Activities and the exploration of meaning by children in a grade one classroom

Katarina Ayton

1998:1
Activities and the exploration of meaning by children in a grade one classroom

Katarina Ayton
Spring Term 1998
Tema Barn
Abstract

This study is an exploration of how the children and the teacher through their everyday activities together create and recreate meaning in the classroom situation. The study specifically looks at interaction and communication. How the children and teachers talk about classroom rules and behaviour, whether, and how the children challenge the teacher's orchestration strategies, as well as the teacher's response to such challenges. The aim is to illuminate this from the perspective of the children.

The main body of collected data consists of field notes collected during two separate two-week observation periods. Some notes are very detailed as the verbal interactions were often short enough to be recorded verbatim. There is taped material used from class meetings (klassråd), a formal session held in school classes to provide democracy in school.

In the study we see the organisation and orchestration of school activities by the teacher constantly being challenged by activities initiated by the children. In this the children go in and out of activities and the intensity of their involvement seems to change rapidly from moment to moment. Looking at behaviour and the negotiation of rules in the classroom we see that the teacher and the children use rules in different ways.

The two main challenges seem to be the challenge to order and the challenge to an activity. In regard to instructions, noise and body placement it is possible to see the children's challenges as a threat to the order of the classroom. Other challenges, i.e., the avoidance of set tasks, the misunderstandings and the creation of games seem mainly to challenge the planned activity.

In the concluding comments the discussion moves from the one classroom, with the specific teacher and children involved, to a general level where we see the ideas behind school interacting with classroom organisation and children's negotiation of meaning.
# INTRODUCTION

- The research interest ........................................................................................................ 2
- The purpose of this study .................................................................................................. 3

## EDUCATION AND SCHOOL: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Education .......................................................................................................................... 4
- Conceptions of school ......................................................................................................... 5
- Traditions and ideology ........................................................................................................ 6
- Looking at interaction .......................................................................................................... 7
  - Including Culture ............................................................................................................. 8
- Communicating within the classroom .................................................................................. 9
  - Ground Rules .................................................................................................................. 9
  - Acts of Talk ...................................................................................................................... 10
- Classification and power ..................................................................................................... 11
  - Rules, meanings and interaction sets .............................................................................. 12

## ON ENTERING THE CLASSROOM

- Methods used and choices made ....................................................................................... 15
  - Choosing site .................................................................................................................... 16
  - Recording data .................................................................................................................. 16

## THE CLASSROOM AND IT’S SETTING

- Entering ............................................................................................................................ 18
  - The physical organisation of the classroom ..................................................................... 19
  - The teacher’s organisation ............................................................................................... 20
  - Activities ......................................................................................................................... 20

## RULES AND BEHAVIOUR

- The teacher’s strategies during transitions ....................................................................... 21
- The children’s use of rules .................................................................................................. 22
  - Putting your hand up ........................................................................................................ 25
  - The teacher’s use of this rule ............................................................................................ 25
  - The applicability of rules ................................................................................................. 27
  - Power ............................................................................................................................... 28
  - Negotiation of rules .......................................................................................................... 29

## ORCHESTRATION AND CHALLENGES

- The teacher’s orchestration ............................................................................................... 32
- Challenges .......................................................................................................................... 33
  - Avoidance ......................................................................................................................... 33
  - Games ............................................................................................................................... 34
  - Instructions ......................................................................................................................... 36
  - Challenging rules .............................................................................................................. 38
  - Misunderstanding ............................................................................................................. 38
- Responses by the teacher ................................................................................................... 39
  - What is challenged? .......................................................................................................... 41

## THE MATTER OF GENDER

- Interaction .......................................................................................................................... 44
- Ideology and practice .......................................................................................................... 46
- Children and their schooling ............................................................................................... 48
- Reflections ........................................................................................................................... 49

## LITERATURE

- Appendix I ......................................................................................................................... 51

- Appendix II ......................................................................................................................... 53
Introduction

A large part of my life has in some way involved different learning situations and institutions – through changing schools and school systems on a regular basis as I was growing up, to teaching Swedish to adult immigrants, English to Swedish and Swazi children and living and working at an international boarding college in Swaziland, Southern Africa, for nine years. Leaving that part of the world I entered yet another learning institution, Linköping’s University, as a student.

While my own fascination for schools as institutions grew, my children proceeded to make their way through school. From my childrens' perspective I have had insight into two school systems with different traditions, ideologies and understandings of school.

In Swaziland school is an important institution, both for the individual and for the country itself. At independence in 1968 a minority of the population had access to schooling. By the end of the eighties over 90% of Swazi children attended primary school. An achievement the country prides itself for.

Looking at these children trotting off to their schools, to sit in crowded classrooms and learn reading and writing, I wondered what hopes these children had, and what hopes their parents had for them. Schooling for these parents and children was not compulsory, and it was not free of charge. Poor parents scraped and saved to pay school fees and buy uniforms and books.

Moving to Sweden in the beginning of the nineties I found a different school. While school in Swaziland was presented to children as a privilege, in Sweden school was talked of as the natural arena for childrens’ everyday life. School was taken for granted, but at the same time exposed to massive criticism from several directions.

My interest in schooling and schools has grown during my academic studies. Although I read articles and books discussing the learning aspects, it is the idea of schooling, the existence of schools and the total acceptance of them that has fascinated me.

The research interest in my BA Anthropology thesis was the underlying beliefs of those working politically to extend compulsory schooling in Sweden. Finding that children as such did not figure largely in these debates I became more interested in the meeting between the children and the institution created for them.

The research interest

Schools are institutions created for children. In Sweden it is usually not the first of such institutions children meet. Many children spend some years in day care centres and most attend non-compulsory preparation classes aimed at six years olds. The fact that school is compulsory, and day care and preparation classes are not, might in practice be of little relevance to many parents or children.

The justifications for the two institutions are not the same though. As a child enters school it is under the justification that they will learn things in school. Sometimes preparation classes for six-year-olds are justified by children needing to learn what it is like in school, and how they should behave in school.
The two main groups of actors in school are children and teachers. Within the overarching structure of the institution these two groups, separately and jointly create their daily life. At break time the schoolyards are filled with young children, who are told that they need fresh air, while those teachers not on break duty meet in the staff room. During lessons schools look very quiet and peaceful from the outside and the activities in the classrooms are hidden from the public eye.

This does not mean to say that school personnel deliberately reduce accessibility. Those schools I have had any contact with have always been willing and eager to open their doors to parents and others interested in their activities. It is possible that the isolation of classrooms, and their occupants, is part of the tradition of school.

The purpose of this study

As school is central in our construction of childhood, and a central part of children's lives, I see the classroom as an arena for every-day life. I am interested in the meeting between the institution and the young child in the belief that it is in this meeting that children elaborate the ideas of school. I want to explore how the children and the teacher through their everyday activities together create and recreate meaning in the classroom situation.

I will specifically look at two areas of interaction and communication. How the children and teachers talk about classroom rules and behaviour, whether, and how the children challenge the teacher's orchestration strategies, as well as the teacher's response to such challenges. My aim is to illumiate this from the perspective of the children.

Education and School: Theoretical Background

The following sections contain presentations of studies and theories that have provided me with background knowledge, and that I have drawn inspiration from. In this presentation I have tried to proceed from a wide perspective, narrowing down gradually until I am presenting theories relating to specific occurrences in face-to-face interaction.

I first look at education in its widest form and then proceed to studies in which we can see the actual existence of school as creating meaning. After this I look briefly at the traditions and ideologies on which the Swedish comprehensive school rests, as these provide a backdrop to any experience and discussion of schooling in Sweden.

From this rather wide view of how people understand education and school, I present some aspects of Erving Goffman's discussions of interaction. I bring up parts of his writing that can be directly related to the introduction of novices into the school situation. Another important theoretician is Jerome Bruner who for many years has been influential in school debates. Bruner discusses interaction and the transfer of culture. To exemplify the transfer of cultural values I briefly look at Kathleen Wilcox' comparative classroom study.

Starting by introducing a study by Derek Edwards and Neil Mercer, both with a background in psychology, I go on to look more specifically at communication in classrooms. I placed the studies I present in two categories. The classification thus created is of course arbitrary, other classifications are obviously possible. For my purposes the division is between studying the ground rules for understanding one
another together with such underlying messages these contain, and studies which I felt where more focused on the acts of talk; the who, when and how much. Together these studies give a quite detailed picture of communication between different groups in the classroom.

As I am interested in the way children might challenge the orchestration strategies of the teacher I also present studies which discuss the power relationship between students and teachers. One of these specifically discusses the difference in children's negotiating power in the home and the school situation.

Going on to the very details of interaction, I end with, as mentioned above, studies relating to specific occurrences in face-to-face interactions. Firstly a presentation of how rules can be analysed and divided into types. Each type of rule has its own hidden message that a child interprets at the same time as the explicit, spoken message of the rule. Secondly two studies which discuss the way children move in and out of types of interaction and interaction sets. The kind of involvement in interaction is analysed with regards to negotiation of meaning, and the level of shared meaning.

**Education**

In the introduction of *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling* (1982), George Spindler, distinguishes between the terms *ethnography of schooling* and *educational ethnography*. The ethnography of schooling which is defined as dealing with "educational and enculturational processes that are related to school and intentional schooling" (Spindler 1982:2) specifically concentrates on the institution of school and school-related areas. The second term refers to educational processes wherever they occur, and in whatever setting. In *From Child to Adult* (1970), a collection of writings concerning the education and enculturation of children, the editor, Middleton, says the material was chosen to show just how "education is a gradual and usually non-specialized process that involves all members of a social group" (Middleton 1970:xvi). This is done without "formal pedagogical methods of instruction" (Ibid). Raymond Firth's (1936/70) chapter in this book, about education in Tikopia, shows how education is a part of everyday life for these Polynesian people. Education arises from actual daily situations and formal lessons are not often given. Even in spheres where specific knowledge needs to be imparted, this is done at the performance of such an activity or social situation when explicit advice and commands are given.

In Otto Raum's (1940/70) account of indigenous African education, in the above book, he includes learning from peer-groups, as well as the children's self-education in the description of how the Chaga children learn practical and social skills. Raum defines education as "the relation between consecutive generations". He points out that although it is often assumed that children are subjected to such influences and formative forces that one could picture them crushed under them, there are in the Chaga society three factors which restore the balance. Firstly the sociological factor in that the child's role is that of cementser of marriages, a marriage is not seen as fully "operational" without children. Secondly the psychological significance of a child in "producing pleasurable emotional responses". Thirdly he discusses the fact that children are not passive objects of education but active agents. This is of course something that is central to many of today's studies of children. Raum has another interesting distinction, that between parental means of education and the self-education of children. In parental education, he says, the essential problem is that of achieving control over the child's behaviour even when it is out of direct parental
control. Within peer-groups, Raum says, the children's society has its own culture that has developed in close relation to the adult's society. In this children's culture, Raum, as James (1993) does, see distinctive features which are absent in the adults culture.

