

These sequences illustrate the teacher’s *domination* and the pupils’ lack of influence. In this discussion they can only make contributions which are subsequently deemed right or wrong. In the first follow-up, Zenya’s answer, the teacher commends Zenya for associating the word *sil* with *silhouette*, a not unusual, but erroneous, way among pupils with Swedish as a second language to associate the meanings of words with similar sounds. The next suggestion comes from Maiza, who associates with the teacher’s manifest actions at the board but not with the actual sound image of the word. Her association with a piece of concrete reality is not worth praising so the only answer is *no*. Still, Maiza does not give in but tries again with a similar explanation, which receives no comment whatsoever from the teacher. Iasmin’s suggestion that you draw something on the board is fairly similar to that of Maiza but is followed up more positively by the teacher’s *well*, an answer which may mean that it is almost right, but then the teacher rejects it by saying that it need not be like that. This is a cryptic formulation which suggests, however, that Maiza has not given the correct answer. Elmedin seems to associate with the colour of the teacher’s pen and suggests that *silhouette* means “black”. His answer is followed up by an immediate riposte from the teacher, whose *what # apples aren’t black are they* may be interpreted as an expression of surprise. The tone is friendly and humorous, but the teacher offers no confirmation that he is on the right track. Nevertheless, a few moments later she uses the word *black* in her continued attempt to explain. After a further attempt, the teacher provides the answer herself and Radi reformulates her explanation and receives confirmation for this. In the course of this discussion Alin asks for clarification of the word *transparent* and Zanna says that she still does not quite understand, but their comments have not led to any answer or follow-up at all. Thus, in this discussion several pupils have offered the wrong suggestions, but their suggestions have met with different responses.

This class sequence has been analysed from the aspect of *domination*, but it can also be considered in relation to *diversity* and *access*. With regard to *diversity*, there is
not much here to indicate that the pupils’ own experiences are utilised. As for access, as an observer I had the impression that many of the pupils did not feel as if they had participated when going through the words. The working method was a classic IRF presentation (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975) where the teacher asks questions, the pupils answer and the teacher responds to the answer by stating whether it is correct or not. Most pupils sat silently and seemed to be listening, but some of them moved up and down in their desks doing things in the classroom, picking up sheets of paper or a book from inside the desk, while a few looked half asleep. In most cases only one or two raised their hands and were then given the question, but once in a while the teacher asked those who had not raised their hands, but none of them knew the answer. Even those who did raise their hands sometimes answered wrongly. In most cases the teacher supplied the correct answer, but on a few occasions brief discussions arose with the teacher guiding the pupils towards it. Ten of the 24 pupils in the class never received questions at all during this first stage in any of the three lessons.

An IRF situation like the one above is dominated largely by one party only, namely the teacher, and is strongly performance-related. The teacher did not base her discussion on the pupils’ experiences, and most of the pupils did not take the chance of suggesting what the word silhouette meant. The teachers stated in the interviews that their intention was above all that the pupils should increase their lexical knowledge. By understanding and learning the words they would then show that they could use them correctly in their written stories, but few pupils demonstrated they had learned this possibility to increase their vocabulary, probably because they had not actually gained access to these very words. The result of presenting the words without anchoring the discussion in the pupils’ experiences and without following up and discussing the pupils’ ideas was that many of the pupils probably missed this opportunity created for developing their lexical knowledge. The pupils did not, at any rate, demonstrate that they had gained access to the words the teacher had intended to teach them. Of the 26 words that were covered, only 17 were used, mostly in just a few of the pupils’ texts. The word silhouette, used above as an illustration, occurred twice in their writing: Iasmin, who had contributed one suggestion, and Amir, who although he had sat silently seemed to be listening actively.