Although what happens in these non-formal settings is undoubtedly education within the definitions given above, they deal with aspects we often call bringing-up, as well as with unstructured learning processes which are in progress on a general level throughout life.

Conceptions of School

The existence of school can itself be a symbol in these learning processes. In Karrr-ap or Take-off (1992) Annika Rabo and Don Kulick both present ideas of school that at first sight probably differs from how we in Sweden think of school and its task. Of these Kulick's writing about a Papua New Guinea village called Gapun is furthest from our picture of our schools and ourselves. According to Kulick development in Gapun is a sort of sophisticated cargo cult. In this lies an idea that white people possess a secret that enables them to obtain cargo. This idea is also present in the Gapun peoples' picture of school. Since the 1960s most children have attended up to six years of primary school in a neighbouring village. Kulick claims that schooling is subsumed under the villagers' notion of development and that it's ultimate purpose is believed to be to reveal the secret of cargo. As this has not happened, and as no Gapun child has passed grade six examinations and gone on to high school, the villagers express a suspicion that the secrets needed are being withheld by the teachers. Kulick points out that the impact that schooling has had on villagers must be considered in terms of how perceptions of schooling mesh with perceptions of development.

In Rabo's writing on the value of education in Jordan and Syria in the above book she points out that education, as formal schooling for the citizens, is assumed to be part of, as well as an indicator of development. Schools teach children to become developed and the provision of schools shows that the country is committed to development. Rabo shows how education is symbolically tied to ideas of development and ideas of being modern.

Papua New Guinea, Jordan and Syria are far from Sweden, and the Polynesian and African people were studied many years ago, but the accounts above exemplify aspects of learning as well as understanding and sharing meanings which are created outside the institution of school but very much influence the daily life in schools. The education of children occurring outside school as well as the symbolic meanings of school which are diffused in our society influences even young children's perception of school. They definitely influence school staff's perception of schools value and task.

Kerstin Bergqvist points out that school is an institution with a long history as well as a particular role in the social order. In Sweden it is usually understood and described as an environment specifically geared toward teaching and learning.

---

1 Cargo cults linking religious ideas with the obtainment of cargo, i.e. things such as fridges, tarred roads and tinned food, have been wide spread in Papua New Guinea.
"The conception of school as a teaching and learning environment is self-supporting and it is maintained and re-constructed in curricular documents and teacher education as well as within the very activity of schooling itself" (Bergqvist 1990:2).

As Bergqvist says, this shapes the way school is talked about and understood. Another aspect of school, that of school as a social world where staff do their jobs, students meet friends, and routines of everyday life interaction is created, is often seen as subordinate to the first aspect.

**Traditions and Ideology**

Sven Hartman (1995) explores traditions within the Swedish school system and the development of ideas of what is considered necessary "teachers knowledge". Until 1962 Sweden had a parallel school system of one route leading to university studies and the other to early working life. The route to become a teacher in each school system was different and when the present system of one school for all children was introduced these were joined in a shaky partnership (Hartman 1995).

Within this comprehensive school a double task was imposed in that it was charged with meeting the needs of each individual child, as well as providing a shared framework of social values and knowledge. According to Bergqvist tensions and difficulties at times arise due to oppositions in these tasks. In producing a shared framework the school is to work for social reform and the rhetoric of the curriculums have included ideals of democracy and social equality. Bergqvist points out that the connection between school practice and ideology is neither immediate nor clear-cut. The collision of school's controlling function with its educational aims can also diminish the impact of the ideological rhetoric on practice (Bergqvist 1990:7-9).

The Swedish comprehensive school was deeply influenced by the American progressivist movement, specifically the writings of John Dewey. In Dewey's philosophy there is a developmental perspective in which each person is unique and has the potentiality of excelling. Dewey did not see knowledge in itself as useful but the use it was put to, nor was knowledge seen as given but as changeable. In the progressivist movement there was also a deliberate democratic vision in which practical knowledge had the same value as theoretical. The most noted idea is what is usually called learning by doing behind which there is an advanced theory of cognition. Learning by doing did not, as some thought, propose craft activities instead of book learning, but proposes that personal experience is a better ground for learning than pure theory (Hartman 1995:153-163, Bergqvist 1990:10-12).

The theories of Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner and Erik H Eriksen, all psychologists, have also affected the educational processes in the Swedish comprehensive school. Piaget's theory is age based, a stage theory in which a child's age and maturity to a large extent frames the child's ability. Piaget did not write much specifically related to education, although he did have recommendations. These recommendations contain the child-centered pedagogy where learning comes from the child and is not handed down by the teacher (Crain 1992:121-124). According to Bergqvist one of the cornerstones of Piaget's position is that we build our understanding of the world through our own actions" (Bergqvist 1990:12). Bruner also advocated for the active student. He saw the teacher as someone who should create good learning conditions and whose task it is to motivate the student to want to learn. Eriksen's theory is a psychoanalytically based stage theory built on Freud's stages, mainly concerned with children's emotional development. One of the stages is connected to
Freud's latency stage, concerning the six to eleven year old child. This period is, in Eriksen's theory, important for the child's ego growth and in literate societies school plays an important role during this stage. According to Svedberg & Zaar Piaget, Bruner and Eriksen became foreground figures in the dialogue pedagogics, a concept launched in an official Swedish government report in 1972, (SOU 1972:26). The report was concerned with preschool educational theory but the concept of dialogue pedagogics spread to the comprehensive school. It built upon the idea that the search for knowledge should be enacted through a dialogue between students and teachers. This was in opposition to the earlier ideas of a teacher supplying the student with knowledge. Dialogue pedagogics was much discussed during the seventies and although it fell into disuse, possibly due to lack of sound theoretical production, the ideas were to a certain extent incorporated into the general educational theories and practice (Svedberg & Zaar 1988:175-186, Crain 1992:247-256).

Although there is yet a new curriculum (Lpo 94), the tensions, traditions and ideologies of the past are seen to influence school today (Hartman 1995). In my understanding of school, new ideas are slow in their impact and old traditions live on with new names and therefore knowledge of the development of the school system is necessary for an understanding of the classroom situation. Leaving the larger structures of society and school, I will present studies which show how ideas of interaction, communication and school have been perceived.

Looking at Interaction

Interaction can be seen and discussed in many ways. C. H. Cooley together with G. H. Mead inspired the ideas of symbolic interaction early this century. Fundamental was the idea that an individual's action could only be understood in relation to the group of which s/he was a member. But Mead did not only discuss the interaction in the social world but also discussed interaction with the physical world. Here his emphasis was on the experience of the physical world and the function it has for the individual (Björklid & Fischbein 1996:65-70).

One of the foreground figures when discussing interaction today is Erving Goffman, and his writings on interaction have been a foundation for others in their study of interaction. Goffman has introduced a dramaturgical aspect in his studies of the interaction occurring between people in various settings.

"Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him in either face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants. In each of these contacts, he tends to act out what is sometimes called a line - that is a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (Goffman 1967:5).

Here we clearly see the interaction of situation, self and others. Goffman points out that the setting or region in which the interaction occurs is part of determining what is happening. In what he calls "our Anglo-American society" which is, he says, a relatively indoor one, performances, that is interaction, usually occur within a bounded region. This region is often bounded by time as well (Goffman 1959:108). A classroom can of course be a very good example of a region.

When a person moves into a new region, and receives a new part to perform he will usually only receive a few cues and hints as to how to conduct himself. Goffman points out that socialisation might not be that one learns in detail how to perform a
part, but learning bits and pieces so that one can fill in the rest and play the new role (Goffman 1959:79).

In a discussion on rules of conduct, Goffman points out that rules are an important source of regularity and patterning of behaviour. This in spite of the fact that rules and guides of conduct are both sidestepped and ignored. Rules of conduct have two aspects, they form an obligation of how the individual is morally constrained to conduct himself and an expectation of how others should conduct themselves in regards to him. Each performance which is separate from other performances perhaps through its setting or region, can have its own rules of conduct. These rules can, according to Goffman be grouped into substantive and ceremonial rules and expressions. The first group comprises of law, morality and ethics, and the second of that which we call etiquette (Goffman 1967:47-55).

Including Culture
Jerome Bruner (1996) also discusses interaction, and says that it is through interaction with others we learn. He points out that it is principally through interacting with others that children find out what culture is about and how we culturally conceive the world. According to Bruner it is the "astonishingly well developed" talent for intersubjectivity that permits us to negotiate meaning when we do not have the words. He says that western pedagogical tradition does not do justice to the importance of this intersubjectivity; instead there is a preference for a degree of explicitness that seems to ignore it. Teaching is often seen as a process where knowledgeable teachers explicitly tell or show the unknowing learner something. When instead, passing on skills and knowledge involves a sub-community of interaction, where it is possible that the very institutionalisation of schooling gets in the way of creating. In his approach a theory of education necessarily lies in the intersect between questions of the nature of the mind and the nature of culture. It lies in the interaction between the powers of individual minds and the ways in which culture helps or opposes their realisation (Bruner 1996:13-21).

Kathleen Wilcox's (1982) looks at beginners introduction into school life. Her study is conducted in two grade one classrooms, one in an upper-middle-class area and another in a lower-middle-class area. Her focus is on interaction within the classroom in relation to the participants understanding of what school is. Wilcox's concern is how the hidden curriculum reproduces social differentiation instead of being the spearhead for social reformation it has at times been presented as. Wilcox shows that what happens in the classrooms of her study is related to the sociocultural setting of the classrooms. She points out that school personnel, as much as everyone else, are cultural beings whose actions and understanding is to be understood within the cultural context in which they are found. Wilcox discusses the relation she sees between the teachers' control strategies and messages and the role the children are perceived to be socialised into. This perception reflects the cultural values placed on different types of work adults perform.
Communicating within the classroom

Interaction inside classrooms consists largely of direct communication between different sets of people. This communication consists of explicit and implicit messages to be interpreted by others.

Ground Rules

Bergqvist (1990) looked at the communication between students and teachers, and also between peers. She followed two grade sevens for a year in a Swedish comprehensive school. Bergqvist was interested in how schoolwork is "construed and interpreted in its daily context" (Ibid. 1990:29) and in this school was viewed as a "living-space for groups of conflicting interests" and she wanted to understand this from the perspective of the students. Bergqvist views the school as a social world and the focus in her study is on the understanding and negotiation of school tasks. Looking at communication about school tasks between teacher and students as well as within the student group she looked for the premisses for communication and participation that were created for accomplishing a task. One of her findings was that due to unclear premisses students did not interpret the task as the teacher had intended it and would fall back on the assumptions of meaning they had met before.

According to Derek Edwards and Neil Mercer when studying communication in everyday-life situations, the aim is to understand the communicative practice underlying social interaction. To participate in social interaction requires knowledge of the rules of interaction. In their study, Common Knowledge, (1987), education is about how knowledge is "presented, received, shared, controlled, negotiated, understood and misunderstood" (Ibid. 1987:1). They believe that education is about the development of shared understanding. Their initial interest was in the misunderstandings that occur between teacher and children. These different misunderstandings they felt were all illustrations of failed communication as the participants had not achieved a shared understanding of the situation. They point out that being in school entails a suspension of rules that apply in other settings and that school has its own rules of conduct that rarely are made explicit.

In Childhood Identities (1993), Allison James also discusses the explicit and implicit rules that exist in school situations. Her interest is not as Edwards & Mercers to understand the sharing of knowledge, the teaching and learning situation, as much as exploring children's negotiation of self. She claims that in the negotiation of self, the idea of conformity becomes important in primary school. Conformity implies the existence of implicit and/or explicit rules that should be adhered to. The idea of conformity further suggests that not following the rules could result in sanctions of which the ultimate sanction is the social stigmatisation or isolation that follows from nonconforming actions. In seeming contradiction to this, a motif of individuality, says James, also patterns children's social relationships. Individuality becomes more important with age, but is, it must be remembered, also culturally patterned and shaped. There is a continual balancing act to be performed between conformity and individuality. Rules, implicit and explicit, are important in framing conformity and individuality. Explicit rules, such as laid down by teachers in school, are quickly learned and soon negotiated. Implicit rules that may only become apparent when breached are more complicated. According to James even very young children "revealed a considerable sophistication in the reinterpretation and invocation of the rules of the adult world" (James 1993:153).
Barrie Thorne (1993) in her book *Gender Play*, also looks at children's reinterpretation of the rules of the adult world when she looks at “the collective practices through which children and adults create and recreate gender in their daily interactions” (Thorne 1993:4). Thorne points out that the question of whether girls and boys are different is not the issue but when and how patterns of gender are created and when and how they are challenged. Gender is not only constructed but is continually reconstructed by different groups in different situations. In her study, which is conducted in two primary schools, Thorne studied how children came together or divided up according to gender. She shows that there is a continual shifting in when and how gender matters but we are shown that gender is more often a separating category in school than in the neighbourhood setting. According to Thorne the organisation of schools is contradictory in that it both reinforces and undermines social patterns such as gender separation. Thorne looks at how the organisational features of school affect the gender relations of children. She looks at classroom routines, communication and organisation.

Thorne's study is specifically geared at looking at how gender is negotiated in school. She looks at classroom organisation as well as break time activities and lunchroom seating. The focus of my study is not gender but as gender is present at all times I do not feel that it can be completely ignored. As Thorne's study encompasses so many aspects of school life I hope to relate issues of gender to her findings.

Bergqvist and Edwards & Mercer have focused on communication between teachers and learners in relation to specific learning tasks. Their interest is the actual learning situation, the understanding of the task and the negotiation of understanding between teacher and learner. James discusses how children talk of rules and how they show their understanding of them.

Although the above studies have an interest in the rules and premises that underlie orchestration (definition Cederborg (1994)) and form the context in which meaning is created their focus is slightly different from mine. My interest is of what happens in the classroom, in a more structured situation than James', but not the actual negotiation of school tasks as Bergqvist and Edwards & Mercer.

**Acts of Talk**

In their compilation of classroom studies in Sweden, *Lif och Arbete i Svenska klassrum* (1995) (*Life and work in Swedish classrooms*, my translation), Granström & Einarsson discuss several studies concerning speech actions in school. These have generated knowledge of who speaks, who controls the right to speak and what should be spoken of. Not surprisingly the research has shown that teachers control the public speaking in the classroom situation but apart from this public talk there is varying degrees of private talk occurring in classrooms. The studies of private talk in the classroom showed that there was a difference in frequency and content in a grade eight and a grade three.

Through Granström's & Einarsson's compilation and summarisation of up to date classroom studies, knowledge of routines, as well as form and structure of various types of classroom interaction and communication, and their dependence on situation, gender and age is available. These studies, and the compilation of them, provide background and supply me with a framework and tools which is useful for an analysis of interaction in a classroom setting.
Classification and Power

Gearing & Epstein in their an anthropological study of a remedial reading group in an elementary school in New York State, describe the reading group of five people as a small cultural system. Whenever, they say, the same people come together in the same place for the same purposes on a regular basis "the small world of that scene gets rather elaborately classified by them, principally into classes and subclasses of activity and classes and subclasses of person" (Gearing & Epstein 1982: 244).

In a classroom, as in other settings, it is possible to classify people in different ways. One possibility is to differentiate between children and teachers. The teachers can be divided into subclasses according to different criteria, such as which subject s/he teaches or whose homeroom teacher s/he is. In the same way children can be allocated subclasses using various means of categorisation. Differentiating between children and teachers is a common feature in classroom studies. In Philip Jackson's anthropologically inspired *Life in Classrooms* (1968), he discusses the authority of teachers. In a comparison with total institutions he points out that in schools one subgroup of the clientele (the students) are involuntarily committed whilst the other subgroup (the staff) has the freedom to leave. In this setting teachers' authority is centered on command over the students' attention, according to Jackson. The distinction between work and play is fundamental and in effect the teacher is the child's first boss. With the child the *worker* and the teacher the *boss*, the child like any worker is tempted to occasionally abandon that role. According to Jackson even in the most "progressive environments, the teacher is very much in control and pupils usually are aware of the centrality and power of his position" (Jackson 1968:32).

In *Children in Action at home and school*, (1994) Berry Mayall discusses the activities of children "in relation to and in interaction with adults". In this Mayall sees it necessary to take power relationships into account. Mayall says that these can be characterised through "the proposition that adults have organizational control over children's activities" (Ibid1994:116). The level of children's powerlessness vis-a-vis adults is not constant though, but varies according to the conceptualisation of children and childhood in different settings and by different groups of adults. According to Mayall "children's identities, knowledge, permitted behaviours, their negotiating power and their interactions" are contextually created. In this the child's position in the home context differs from that in the school context (Mayall 1994:116-120).

Mayall points out that in school, as a setting with publicly specified goals, children have little leeway in negotiating their own actions, interactions and accepted norms. Conformity seems to be an obvious strategy in this type of arena, but both Mayall and Jackson point out that this powerlessness also makes it necessary for children to adopt "calculated measures to work the system" (Mayall 1994:126).

In the setting of school it is very easy to see the teachers', and other adults', power and authority. The actions, the decision-making, the planning and the orchestration of the teacher is highly visible while the actions, the planning and the negotiations carried out by the children in this setting is far less visible. In spite of the relative powerlessness of children in relation to the adults in the school setting, as discussed above, the children pursue their own agendas in school. As mentioned above, Granström & Einarsson (1995) point out that the occurrence of private talk in classrooms varied in frequency and content. Such talk could, among the older children, be *far more frequent* than the public talk by the teachers. The frequency
was partly dependent on how the room was furnished as most talk was between students sitting next to each other. The content differed according to age though, with the younger children’s private talk being mainly concerned with the school task on hand. In Bergqvist’s (1990) study it is clear that although it is the teachers that plan work, students are in many ways powerful in their transformation of tasks. As this transformation is not deliberate, but due to unclear premisses leading the students to fall back on the assumptions of meaning they have met before, it might be argued that it is not a sign of power. From the point of view of who has the ultimate say in classroom tasks Bergqvist found that when the students transformed the tasks the teachers often accepted the redefinition that occurred. Bergqvist also points out that students can exert their power by deciding not to be engaged in the classroom activity orchestrated by the teacher.

Accepting the assumption that teachers have the power of definition in the power relationship in the classroom, as well as assuming the children to be active agents within this structure, my interest is in exploring the children’s negotiation of meaning in relation to the teacher and each other.

**Rules, meanings and interaction sets**

In the studies below I have found concepts and structures which I hope to use in my understanding of the processes in the classroom. Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (1987) discuss how children understand rules. In Haste’s discussion of children *Growing into rules*, we find the reception of rules and their underlying messages discussed. Both Nancy Mandell’s Mead inspired analysis of *Children’s Negotiation of meaning* (1991) and Viv Furlong’s study of *Interaction sets in the classroom* (1976) supply ways of studying interaction, and negotiation of meaning, by children in school settings.

Haste (1987) calls rules the grammar of social relations in that they order and organise ones experience. She sees the rules as the basis for interaction with others and as a shared cultural framework for making sense of the world. The explicit phrasing of a rule is part of the ongoing discourse between sets of people. In regards to discourse between adults and children as well as between peers, Bruner (1987) discusses three themes that relate to the rules discussed by Haste; scaffolding, negotiation of meaning and the transfer of cultural representation. The process of discourse as scaffolding can, says Bruner, take general forms such as correcting, elaborating, pacing and responding to the other. In the co-construction of meaning the public concept is not merely absorbed, but the receiver must reformulate it in order to internalise it. According to Bruner very young children are able to infer the meaning which is implied by others and use this in interaction. Cultural or social representation can be transferred through metaphor or in the language of legitimation. In explicitly stating a rule or expectation there is a direct transmission but there are, as Bruner points out, subtle messages within these direct transmissions. It is in these subtle messages, as well as in the direct ones, that children receive a vast array of messages concerning the social and conceptual world (Bruner 1987:21-24). In seeing how children learn and interpret rules, Haste looks at three fields in which the understanding of rules has been studied. The different fields involve different rules. In looking at moral and conventional rules we look at prescriptive rules. In map making it is descriptive rules that are studied and in the area of health and illness the rules are descriptive and evaluative (Haste 1987:162). Haste points out that as well as learning a rule, children need to learn the justification of the rule. Haste uses Bruner's distinction between finding out about
the rule and accounting for it. Children are often aware of, and able to enact rules before they can account for them.

Prescriptive rules are justified by reference to classes of consequence, says Haste, as they are characterised by carrying sanctions. Most prescriptive rules contain other messages, and there is an implied tension between the normative and the desirable according to Haste. Another type of rules are normative. They make order and describe the world. The message received from such rules is that it is possible to create order and predictability in one's world. Not only does breaking such rules create disorder but the implication within the rules are their necessity; their functionality (Haste 1987:163-177).

The processes in which children learn to decode the rules have a social and an individual dimension. At the individual level there are actions and rituals for interaction, while at the social level the rules are manifested in social interaction and structure. Thus, says Haste, "the child learns how to enact the rule before she can express it" (Ibid: 166). The social dimension includes the development, negotiation, and perpetuation of rules and meanings within groups and institutions of society. The individual dimension includes children's competence in making cognitive sense of the world and interacting effectively with others. This, says Haste, involves the structural bases of thinking, and processes which affect the child's own construction of meaning (Haste 1987:166).

Mandell (1991) explores the ways children interact with each other and is concerned with "identifying and describing the ways that children negotiate meaning, i.e. work together to figure out what is going on, both from their own perspective and that of others" (Ibid. 1991:161). In her study of young children in two day care centres Mandell identified four ways of "acting in the world of others". She calls these involvement stances. Mandell bases her analysis of involvement on the work of G. H. Mead. According to Mandell, Mead saw taking account as something learned, a process composed of three parts: 1) deciding what feature of the other are important; 2) acting in terms of that decision; and 3) assessing or evaluating the outcome" (Mandell 1991:162).