**Diversity**

There was no sign whatsoever during the presentation and discussion of the various stages that the class had anything but a typical Western background. Even the book chosen for reading aloud was characterised by this approach through the clearly ethnical Swedish children Tim and Sofia as well as via the description of the geographical setting, social life and relations within families and homes. The cultural heritage involving one nation, one people and one language that May (1999) describes within the framework of critical multiculturalism seems to be the natural and self-evident one in the situation and on no occasion is any other point of view discernible. The talk
about words and events is concentrated on what happens in the book and scarcely any other worlds of experience enter into the discussion.

*Diversity* not only refers to cultural and linguistic experiences among multilingual pupils but also to the multitude of other experiences prevailing in a classroom. When the words are presented personal experiences come to the surface on a few occasions, for example when the teacher asks for the meaning of *hail* and Amila starts talking of broken roofs, but soon enough she is interrupted by the teacher. When the teacher explains the word *air pockets*, she starts by asking how many have flown before and many hands are raised. Zenya opens her mouth and tells the class that air pockets affected her hearing. This question causes a general buzz in the classroom and some pupils turn to each other, start chatting excitedly and telling one another about their experiences. However, they are soon enough silenced by the teacher who gives her own explanation of *air pockets*, describing how nasty they can be. This situation thus gives rise to some activity in the classroom, which tells of personal engagement on the part of the pupils, and it could be said that taking *diversity* into consideration gave greater opportunities for knowledge acquisition in this case, as *air pockets* turned out to be one of the few words that reappeared, albeit to a limited extent, in the pupils’ writings. A contributory reason could be that this word also occurred on the mind map.

**Access**

Since the purpose behind the different work stages was that the pupils should increase their cognitive development by picking up new words, I discuss whether this was what they actually gained *access* to. The above discussion has primarily concerned *access* to the classroom agenda, but the *access* concept can also be interpreted from a narrower perspective, in this case as access to the intended knowledge acquisition.

During the first stage, the teacher thus worked with a number of words that may be largely considered less frequent ordinary words, which are important for the pupils’ development of a school-related vocabulary. She wrote the words on the board, discussed them in accordance with the IRF model and erased them again. Most of these words were notably absent from the pupils’ own writings, except for a few words like *silhouette* and *air pockets*, which had attracted greater attention in the discussion. The words that occurred on the mind map had a much greater impact. Apart from names, every word or expression occurred on average 14 times in the pupils’ texts, in contrast to the words from the first stage, which on average appeared only 0.5 times.

When drawing the mind map, the teacher and the pupils discussed the events of the story and the teacher drew up mind maps that consisted almost exclusively of simple everyday words, all of which were already part of the pupils’ vocabulary. It is true that the pupils were allowed to contribute in the joint designing of the mind map, but no *access* was provided towards any increase in their cognitive development since during this stage the teacher neither linked up with the pupils’ own world of ideas and experiences nor led the discussion in a direction that could have entailed
more reflective thinking. In the book read aloud, a storm plays a prominent role in one chapter and there are plenty of passages describing the main characters’ experiences, emotions and reflections, but the words occurring in these contexts were not taken advantage of in the classroom discussions.

Figure 1. A storm described in an extract from the book

At this very moment it all broke loose. A rumble erupted, as if the skies had opened up, drowning all other sounds. Flashes of lightning, one more powerful than the other, shot through the air and struck before and behind Tim and Sofia. It was almost as if someone was aiming a gun at them. [...] Now the rain hardened and turned to hail. Ice stones, some as big as plums, fell from the sky. It hurt badly [...] They stumbled ahead in the tall grass [...] The thunderbolts flashed angrily around them and Tim thought their last moment had come [...] cloudburst [...] pouring down [...] furiously [...] slippery wet grass. The rain was gathering strength. The wind carried along the ice-cold drops which were sharp as needles in their faces and an icy cold spread through their bodies [...] Matted wisps of wet hair hung over their eyes [...] The sky was all lit by the threatening zigzagging flashes [...] (Söderberg 2010).