The first involvement stance identified by Mandell is called self-involvement. In this the children are self-absorbed and completely involved with the object of their involvement. In this stance private meanings prevail and the extent to which it is meaningful is indicated by the child's absorption in the activity. Mandell discusses two categories here, the self-involvement with self-chosen activities and the involvement with teacher directed activities. Each of these can be equally absorbing and Mandell sees no qualitative difference between them but suggests that adults often see the latter as more constructive (Mandell 1991:165-166).

In the second stance, which Mandell calls interpretive observation and display, children monitor others, attempting to "learn the ropes". Mandell sees this as representing a peripheral commitment from the observing child, a marginal involvement often taking place beside other children. This interpretive involvement should not be seen as a developmental stage nor only as newcomer behaviour, says Mandell. She found that children move in and out of that involvement stance and used it as a "well defined period of quiet observation and reflection" (Ibid: 168). The third involvement stance, co-involvement, is largely characterised by the attempts of children to find common ground for sustained interaction. In this stance there is not enough shared meaning and the children spend time trying to adjust their actions to each other's. The fourth stance identified by Mandell is characterised by action.
"jointly created on shared definitions of the situation" (Ibid: 172). She calls this reciprocal involvement. These involvements can be short but, Mandell says, the most fascinating to her as observer, and she thinks, to the children involved, are the ones that flow on and on through changes in themes and physical locations (Mandell 1991:168-173).

In the four involvement stances above Mandell shows that a child will move from one stance to another, and also from one set of activities and people to another. Furlong (1976), who studied interaction between pupils in a secondary school in England, discusses how membership in interaction sets varies from situation to situation. He defines an interaction set as those students who at any one time "perceive what is happening in a similar way, communicate this to each other, and define appropriate action together" (Ibid. 1976:162). I see similarities in this to the way the children in Mandell's study move from group to group and vary their involvement stance. Interaction sets, says Furlong, are not the same as friendship groups or peer groups. In his empirical material Furlong show that friends can choose to join the action in an interaction set, or not, depending on the situation. The choice of actions, says Furlong, is with the individual even if the general situation is interactively defined (Furlong 1976:162-164).

The studies and theories presented in this chapter are there both to provide a frame around the classroom and to provide a picture of the variety of knowledge and research available in regard to classroom studies. My study is to be conducted wholly inside the classroom and I will look at activities occurring there when the grade one children and their teacher go about their daily life. This classroom is inside a frame of meanings and understandings at different levels which I have tried to make visible in the theoretical presentation.

There are aspects in all of the above theories and studies that relate to my research interest. Some of the studies are closer to the area I want to explore than others. I am aware that I have only touched on what is available and have in no way been able to present all the knowledge, or studies made, relating to interaction, communication, schools or classrooms.

I believe that the discussions by Bruner, Haste, Mandell and Furlong presented last provide concrete theoretical tools that I can use in looking at the classroom interaction. I will also use the knowledge gained from studies in communication, both ground rules and acts of talk, Goffman's discussions of interaction as well as the awareness of power relationships gained from Bergqvist, Jackson and Mayall who all bring it up in their own way.

In the studies I have presented, school is mainly seen as an institution for learning. The studies might show problems that arise and impede the learning process but classroom interaction is studied in an attempt to understand how learning can be facilitated. Studies of children's social interaction are mainly conducted at break time, and it is during this time that school is seen as a social institution as well as a learning institution.

In my study I aim to look at the social interaction occurring inside the classroom but alongside the activities structured by the teacher. I will look at activities and interaction among the children and between the children and the teacher. I want to do this in an attempt to see the classroom as one of many every-day life arenas where meaning is negotiated and constructed.
On entering the classroom

To me the material I have presented in the previous section represent a web of meanings that can be invested in the institution of school. Sending children to school, advocating for better schools or even building schools is not a simple one-dimensional act. Any classroom study or any study conducted in a school needs an awareness of the strands of meaning interacting in the existence of school even though this understanding might not be actively used in the presentation of the study.

When I enter the classroom that I am to study I will bring with me the knowledge from the different studies I have read, as well as my previous experience of school, children, teachers and interaction with other people. I bring my own biases with me and I will attempt to keep an awareness of this with me, throughout the study.

Methods used and choices made

In choosing to study classroom activities with no interest whatsoever of what the children learn academically I would be studying what Bergqvist calls

“phenomena that with a normative outlook on school would be seen primarily as “noise”, shortcomings or problems that ought to be eliminated” (Bergqvist 1990:21).

In discussing her fieldwork James says that in witnessing how children

“negotiated, manipulated, kicked against and submitted to the social, economic and political limitations placed upon their actions by the adult world” she “was led to understand how children learn forms and styles of behaviour appropriate for being a “child” and for themselves, as particular children in particular settings” (James 1996:315).

I am studying the background noise in the classroom as it is within this I might see children "negotiating, manipulating, kicking against and submitting to" the limitations placed on their actions within the classroom setting. As James, in her much larger study, was to understand children's learning of appropriate forms and styles of behaviour of being a “child”, I am hoping in my study to begin to understand how children, through the classroom rules, negotiate the appropriate behaviour for a “schoolchild”.

This study is also to look at the children's challenge of the teacher's orchestration strategy and the teacher's response to this. The term orchestration is used by Cederborg (1994) to identify a discursive strategy used primarily by therapists in directing who is to talk to whom. In her study orchestration therefore refers to the therapists discursive strategies for coordinating talk.

I have a broader use of the term. When I talk of orchestration strategies I do not only mean the instructions and organisation concerning work and behaviour issued verbally by the teacher. I include her taking for granted expectations based on her experience of how classroom interaction and work should proceed. As the term orchestration strategies is wide it follows that I have a wide definition of the term challenging. Challenging not only includes the deliberate choice a child makes in not following instructions or known rules, but also any action of the child's that goes outside that expected by the teacher.
In looking at how children challenge the teacher’s orchestration strategies, and at her response, I am not interested in the problem of discipline as such. It is therefore, not the noticeable challenges, the loud and boisterous disobedience that I mainly look for, it is the quiet, the barely noticeable acts, those which can be so subtle that the line between disobedience and obedience becomes thin. The area in which disobedience is a matter of interpretation and where a disobedient act may be, or at least claimed to be, accidental.

Choosing site
The aim of a study can in some ways determine how the actual sample to be studied is chosen. In Jackson’s (1968) study the criteria for choosing classroom was partly that the teacher of the class should be experienced and well respected. Although it is primarily the children and their actions which are of interest in my study it does not mean that the teacher is of less importance in the choice of class.

As I mentioned in the introduction I have had close contacts with various learning institutions. I have also also had close contacts with learners at different stages and with parents of learners. I have heard many complaints about school systems, individual schools as well as individual teachers. In planning my study I was aware that the interaction in which I was interested could easily be submerged in an analysis of teaching methods and styles. I also decided that as it was not the grand gestures of protest I wanted to study, I needed a teacher who was capable of maintaining such order she deemed necessary.

This led to my study being conducted in a class whose teacher I had had contact with. I chose someone who was considered by parents I had met to be skilled and experienced and whose classroom organisation enabled interaction between the children but who, according to ex-pupils, wanted there to be peace and quiet in the classroom and to a great extent achieved this. I felt that this provided access to peer interaction and teacher structuring. This together with her now teaching a grade one seemed to make this a good arena for studying the mundane everyday aspects of classroom life.

Having chosen my own preferred study site I proceeded to ask permission from the teacher involved and then the deputy headmaster of the school. Through a letter I then presented my study to the parents of the children involved and I included my phone number and an invitation to contact me if they had any queries or objections to the study. None of the parents contacted me and the teacher did not receive any queries either. Within a couple of weeks I was set to enter the classroom.

Recording data
Having chosen a study site I must also choose the method of recording what happens in the classroom. There are different ways in which to do this and they all have their merits. In deciding method consideration has to be taken of the extent of the study, the width or the depth to be studied and the type of material wanted for this specific study.

---

2 See Appendix 1
Recommendations of various kinds by experienced researchers helped me to understand what the different methods entailed and what their advantages were.

For my purpose video filming the classroom interaction did not seem advantageous. I feared that although the depth of the study could, and probably would, increase the width would decrease. I do not propose this to be a general effect of video filming but specifically in regards to this study as it is a relatively small study done in a limited amount of time. In a longer and more detailed fieldwork of Swedish primary schools, video filming would be an excellent complement.

This study, which I would like to see as a pilot study, was spread out with the initial observation done during the two weeks before the Christmas vacation. Observations where resumed for another two weeks after the vacation and ended with a final visit in April. On initiating the study I did not know exactly what would be happening in the classroom and what I would see or hear that was interesting. In the same way I did not in detail know how the schooldays were organised or what role I would have within the classroom whilst keeping my promise to the teacher of not disturbing her planned activities and classroom organisation.

My decision was to take notebook and pen as well as an audio recorder with me to the classroom. I assumed that much of what would be happening would be quiet and therefore not recordable on tape, but that certain activities would be more vocal and taping them would be helpful.

The main body of collected data consists of field notes covering observations of all types of classroom interaction. Some of the notes are very detailed as the verbal interactions where often short enough for me to record them verbatim. I made notes in Swedish during the schooldays. These were a mix of jottings and more elaborate notes. These notes I translated into English in the evenings as I entered them into the computer.

There is taped material of the teacher's orchestrations at the beginning or the end of a planned activity, and at the beginning and the end of a school day. Taping during planned activities generated very little material as interaction was intermittent, spread out in the room and often very quiet or even soundless. There is taped material from class meetings (klassråd), a formal session to be held in school classes to provide democracy in school. I used a simplified version of the transcription convention used by Cederborg (1994:231).

I have watched the children and listened to them. I have interacted with them at a low-key level, being available but letting the initiative come from them. The reasons for the very low-key approach I have used throughout are both ethical and to do with the intentions of my study. My intention is not to look for the children's interpretation of classroom interaction but to see them experiencing it.

Interviewing the children would bring in another dimension which, I feel, deserves a study of its own unless it was done as part of a larger study. Interviewing such young children on an aspect of their life of which they appear to have minimal control and influence requires a great deal of thought and it would be vital to allow each child the real option of participation or non-participation. Providing this choice and formulating interview questions that in no way question the child's existing understanding of the classroom situation would, to my mind, require this to be the main thrust of the study.
I will proceed by giving a picture of the setting in which these children and this teacher interacted. Then the organisation of the school days will be described and features which are routine or regularly repeated will be presented. After making the reader familiar with the setting I will present the material in my study in two parts; first a presentation and discussion of how classroom behaviour is discussed and secondly the children’s challenging of the teacher’s orchestrations strategies as well as her response to this.

In both parts I will use my notes to exemplify my discussion. I will do this as I find that the description of any actions made at the time they happened give a fuller picture of classroom life than any description made by me now. In these notes I have given the participants new names. The adult participants have been given randomly chosen names but as the children are seated in permanent groups, which will be shown later, I have given each child in a group a name starting with the same letter. When reading the examples any children with the same initial should be pictured as sitting together. When I use the pronouns *she* or *her* I am specifically talking of the teacher whose class I visited.

The examples I will use are of course deliberately picked from a larger material and generally I will not discuss the frequency of different occurrences. There are several reasons for this. Firstly the study was not conducted in such a way that I could in any way claim to have recorded all occurrences of any type of behaviour. Secondly the categorisation of events in the classroom is made according to my interpretation of the actions I have seen and recorded. Another researcher might have used other criteria.

### The classroom and it's setting

My study is conducted in a comprehensive school in a medium-sized Swedish town. The school is located at the edge of the older part of the town, beyond it there are housing areas, from the seventies and eighties, with their own schools. The catchment area for the school is towards the center of town and consists of areas of detached houses as well as apartment blocks.

The lower and middle grades are mainly housed in an area of smaller detached buildings with a couple of classrooms in each whilst the older children use the main block. In accordance with a political decision taken by the town council a few years ago the preparation classes and the after-school-care activities utilise school buildings as far as possible.

### Entering

Having arranged the day and time with the teacher concerned, whom I will call Vera, I stand outside the classroom on a cold day in December. Children walk past me entering the door to the classroom area. They glance curiously at me and I greet them with a simple hello. Vera arrives, greets me at the same time as several children clamour for her attention. A very small girl is upset about not having brought a birthday present for a party she is attending that afternoon, she is asked when the party is and whether she is going home before it. The little girl says her mother is fetching her and is comforted by being told that her mother probably will have arranged a present by then. As this is sorted out other children are explaining that they do have presents as they are not going home in between. In the midst of this talking we all enter the cloakroom where other children join in. The children still wearing their outside clothes are hurried along.
A line forms in the cloakroom outside the classroom and Vera stands in the doorway and taking each child by the hand she greets them by name. I am still standing in the cloakroom watching and feeling at a loose end. When the last child has gone in I look into the classroom, Vera is talking to the children and I see no chair which I can use so I take one from the cloakroom and, trying to be unobtrusive, I place it by the wall directly inside the door. Vera goes to the doorway and asks who owns the blue overall on the floor, the winter boot under the table and so on, getting the children to come and tidy their things away. She reminds the children of the necessity of keeping the hall tidy. After this she tells the children that they have a visitor, and asks them to greet me. There is a chorus of voices saying “Welcome to grade 1”.

Vera and I have agreed that I will introduce myself and tell the children what I will be doing. When she indicates that I should go ahead with this I feel very strongly that this interferes with the smooth running of the classroom. I feel the need to explain myself in as few words as possible, not to waste time. This is made easy as the children only display a very polite interest in what I say and show no curiosity at all at this stage. My prepared explanation is shortened as I talk and within a minute the day’s activities proceed as if there has been no interruption.

Sitting at the front of the classroom I feel conspicuous and after the first break I move my chair to the back of the room to be less visible. This move creates a certain disturbance that I have not expected. The children now keep turning around to see what I am doing. At the lunch break I again move my chair and place it by the wall directly inside the door where I am in full view of almost all the children. This way they need only cast a glance at me to find that I am sitting quietly, either looking around or writing in a notebook.

The physical organisation of the classroom
To get to this classroom in the morning we have to walk across the playground where there is a fair amount of movement with children playing, moving about or standing around outside their classroom doors waiting for the teachers. There will be teachers on the way to their classrooms as well as a few parents delivering children. Getting to our classroom we may enter and then we find ourselves in a small hallway with a toilet on the left hand and a door leading into the cloakroom straight ahead. As we enter the cloakroom there is a table and some chairs by a window to our left and the door into the classroom to our right. Further ahead there is a narrower area with windows on the left-hand side and another, narrower table with chairs. The wall at the opposite end and the right-hand wall are covered with hooks and shelves for clothes and bags as well as shelves for shoes.

This area is filled with children in various stages of removing their outside clothes. As it is winter there are snowsuits, jackets, padded trousers, scarves, hats and mittens to be put away as well as wet and dirty boots. Where the room narrows down there is a line of tape on the floor called the shoe line. No outside shoes are to be worn beyond it.

When we enter the classroom there are windows along the whole wall opposite us, to our right there is a white board and to our left are the children’s desks and chairs placed in groups. Right at the back there are some mats and cushions on the floor. There are cupboards and shelves along some walls but large areas are covered with paintings.

This is the hub of the children’s school days and it is here that I will spend my time.
The teacher’s organisation
Apart from the youth worker, whom I will call Peter, who takes half the class across the yard during group time and regularly assists in the classroom and the extra reading teacher who comes in a few hours a week, there are twenty people who are in the classroom on a full time basis. This group of twenty people consists of a teacher who started teaching thirty years ago and nineteen children who are in their first term of school.

Each pupil is provided with a desk that opens up and in which they keep their schoolwork. The desks are placed in groups of four, apart from one of three, and the seating arrangement is decided by the teacher and is permanent. I will call these groups homegroups. The desks are placed so that two children face forward and two on the sides face each other and each homegroup consists of two or three girls and one boy as there are only five boys and fourteen girls in the class. Every three weeks the homegroups are moved and this entails moving all desks one step along in the classroom as well as turning the homegroup around so that another set of children now sit facing forward.

This moving of the homegroups partially accounts for some children being more noticeable in my material than others. The homegroups close to my position by the door were easier to see and hear.

According to the teacher the seating arrangement is inspired by a pedagogy developed by school psychologist Barbro Goldinger (1979) who wrote of a method of involving children, teachers and parents in the school. The teacher says that by sitting in homegroups the children are able to assist one another, and they are able to share their knowledge and experiences. It does mean foregoing the quietness of the more traditional classrooms she points out, but she finds it worthwhile. The homegroups are kept together for the three years that she teaches the class and this means that the children in each homegroup get to know each other very well. The homegroups are regularly moved within the room because, the teacher told me, there are studies showing that teachers mainly direct their teaching to only part of the classroom and by moving the children she ensures that no one should be overlooked.

As a part of the teaching is conducted from the front of the classroom the desks are turned within the homegroups to ensure that there are no children who sit twisting sideways throughout the school year. Although she spends time in front of the class the teacher does not have desk and chair placed centrally. There is a teacher’s desk, placed sideways, facing a cupboard, in the front of the classroom, and I will see the teacher sitting there once during my weeks of visiting.

Activities
In the classroom setting I see the teacher engaged in three main activities. Two entail standing in the front of the classroom and one entails moving around the classroom from pupil to pupil. Standing in front of the classroom she is either teaching, i.e. she is explaining, narrating or describing something she considers relevant or necessary for the children to know or she is orchestrating the activities of the class. Part of the day the children work individually at their desks and the teacher moves around the classroom responding to raised hands.

Although the children also are involved in different activities in the classroom setting theirs are almost exclusively conducted at their desks.
Having given a picture of the setting in which the children and the teacher are acting I will discuss how behaviour and rules are talked about in this setting.

Rules and Behaviour

In looking at how the children and the class teacher in my study talk about behaviour and rules I will start by discussing quiet and noise. In the classroom the issue of being quiet or of disturbing others is prominent. This may be due to nineteen young children being enclosed in a room with one adult for several hours each day. Comparing the noise level of a playground with the noise level in a classroom I suggest that the difference is achieved in a deliberate manner.

Behind this reduction of noise there is a rule saying “You shouldn’t be noisy, it disturbs others”. The rule is prescriptive according to Haste’s criteria in that it implies a restraint or control of behaviour and is justified by reference to classes of consequence, i.e. disturbing others. It is also generalizable in that noisy behaviour is talked of as if it generally disturbs others, i.e. any other people.

I have observed that the need to be quiet is not usually elaborated but taken for granted. A soft or loud ssh is often the only enforcement used, and it can be used by either children or teacher.

Anne and Andrea keep talking and Alice loudly hushes them. Small talk continues around the table. A soft ssh from Vera. Alice shouts out loud and Alexander hushes (Notes 971208).

In the above example there seems to be a relatively simple relation between the noise level and the attempt by either children or Vera to lower the level. At other times the rule and the justification of the rule is elaborated.

In a homegroup the four children are talking a lot. They get louder and louder and finally Vera gets very firm with them. She tells them that they are disturbing the others and she also points out that being quiet is something that they are capable of (Notes 971210).

Vera tells Alice, and the rest of the class, that if one is to be in the hall playing games one must not disturb the rest of the class. Later as Alice works she calls Teacher! They disturb! Vera goes and tell the ones in the hall (Notes 980116).

In these encounters the justification, that noise is equated with disturbance, is the same whether the initiative comes from the teacher or the children.

There are several regulations around noise which are subordinate of the main rule of not disturbing others. These rules are not all discussed as rules but as the type of behaviour expected of the children.

The teacher’s strategies during transitions
An explicitly stated rule is that “an open desk means a closed mouth”. The need for such a rule can be seen in the light of transitions between activities. In transitions there is a loosening of control as the participants are between defined activities and therefore behaviours. This means that when an activity is at an end and books or papers are to be put away or brought out from the desk, or there is to be a movement from sitting at the desks to the mats in the corner, there is often a breakdown in control. The noise level can become rather high and the body
movements of the children become more abandoned than during structured activities.

Creating a specific rule about noise to be applicable at these times is one way of dealing with the transition. In the example below there is an attempt to control both noise and body movement in the transition between a group activity on the mats and returning to previous work at the desks.

Vera softly says, "Let's pitter patter over to our seats now." The noise level gets a bit high and Vera says ssh (Notes 971208).

Another way of reinforcing a rule like this is to bring it down to the individual level of each child. This is easiest done by using the handshaking ritual at the beginning or the end of the day. In the example below though the teacher talks to each child as they leave the classroom for lunch break.

Vera tells the class to put their things away, to do it quietly and get ready to go to lunch. She then stands in the doorway and tells each child something like "You did very well, you were quiet when you put your things away like you were supposed to be, very good" or something like "Didn't I ask you to be quiet? You know that we are to be quiet when we put things away, try harder next time" (Notes 971211).

Other behaviour expected from the children in regards to noise is that they are to be quiet when someone has been given the word and is telling the class something and they are to be quiet when the teacher talks. All the rules about noise are at time reinforced by the teacher through telling off or through complimenting the children on their good behaviour.

The children's use of rules

When the teacher initiates talk about rules there is a willingness among the children to recite the rules, to remind of forgotten rules and to elaborate the justifications of the rules. This indicates that the rules are known, decoded and possibly internalised.

Haste (1987) sees rules as the basis for interaction with others and a shared cultural framework for making sense of the world. Rules are part of the ongoing discourse between children and adults and between peers. In his discussion of discourse Bruner (1987) says that meaning is created by co-construction in groups but that children do not only absorb the meaning which already exists but reformulates it in order to internalise it.