The text contains similes and metaphors like break loose, big as plums, the thunderbolts flashed angrily and sharp as needles as well as evocative descriptions of experiences like a rumble erupted, the rain hardened, hurt badly, ice-cold drops and stumble ahead. None of these were made use of during the presentation of the events, but the mind map included words like storm, rain, flash of lightning and wind, which altogether recurred 49 times in the pupils’ writings. Even though they describe the weather, they are fairly empty words, saying nothing about how the storm was experienced. Nearly all of the pupils’ texts mention the storm, but only in two of them can one notice that the pupils have taken in the descriptions during the reading aloud and used them in their own writing. To enable second-language pupils to enlarge their lexical knowledge and put words to their experiences, reflections and emotions is extremely important for their self-esteem and identity development (cf. Langer 2011). This presentation did offer fair opportunities for more reflection when describing different courses of events, but these opportunities were not used.

Still, it cannot be excluded that the descriptions did play a role in the pupils’ learning of words and expressions, even though it is not apparent in their own texts. They saw them on the smart board and subsequently heard them being read aloud so the next time they come across these words they may recognise them, which could lead to including them in their vocabulary. It can also be gleaned from the texts that some pupils tried to apply the words presented by the teacher, even if they did not turn out correctly. Alin, for example, seems to have understood the word further, which he applies by writing Then Sofia took a fadder step towards the stone.
An overarching comment regarding the access aspect is that the result of the lack of domination on the part of the pupils and of diversity in the discussions is that most pupils failed to gain access to the agenda which was intended and planned to increase their lexical knowledge.

**Design**

The teachers put plenty of thought into the planning, with a variety of work stages when the pupils were to train in speaking, listening and writing and which from a linguistic point of view included both receptive and productive approaches. The teachers made use of several different media – writing by hand and projecting pictures on the smart board, reading aloud from a book, and computer writing. Apart from the pictures projected on the smart board, the written word was in focus through all of the stages. Although the modern technology in the classroom allowed the teachers and pupils access to other semiotic resources, they were not used. The pupils were given an ordinary assignment, to retell a literary text by writing it on a computer, which was used in the same way as pen and paper. The texts were then saved in a dropbox, but the pupils were not informed about what their written material would be used for. As an observer, I felt that the pupils who had the ability to write independently worked most conscientiously but without being personally involved. From the texts that were handed in, however, one can draw the conclusion that a couple of the pupils had tried on their own initiative to use more resources by experimenting with typefaces and sizes, and one or two pupils had inserted pictures to illustrate what was written.

**Discussion**

The teachers, who were both deeply engaged and interested in their teaching, had planned a varied and well-thought-out arrangement to expand the pupils’ knowledge, but the pupils still did not seem to gain access to the classroom agenda and thus did not acquire the increased knowledge that the teachers had intended. Although they had chosen a vivid text full of nuances to read aloud, the pupils’ texts retold it in a relatively uninterested way, and their lexical knowledge did not seem to have been enriched by the words the teacher had explained. Some had hardly written anything at all of their own, but merely reused the words in the mind maps, perhaps because they had not understood the text read to them, or because their powerlessness in the situation left them uninspired.

The teachers were unable to create meaning in the learning, which may be due to the lack of domination on the part of the pupils and the lack of diversity in the teaching situation, which did not give the pupils access to the acquisition of knowledge. The teaching did not result in the critically reflective thinking that is essential for full literacy (Freebook & Luke 1997; Luke 2003; Janks 2010), nor did it generate any sense of liberation in the pupils (see Freire 1972). Because the purpose of the literary text was
solely to improve skills in Swedish as a second language through traditional training, the pupils were also not given an opportunity to approach *horizons of possibilities* (Langer 2011). The pupils could nevertheless have improved their skills in Swedish as a second language if the teaching had problematised instead of just mediating (Freire 1972), if their contributions had been highlighted and developed, and if their writing had been linked to their own ideas and experiences of life instead of retelling someone else’s (the main character’s) experiences of life. Moreover, just being asked to retell something is not a cognitive challenge for pupils on this level; a more demanding and reflective assignment could have inspired the pupils to be more intellectual and thus led to critical analytical thinking. Since the pupils did not know what the teachers’ intention was in having them retell the story, it is wholly conceivable that they found the writing to merely have a control function.