According to Haste the processes in which the children learn to decode rules have a social and an individual dimension. The social dimension includes the development, negotiation, and perpetuation of rules and meanings within groups and institutions of society. The individual dimension includes children's competence in making cognitive sense of the world and interacting effectively with others. (Haste 1987:166).

In the classroom there is a negotiation of rules as well as a use of rules. In using rules and the enforcement of rules the individual child's understanding of rules and other interaction patterns plays a role. Therefore it is possible that rules and the use of rules by the children in the classroom have different functions, as I will show below.
They all talk and after a while Vera who is busy at another table turns around and tells Julia to work and to sit properly with her feet on the floor. Robert looks around and says he sees many who are not sitting properly. Vera agrees with him but does not do anything more (Notes 980109).

Robert has put his hand up. Vera ignores this and reads the story to the end. Then she gives the word to Robert who tells on David (Notes 971211).

Vera then reads a story; the children seem very involved. I notice that Robert early on puts his hand up. He gives no sign of needing urgent attention and Vera continues reading. By 12.20 some children are getting restless and Vera stops reading. Robert still sits with his hand up and Vera now asks him what he wants. “It is getting rather late”, he says. Vera looks at the clock on the wall and says “Yes it is twenty past twelve”. Robert seems content with this (Notes 980109).

In the examples above there are three different happenings which in many ways are different from each other. In the first example Robert hears a rule being enforced. He looks around and finds that the rule is also being broken by other people and points this out. In the second example David is misbehaving during story time and Robert patiently sits with his hand up during most of this time waiting to tell. In the first example we can see him defending Julia or we can see both examples as Robert telling tales to get others into trouble.

In the third example there is no rule breaking involved. Again we see Robert patiently waiting to inform the teacher of something he considers important but as lunch break was not until 12.30 the relevance of his comment was not apparent to me.

Looking at the three examples it is on the other hand possible that Robert is not trying to get others into trouble by telling on them nor defending Julia. It possible that Robert is bringing up rules, and other organisational aspects of classroom life, to see whether they are applicable in these situations. I feel that this interpretation is possible because even when he tells on a specific child he does so in a situation when the others in the class are already aware of the misbehaviour of that child. Although this manner of pointing out rules and organisational aspects of the classroom was typical of Robert he was not the only one who seemed to use rules in this way.

At times the children seem to bring up rules and enforce them to divert attention from their own misbehaviour, but on the other hand they also seem to use rules to gain attention to themselves. It may be that by noticeably telling other children to behave themselves your own knowledge of the rules is shown. In this way you can use other’s misbehaving to show that you are behaving well. To achieve this it is necessary to gain the teacher’s or other children’s attention when you correct someone else.

(Debra and David play) Rebecca looks at them for a while then she tells them off. Debra stops shortly but David continues and Rebecca tells him off again, louder, until Vera reacts and tells him to stop. Rebecca then points out that Debra also did it but Vera does not pay any attention (Notes 980109).

Julia and Joan are looking at one another and sing back and forth. Rebecca tells them to stop. They ignore her (Notes 971210).
In this first example Rebecca manages to draw the teacher’s attention to the misbehaving of David. She also points out that Debra also misbehaved but is ignored. She is also ignored in the second example. Here she does not pursue the issue and involve the teacher.

Two of the children, David and Alice, are often wandering about the classroom or are otherwise engaged in activities other than the set activities. David is often accused of disturbing other children and in return he often tells other children to be quiet. Alice is frequently engaged in private activities and is accused of disturbing others. As David, she often says ssh to others but she also accuses them of other transgressions and of doing their work incorrectly.

The youth worker is at home with a sick child and the class is not divided into groups as scheduled. The maths lesson was to be “playing shop” with half the class. Vera decides that they should do it anyway. They are to use toy money to buy things from the shop. Ten crowns at the time, one object at a time. They are then to write up what they spend and do the sums. Alice writes slowly and with mistakes. She then points out to Alexander that he is not writing correctly. He says he is and proves to her that she is wrong. She mutters about not seeing it properly and talks defensively to herself for a long time (Notes 971210).

Alice complains about the noise of the children in the hall playing the board games. Vera agrees with her that they are noisy and tells them to be quieter as they disturb the rest of the class. When Alice has her turn in the hall she is noisy and towards the end she screams loudly so that everyone in the classroom reacts. As she gets back into the classroom Vera says “Who was it who screamed, was it you Alice?” Alice answers “No.” “It was you, but is was silly of me to ask”, says Vera. She continues by telling Alice, and the rest of the class, that if one is to be in the hall playing games one must not disturb the rest. Later as Alice works she calls “Teacher! They disturb!” Vera goes and tells the ones in the hall to be quieter (Notes 980116).

In the first example I had seen that Alice had difficulties in writing up the sum. The other children in her homegroup did not appear to have these difficulties and showed signs of enjoying the task. My interpretation of the situation is that their enjoyment together with her own difficulties caused Alice to look for faults in Alexander’s work, that it is possible she accuses someone else of making mistakes to draw attention from herself. On the other hand she could well have spotted something she interpreted as a mistake but the reason for pointing it out could have been the same. When she finds she is mistaken she withdraws and avoids interaction with the other children.

In the second example Alice first gains attention by accusing others of misbehaving, then she gains attention through her own misbehaviour and finally once again points out that the other children are misbehaving. Her manner when telling Vera that she is being disturbed is rather self-righteous and it is possible that she was pointing out that she was working hard and others should be considerate and not disturb her.

In all the examples above there is not a clear-cut boundary between the uses of rules. The separations I have done are to illustrate the possibility of using rules to create and explore meaning and activity in the classroom situation. In the above it is also possible to see all the uses of rules by the children as a test of their applicability.
The applicability of rules is not constant in the classroom. Rules are not always reinforced and rule breakers are not always noticed. Just as in daily life outside the classroom there is certain negotiability. This negotiability I will exemplify in a discussion about putting your hand up if you want to talk in the classroom.

**Putting your hand up**

There is a general rule, formulated by the teacher, that if you want to talk in the classroom you must put your hand up. In the organisation of the classroom I visited an exception to the rule is that talk is allowed between children in the same homegroup. This talk within the homegroup is to be concerned with the task at hand and the level is to be soft so that other children are not disturbed. This is regulated under rules about noise.

The rule about putting your hand up is therefore mainly applicable if joining a general conversation or when wanting the teacher's attention. The reason given for the rule falls under the noise rules in that it stops everybody talking at once and thereby creating a disturbance. Another justification for the rule is that it gives everybody a chance to talk and creates fairness.

The teacher's use of this rule

I see three main uses of this rule by the teacher. Firstly it enables her to distribute the right to talk. In many classrooms question/answer sessions are regular occurrences. In these sessions children put their hands up to signal that they know the answer to the teacher's question. There are studies made that show that there is an uneven distribution of answering opportunities for children in many classrooms. In one study it is shown that teacher use what has been called a *steering group*, i.e. a group of students that steers the teachers' understanding of how the work has been understood by the class. This group often gets more chances to answer questions than other children do. In a study of gender in the classroom it has been shown that boys will more often be given the question in a question-answer session, than girls (Granström & Einarsson 1995). The fact that these studies have been made show that there is an ideal that says that teachers should strive for an equal distribution of questions.

In the classroom I studied there were at other times structured class conversations of specific subject matters. On these occasions the teacher has the role of a chairman in that she indicates the turn taking monitored through the participants raising their hands. In the class meetings the teacher again has the role of the chairman in allotting speaking time. In the example below from a class meeting the teacher's role in orchestrating turn taking is clear.

**Excerpt 1 Class meeting**

Vera - Then we wrote like this as well (.) last week lets see if that is right (reads) It has worked quite well to be outside with the Spice Girls pictures

Chorus - No

Vera - *(Reads)* The girls will continue to try hard

Child 1 - No they haven't

Vera - Haven't they?
Child 2 - What do you mean trying (angrily)

Child 1 - No they’re not trying
(Several are talking at once and it’s not possible to make out what they say.)

Vera - No put up your hand before talking

Child 2 - they have so

Vera - Wait a bit and we will hear some comments
(Several talk)

Vera - You will all get a say (.) but you must put up your hand otherwise we won’t hear anyone, Robert?

Robert - There were many inside there were quite a few inside

Vera - Now!, Rose?

Child - Not me

Rose - (unclear) I want to be inside (unclear)

Vera - Oh, Anne?

Anne - I wanted to say the same as Rose (unclear)

Vera - Aha, Ruth?

Vera - What were you going to say (.) did you forget it, Linda?

Linda - Jessica and I were inside and we swapped we (.) Spice Girls pictures (Tape 971208)

In this excerpt the teacher seems to attempt to control the noise level and to ensure a fair distribution of speaking time. In the following excerpt she both reminds the children who are participating that they should put their hands up, and reminds David that participation is expected, it is not purely voluntary.

Vera asks if anyone knows what’s for lunch. Rebecca volunteers and is given permission to read the menu. The lunch is thin pancakes, jam and caviar it says. Caviar to spread on the bread Vera clarifies. (In Sweden smoked salted cod roe comes in tubes and is a very common sandwich spread). Vera asks if anyone knows what caviar is and the children answer in a range from “sandwich spread, fish and fish eggs”. During this David is half lying in his chair singing quietly to himself. Vera says that there are too many children speaking without putting their hands up. She then tells David to sit up properly and that they are having a joint conversation and he should be joining in (Notes 980120).

Secondly the rule enables the teacher to monitor the subject. When a child is given the right to speak the teacher has the possibility to monitor the subject matter. This means that being given the word by the teacher does not necessarily give you the right to speak, since the teacher might not consider the subject you wish to speak about relevant.

Alexander puts his hand up and says, “You did not put Lilla O up there”, pointing at the board. “We are talking about trolls now”, answers Vera (Notes 980112).
Rebecca asks if they aren’t to talk about Spice Girls but Vera firmly says, “now I’m talking about this” (Notes 971215).

In both these examples the teacher is firm about only allowing talk that concerns the subject she is currently involved in.

The third use of the rule is control of the child’s body placement. The children are told to put their hand up if they want the teacher’s attention during work time. This is to indicate that they have finished a set task or that they need help with some aspect of it. At such times the rule of putting your hand up if you want to speak or need the teacher’s attention is also used to control the place of the child’s body.

The children continue working. Rebecca walks over to Vera to ask something but is told that Vera does not answer anything when one hasn’t put ones hand up, Rebecca is told to go to her seat (Notes 971208).

As Vera leaves the green table she points out to Jessica, “You have a bad habit of following me about” (Notes 971209).

Vera is in the hall supervising the shopping when David comes rushing out calling “I’ve finished.” “Why are you running around calling “I’ve finished”? asks Vera. “I finished my page”, says David. “Well, what are you to do then?” asks Vera. “Put your hand up and wait”, answers David. “Well why don’t you do that?” “I forgot”, says David and walks back to his seat (Notes 980114).

In the above example the teacher uses the rule of putting ones hand up in three different ways. She chooses who is to talk, she monitors the subject and she controls the children’s body placement.

The applicability of rules
Looking at a note from my second day in the classroom we will see that in practice the rule of putting your hand up is not as straight forward as it is presented.

After singing the birthday song Vera asks Louise “has anything fun happened today” and Louise tells everyone that her family sang to her in the morning. She is asked if there was a birthday cake and if she was asleep when her family came into her room. She says she was still asleep and was woken up by the song. Several children put their hand up to tell of how they spend their birthday mornings. Some talk straight out without putting their hand up.

This seems to be constant, some children put their hands up, and others just talk. Sometimes the ones that just talk are allowed to talk and at other times they are told to put their hands up. I have seen no pattern (Notes 971209).

I did not see a pattern in this later in my stay either. This lack of pattern can be what leads Ruth, in the following example, to ask for a clarification of the proceedings during a maths lesson. In her presentation of the task the teacher does not specify that the children are to put their hand up but only says they are to tell her the matching number.

Vera says that she will ask about the “ten-friends” i.e. she will say one and they must say the other, that is if she says 6 they are to say 4 so the answer is ten. Ruth puts her hand up and asks, “Are we to just shout out the answer?” Vera says “no” and some children fill in “you will point” (Notes 980109).
Putting up your hand does not necessarily mean that you are allowed to speak. Sometimes this seems to be because there are many clamouring for the right to speak, but it can also occur because the teacher judges that comments are unnecessary for the moment, or that enough children have been allowed to have their say. It is again the teacher's choice and she will, if she deems it expedient, ignore a raised hand.

Vera starts to read a story. (David and Debra play) Robert puts his hand up. Vera ignores this and reads the story to the end. Then she gives the word to Robert who tells on David. Vera says yes I know, I did not want to disturb the story because David could not sit still and behave himself (Notes 971211).

Vera writes “1” for the ten crown coin and then the amount of one crown coins that each child says she has. She asks if they see anything similar in all these. Andrea is given the question. Vera then goes on to ask what the one means. Andrea puts up her hand, as she answered a previous question she is ignored and Vera waits. After a while Ruth says “ten” without putting her hand up. Vera says, “yes, it means that we have ten” and there is no reminder to Ruth about putting up her hand (Notes 980126).

In the first instance Robert, as talked about earlier, held his hand raised for a large part of story time without being acknowledged. The teacher judged the interruption as unnecessary. In the second example Andrea who is raising her hand is ignored and Ruth who breaks the rule is acknowledged. In a last example of how the rule is applied in practice I will show that although you are to raise your hand to be given the right to speak you do not have the right to choose whether to participate or not. During a maths lesson the teacher is asking the children to give her the answers to sums where “1” is added or subtracted.

Most of the children put up their hand and find the questions easy. Once Jessica gets the question, she looks very puzzled. “I did not put my hand up”, she says. “I know”, says Vera, “but answer anyway”. Jessica does not have any trouble answering but seems puzzled at getting the question without having asked for it. A little later this happens to another child who seems as puzzled (Notes 980109).

The children are affected by the rule of putting your hand up, and its use in practice, in several ways. The rule’s enforcement can and does keep them waiting in many situations. They wait to be allowed to participate in conversations, they wait to be allowed to ask for help with their work, they wait to be able to ask permission to do something.

The rule also enables them to a certain extent to choose whether they want to participate or not. This choice is not complete as shown above. They use the rule to show their own obedience and knowledge of applicable behaviour, at times in comparison to less knowledgeable children. As I see it they may also find it necessary to break the rule to get attention or to demand the right to speak when they do not want to wait for the teacher’s decision.

Power
I find that in relation to the above rule the relative power between the children and the teacher affects three areas. In the area of communication the children can not know whether they will be allowed to communicate that which they see as relevant. They are not in control when it comes to the right to speak nor can they be sure that
what they have to say will be seen as relevant. When it comes to participation the children cannot fully choose not to participate as they may be given the word without asking for it. The children do not, on the other hand, fully have the choice of participating, as they might not be given the word when asking for it.

The final area which is affected is the possibility of being heard and seen. Children who follow the specified rules at all times, or at most times, are less able to make themselves heard as they would not speak without raising their hand nor wave their hand about and make noise to get attention.

I have wanted to show that behaviour can be discussed on the basis of following or breaking known rules. It seems that breaking the rules can be seen as disobedient or wrong and that other's behaviour can be used to mirror one's own, to check the boundaries of permitted behaviour or to hide one's own rule breaking. The justification of rules used by the teacher is used by the children towards other children and can at times be discussed as general, i.e. not only applicable in the classroom situation.

In the above we have seen that rules are negotiable in the classroom. The definitions of rules are also negotiated at times. During my visit to the class there were negotiations about the use of Spice Girls pictures in school. These negotiations were conducted during class meetings.

**Negotiation of rules**

Class meetings are scheduled to be held once a week and both children and staff are able to bring up issues that concern the class as a whole. Both the teacher and the youth worker are present and one of them acts as chairman and the other as secretary during the meeting. In a class meeting in December the teacher chairs the meeting. She reads in the minutes from the meeting the week before that there has been an improvement with regard to the problem of children entering the cloakroom during breaktime to swap Spice Girls pictures. This statement is greeted by derision by several children who say that there is no improvement and that some children still go inside during breaktime.

Several children have a say and there are long explanations by some of why they were in the cloakroom at breaktime. The youth worker says he saw seven or eight children inside swapping pictures and thereby breaking the agreement made in previous meetings. The teacher points out that there had been two suggestions the week before, trying hard or banning the pictures during school time.

**Excerpt 2 Class meeting**

Vera - yes because you know we can't nag and bring it up every week and say you must try because either it is like that or not

Peter - that's right

Pause

Vera - well what should we then do then do you think (.) Anne?

Anne - try harder

Vera - you think you should try harder and then

29
Anne - not be inside and swap Spice Girls pictures at breaktime

Vera - Ruth

Ruth - obey you when you say we shouldn’t be inside

Vera - Jessica
Jessica - but it was Anne she is usually also inside

Anne - no I’m not
(Class meeting 971208)

In the above excerpt we see that the children are given an opportunity to state their case. It is noticeable though that their suggestions and comments are not elaborated. We see that several children suggest that they should try harder. The children do not see the suggestion of only having the pictures at the after-school-centre as a good solution as they feel that this would cause those who do not attend the centre to be left out. The discussion is rounded off by the teacher with a suggestion of one last chance where transgression immediately means a banning of the pictures to the after-school-centre. The children agree to this.

At the class meeting the week after this the youth worker chairs the meeting and he brings up the issue of Spice Girls pictures. He says that the teacher and he have decided to ban the pictures from school time as the children have had two chances. One of the children asks if they may have them at the after-school centre and is told that they may. There is quite a lot of talk of why they can’t be outside with the pictures as they will get ruined by getting wet and where they should keep them so as not to be tempted to use them during school time.

After this the youth worker has to leave and the teacher takes over.

Excerpt 3 Class meeting

Vera - You know there is something I want to talk about, two things (.) quickly almost related to this about Spice Girls pictures. There is another thing which comes along to school that can become a problem (pause) Louise?

Child - computer pets

Louise - computer pets

Vera - yes and where are they supposed to be (.) during lessons (pause) Diane?

Diane - in the backpack

Vera - yes

A long discussion follows where the children claim that the computer pets can die and the teacher claims that they cannot die as they are not really alive. She then says that they do not need to discuss that aspect any more.

Vera - Wait a bit (.) I do not want them in the classroom while we are working. Is there anyone who can guess why we shouldn’t have them in the class room? Mm Julia

Julia - they beep and that is disturbing

Vera - yes anything else?
Joan - but I heard something beep but that was Peter’s watch

Vera - yes
_A child laughs._

Vera - Shh (.) what happens when they beep. Wait what were you saying?

Child - you might sit and fiddle with them

The reason for the computer pets not being welcome in the classroom is sought from the children who seem to be well aware of which aspect of the toys that can be seen as disturbing to the lessons. The day before David had kept his computer pet in his desk and been told off about this. The teacher now elaborates around the temptation caused by having things in your desk that you are not allowed to play with and points out that it is better to leave them in the cloakroom.

Vera- now I feel that now that you have seen what happened to the Spice Girls pictures I think you should be careful of your little animal and if you want him along

Child - teacher

Vera - to the after-school centre then you will be smart and let it stay in your bag during lessons so it doesn’t need to come into the classroom because if it does we will discuss it again and if there are a lot of difficulties about this we will come to other decisions

Rebecca - you know Vera those who don’t have one of those computer pets

Vera - mm

Rebecca - they don’t need to buy one now when they know it will be forbidden
(Tape 971215)

At the end of this meeting Rebecca clearly shows that she expects the computer pets to be banned. Although the children do have their say during the class meetings it is difficult to know how much influence they feel they have. In the case of the Spice Girls pictures the children were given the opportunity to provide suggestions and to negotiate around the perceived problem. The banning of Spice Girls Pictures during school time is based on the assumption that it is the activity around the pictures that cause the children to break a firmly established rule. This rule which concerns where the children should be at breaktime is not presented as negotiable.

In the sections above I have tried exemplify how, and that, rules are used differently in different situations. Breaking or following rules is not the only way to challenge the teacher’s orchestration strategies, nor is an enforcement of rules the only response available to teachers. When rules are discussed, enforced or reinforced in the classroom, and outside it, the impression can be given that rules are what makes the classroom interaction run smoothly. In the following section I will try to show that the teacher’s orchestration strategies are challenged in many ways and that neither the challenges nor her response are always to do with the enforcement of rules.
Orchestration and Challenges

One of the aims of this study is to see whether, and how the children challenge the teacher’s orchestration strategies and to see how she responds. The challenges are not always connected with rules.

The Teacher’s Orchestration

Earlier I have mentioned that there are three main activities pursued by the teacher. She stands in front of the classroom teaching, i.e. explaining, narrating or describing something, she orchestrates the activities of the class and when the children work individually at their desks the teacher moves around the classroom in response to their raised hands.

The orchestration she does when in front of the classroom is mainly concerned with organising the work and behaviour of the whole class. When the children do individual work in workbooks or worksheets the teacher circulates around the classroom in response to the raised hands of the children. During this she orchestrates the activities of individual children as well as those of the class as a whole.

Vera tells the children to come to the corner (where they have some mats and cushions to sit on). She has found a picture of a scorpion to show them. When she instructs them to stop working where they are and to go and sit on the mat she speaks in singular, using the Swedish “du” (singular for you) (Notes 971208).

When explaining what the children are to do there seems to be an attempt by the teacher to be very clear and concise. The children are often addressed by the singular you and my interpretation of that is that the teacher wants each child to feel personally addressed. When pointing out a misdemeanour or lack of response, as in the example below, her instructions are not always as explicit. It is possible that a less experienced child could have interpreted the teacher’s comment that she “will wait for it to be done” as if there was no hurry in complying with the demand.