When as an observer I followed what was going on, I sensed that there was restraint among the teachers in allowing the pupils’ own stories of their own experiences to emerge. In the interviews I broached my thoughts about this to the teachers, who confirmed my observation but asserted that such stories about the pupils’ own experiences led to a shift in focus and to restlessness in the classroom. In the discussion it also emerged that one reason for the teachers’ restraint is that they are hesitant about how much of the pupils’ experiences as “non-Swedes” should be made apparent in the classroom, and that they are afraid the pupils would feel different, or ‘exotified’. This fear, which is often implicit, is not unique to the teachers of this class. It is an anxiety I have come across in many other contexts as a teacher educator and researcher. The fear of pupils becoming ‘exotified’ has the consequence that teachers are not open to *diversity* and hence do not affirm the pupils’ identity as multilingual individuals.

The extensive immigration into Sweden in the last few decades has placed entirely different demands on teachers in today’s Swedish schools compared to only two or three decades ago. Strictly speaking, these demands may have existed all the time in terms of *diversity* and heterogeneity, while teaching has been carried on as though all pupils have the same needs. The consequences of a monolingual and monocultural classroom will become more evident and more complex in a multilingual and multicultural society. No longer do pupils have the knowledge of Swedish culture and Swedish traditions that used to be taken for granted; nor have they acquired before starting school the same basic vocabulary as children in earlier generations. For the teachers, this means that they no longer have the same frames of reference as the pupils and thus cannot rely on their own experiences from growing up when working with pupils’ cognitive development. A great many school teachers have had no more than superficial, if any, training for the everyday life they encounter in their work because they were schooled into a system which was not derived from a multicultural society.

Although the teachers in the above study showed such a clear *domination* in relation to their pupils, they emphasised in talking with me that they, too, felt a lack of *domination* in the classroom. They were aware that their traditional views of education
might be detrimental to their teaching and might be one of the reasons the pupils did not make the expected progress. They wanted change but did not know how to achieve this. They felt powerless in their teacher role and were searching for good tools to guide their pupils. With Janks’ model as a starting point, one may thus conclude that not even teachers possess real *domination* and consequently no actual *access* to the classroom agenda. It is not self-evident to them how to apply *diversity* since it has not been part of their teacher training, and the support offered from the state usually focuses on traditional forms of cognitive development without considering diversity and identity development. This justifies the claim that a lack of *domination* and *access* hits back at the pupils in a double sense.

A situation like that of these teachers is not unique in today’s Swedish schools. The relatively rapid change from a monocultural to a multicultural country is leading to lags in many spheres, including school. It is a challenge for teacher educators to ensure that would-be teachers are not just given adequate training for today’s situation but also to enable teachers already working in the field to develop their competence by acquiring the requisite professional skills.

**Acknowledgement**

I thank professor Ulla Ekvall and Solveig Hammarbäck, Linnéuniversitetet, for clarifying discussions of the framework and valuable comments on my article. I am also grateful to the reviewers who provided very useful feedback and suggestions.
Notes

1. This article was produced in the framework of the research project Interaktion för Identitets- och kunskapsutveckling i det flerspråkiga klassrummet (“Interaktion for identity and cognitive development in the multilingual classroom”) at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden which aims to explore methods to improve teaching in the multilingual classroom.

2. I have followed the Swedish Research Council’s ethical principles for research (Vetenskapsrådet 2002) regarding the collection of human material (2002). The parents have given their consent in writing for collecting and using the material for research purposes, and all pupils have been given code names to protect their identity.
References

Collier, V. and Thomas, W. 1999. Making U.S. Schools Effective for English Language Learners. Part 1–3. TESOL Matters, 9, 4–6.

Cummins, J. 2000. Language, power and pedagogy. Bilingual children in the crossfire. Cleveldon: Multilingual matters.

Cummins, J. and Schecter, S.R. 2003. School-based language policy in cultural diversity contexts. In Multilingual Education in Practice: Using Diversity as a Resource, Schecter, S. R. & Cummins, J. (eds.), Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Enström, I. 2004. Ordfoerad och ordinlärning – med särskilt fokus på avancerade inlärare. In: Svenska som andraspråk – i forskning, undervisning och samhälle, Hyltenstam, K. & Lindberg, I. (eds.), 171–195. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Fairclough, N. 1989. Language and power. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. 1992. Discourse and social change. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fanon, F. 1952. Black skin, white masks. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Freebody, P. and Luke, A. 1990. Literacies Programs: Debates and Demands in Cultural Context. Prospect: Australian Journal of TESOL, 5(7), 7–16.

Freire P. 1972. Pedagogy of the oppressed. Harmondsworth UK: Penguin.

Gee, J.P. 2008. What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Halliday, M.A.K. 1985. An introduction to functional grammar. London: Edward Arnold Ltd. Press.

Hulme, P. 1986. Colonial encounters, Europe and the native Caribbean, 1492–1797. London: Methuen.

Janks, J. 1993. Critical language awareness series. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton and Wits University Press.

Janks, H. 2010. Literacy and power. New York and London: Routledge.

Kress, G. 2003. Literacy in the new media age. London: Routledge.

Kuyumcu, E. 2004. Genrer i skolans språkutvecklande arbete. In Svenska som andraspråk – i forskning, undervisning och samhälle, Hyltenstam, K. & Lindberg, I. (eds.) 573–596. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Langer, J. 2011. Envisioning knowledge: Building literacy in the academic disciplines. New York: Teachers College Press.

Lindberg, I. 2006. Med andra ord i bagaget. In Det hänger på språket, Bjar, L. (ed.), 57–91. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Loomba, A. 2005. Kolonialism/Postkolonialism. En introduktion till ett forskningsfält. Stockholm: Tankekraft förlag.

Luke, A. 2003. Literacy and the Other: A Sociological Approach to Literacy Research and Policy in Multilingual Societies. Reading Research Quarterly, 38(1), 132–141.

Lundahl, M. 2002. Postkoloniala studier, konst och representation. Kairos no. 7. Förord.

May, S. 1999. Critical multiculturality and cultural difference avoiding essentialism. In Critical Multiculturalism Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education, May, S. (ed.), 11–35. London: Falmer Press.

Said, E.W. 1978. Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books.

Sinclair, J.M. and Coulthard, M. 1975. Toward an analysis of discourse: The English used by teachers and pupils. Oxford: University Press.
Gudrun Svensson

Skolverket 2011a. Modersmål i siffror från läsåret 2010 till 2011. Stockholm: Skolverket.
Skolverket 2011b. Betyg i grundskolan läsåret 2010/11. Stockholm: Skolverket.
Skolverket 2011c. Kursplaner och betygskriterier för grundskolan, grundsärskolan, sameskolan och specialskolan. Stockholm: Skolverket.
Söderberg, M. 2010. Samariasjöns hemlighet. Stockholm: Sanoma utbildning.
Svensson, G. and Torpsten A.-C. 2012, in progress. Makt och litteracitet – modersmålslärande skriver om modersmålsundervisning. I: Skjelbred, Dagrun and Veum, Aslaug (red.) Literacy i läringskontekster. Oslo: CapplenDamm Akademisk.
Torpsten, A.-C. 2008. Erbjudet och upplevt lärande i mötet med svenska som andraspråk och svensk skola. Växjö: Växjö universitet.
Vetenskapsrådet 2002. Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk- samhällsvetenskaplig forskning. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet.
Wikström, H. 2007. (O)möjliga positioner. Familjer från Iran & postkoloniala reflektioner. Göteborg: Institutionen för socialt arbete, Göteborgs universitet.
Young, R. 1990. White mythologies: Writing, history and the west. London: Routledge.