Vera hands out some maths books and asks the children to put them away. Two children are slow about this and Vera says “Now I will wait for it to be done.” Alice is last. Her book is still on her desk. Vera - “Who are we waiting for Alice?”, there is no answer but slowly without looking up Alice puts her book away (Notes 971209).

While circulating in the classroom to assist the children with their work the teacher orchestrates the individual child’s work and behaviour. In the example below we see that orchestration can involve the minute aspects of a child’s activities. When given a piece of clay to shape into the letter K Joan spent time dreamily picking her clay to pieces.

Joan is busy with her crayon K’s, looking very bored. She had spent a very long time on her clay K until Vera told her off for not keeping to the task as she was picking the clay to pieces instead (Notes 971209).

In the above examples we see the teacher's orchestration. In the second and third example we also see that her orchestration is challenged. It is possible to interpret
Alice’s action as a deliberate challenge to the teacher’s instruction but Joan’s challenge I cannot see as aimed at the teacher or her instructions, but rather at the task.

Challenges

Using a wide definition of challenge means that the teacher’s orchestration is challenged in many different ways. In the section below I show such actions that I have interpreted as challenging the teacher’s orchestration of the classroom activities. I have grouped these under the headings avoidance, games, instructions, rules and misunderstandings.

Avoidance

Looking at the children’s activities in the classroom there are occasions when a child seems to “avoid” getting involved in the set task. In the example below the class had been divided in half during group time. The children who had been out arrived about ten minutes before the lunch break. The teacher asked the children already in the classroom to instruct the arriving children of the task to be done in the maths book.

The last child to arrive is Alice. Her arrival does not seem to be noticed. No one is told to instruct her and she makes no attempt to find out what the others are doing. Alice starts turning the pages in her maths book, muttering she looks at pages which have been done and writes a pencil R next to the teacher’s red R which shows that the page is completed and corrected. After a while she turns back to these pages again and starts to erase the R’s she has written. During this time Peter arrives and walks past her homegroup looking at the children.

The fact that Alice is not working is either not noticed or ignored, she continues erasing the R’s. Suddenly she removes two rings she is wearing. She opens the desk and puts the rings into their matchbox. While she is doing this Vera says that there is very little time left. Alice closes her desk, closes her maths book and starts to look at a paper concerning homework. She is muttering to herself about needing to do that. Peter arrives to help Alexander again and looks at Alice but doesn’t say anything.

Alice folds the piece of paper and goes out into the hall and puts it into her schoolbag, talking to herself. She comes back, opens her desk and puts away her maths book.

She is now noticed. Vera comes to her side and Alice immediately says that she didn’t know what to do. Vera shows the pages to be done in the maths book and Alice mutters that she doesn’t want to. Vera tells her that she may choose which page to do and Alice immediately says she will do the one with gingerbread. Vera asks if she knows how to do it and when the answer is “no” she explains. Alice says that she doesn’t want to do it. “Does it sound to difficult?”, asks Vera. Alice says “mm” and Vera says she will show her which one she thinks will be at the right difficulty level. She shows Alice the page and then turns and tells the class to put their things away, to do it quietly and get ready to go to lunch (Notes 971211).

In this example Alice manages to avoid being involved in the activities of the class for nearly ten minutes. During this time she is involved in an activity which emulates what the others are doing but she seems to be putting on acts where she alternates between being a teacher and a student. Her reaction when the teacher notices that she is not doing her work implies that she is aware that she should be
doing a set task. On the other hand the youth worker had twice been in the position
to notice what she was doing and his lack of reaction could have made her activities
feel semi-legitimate.

In the example below Alice has been very involved in a word puzzle. She has
finished it and wants to go on with the next puzzle. As the class activity is maths she
is told to tidy the puzzle away and do her maths instead. Her lack of compliance can
be seen as a protest against not being allowed to continue with what she wants to do
but it can also be seen as avoiding the work she has been told to do.

Alice is busy with a word puzzle she started before break time. She is very pleased when she
finishes it, she goes up to Vera and to Jessica and tells them she has completed it. “I did
number three!” she repeats over again. Vera is busy checking the children’s “learning by
heart” homework. Alice wants to do the next puzzle but is told “No, it’s maths time now”
and that she must tidy away the puzzle. Alice spends time fiddling about with the puzzle
instead of tidying until Vera tells her off sharply (Notes 980119).

In the last example avoidance is not as clear but the way David intersperses the set
task with other activities could be a way of avoiding involvement in the task

David is working in his maths book and Debra with worksheets. David has interspersed his
work with checking what Debra is doing, and playing with a rubber band and trying to write
with his hands tied together (Notes 980119).

Games
During my stay in the classroom I found that one way in which the children
challenged the orchestration of the teacher was through playing. There are a variety
of activities that I interpret as playing and that I see as creating games. I have
divided these into three groups. In the first group I will show how games are created
in interaction with objects, in the second group games are created in interaction with
another child and in the last group I have placed the games created out of the set
task the child is involved with.

1 Creating games in interaction with objects.
Creating games in interaction with objects is one way of creating a private activity
during class time. This is done in several ways and is quite common.

David is playing with a toy on his pencil. Pays attention sporadically (Notes 971208).

Julia’s crayons fall and spill onto the floor. (This is the fourth or fifth time during this session
that crayons have fallen down.) Alice makes her crayon box slide down her desk by bashing
the desk with her fist to make it slide better. She catches the box before it falls onto the floor
(Notes 971210).

Joan is whispering something in Jessica’s ear and Alexander “drives” a tiny piece of paper
across the desk (Notes 971211).

Vera revises an earlier lesson (8/12) about shepherds. The children are asked what they
remember and are given more information about shepherds and their lives. Alice opens her
desk and looks around inside. She picks up a yellow felt-tip pen that she takes out and starts
to fiddle with. Alexander is fiddling with a clear plastic cylinder which is to fit on top of a
pencil. Both of them alternatively put the toys in their mouths and fiddle with their hands.
Anne has taken her watch off and is fiddling with that (Notes 971210).
In these examples we see classroom behaviour which could be gathered under the heading **fidgeting**. The children here are to a greater or lesser extent involved in play with an object such as a pencil, crayon box or paper. I found that this type of game usually is short and interspersed with other activities. It is most noticeable at times when the teacher directs the activities from the front of the class by instructing, narrating or reading a story.

Although less noticeable the behaviour is also present at times when the children are to work individually at their desks. It is possible that this type of fidgeting can be divided into two. There were indications that a child could be fidgeting without really being aware of it. This seemed to happen at times of concentration, especially when listening to a story. At other times a child seemed to use the fidgeting as a way to create a pause in their work.

### 2 Creating games in interaction with another child.

The second type of game created is in interaction with another child. This can be more or less elaborated.

In their homegroup only Debra and David are present today. David takes something (his back is to me and I can’t see what it is) out of his desk and “drives” it around on his desk with large movements. Debra looks at him and puts her hand up. David immediately puts the item into his desk, Debra put her hand down and grins at him. David opens his desk slightly, maintaining eye contact with Debra, she again puts her hand up and David closes his desk. This develops into a game which goes on until Debra tires and keep her hand up and David slouches at his desk (Notes 971211).

After a while Anne finishes her tree and tidies her desk. Taking the large paper that has protected her desk she puts it in the pile with the others. Noticing some glue on the one underneath she presses her paper against it and rubs. Debra watches and then joins her. They add more glue. They both have a pleased, intense and furtive look on their faces. Vera notices them and says “Hey Debra we can’t have that kind of mess, go and wash your hands” (Notes 971211).

Debra and David have started a game. They press their forehead hard against the desk and then pull their heads down so that a sound is created in the friction between their foreheads and the desk. They do this for quite some time while the conversation about handicraft instruction goes on. (Notes 980109).

It seems as if these children have created something completely outside the teacher’s classroom structure. These examples of games created in interaction with each other are some of the more elaborated games I noticed during my stay in the classroom. There were others that did not develop into such noticeable games as they did not last for such a long time. In the episodes below I believe that an elaborated game may have started if Alice had responded to Andrea’s copying.

Alice puts her head on the desk, Andrea leans over to see if she is asleep. She puts her head onto the table. Very shortly they both lift their heads again. Alice starts to examine the underneath of her desk. Andrea looks underneath the desks to see what Alice is doing. They are peering at each other underneath the desks. Vera is all the while telling them about shepherds (Notes 971210).
3 Creating games from set work.
The third type of game created is when a set task is reformulated or recreated into a
game while the task is done.

Alexander starts to colour his shepherd. Anne looks across and complains at his choice of
colour. She then starts to copy his choice of colour. She creates a friendly teasing relationship
with him over the pictures as she copies all he does. She seems to change the task from
creating a shepherd and learning the name of their clothing into a teasing game (Notes
971210).

Doing K with crayons entails drawing first a capital and then a small k on an A4 piece of
paper using the whole side for each letter. Each letter is to be traced with each colour in their
crayon box. Julia spends a lot of time choosing which colour should come next. She seems to
transform the task from one of practicing K to one in which the colours are the important
part. She looks carefully into her crayon box, picks up a crayon, looks at it again and then
either decides that that is the one or she puts it back in the box and chooses another. When
she has finished doing capital K she starts on small K but seems to be getting less interested
in either task (Notes 971209).

Joan is meanwhile creating a game of writing many U’s. They are to write two rows with
two capital U’s in each and two with two lower case ones in each. Joan starts by doing this
but when she is doing the last row she fills the whole line instead. She shows this to Julia who
shakes her head and makes a face but does not seem very impressed. Joan then proceeds to fill
in the gaps between letters in the rows above. She continuously shows this to Julia and
Jessica who gradually become a little more interested. The others have finished the letter
writing and gone onto the workbooks they are to continue with. Joan shows Jasper her sheet
of paper now covered with letters. He theatrically puts his hand over his mouth and say “oh
my god”. Vera comes to look at their work Joan proudly shows her page. Vera smiles and asks
if she preferred many, and Joan says yes (Notes 980109).

On the face of it the children are doing the set task and can be said to be working but
my interpretation of their actions is that they are playing. Their activities are not
interfered with though, and they are not admonished for playing. In these situations
I find that on the one hand the teacher’s orchestration is challenged in that although
the children appear to be busy with the set task they are in a manner of speaking not
doing it. On the other hand the visible result is the same as if they had done the
work in the manner intended by the teacher and therefore it can be said that they are
acting within the set parameters.

Instructions
It looks to me as if children can challenge by failing to follow instructions. This can
be done by not following explicit instructions by the teacher or when the children
act on their own initiative.

In this first episode the children have been given instructions on what is to be done
and what task they should proceed with when finished. The children do not follow
these instructions. In this case the children have been given simple explicit
instructions but choose not to follow them.

The children are to make sheep for the shepherds to herd. Vera provides instructions of how
they can make them. They are given a lump of clay each, far too much for one or two sheep.
They are told to consider the size of the sheep in relation to the shepherds. The children go
outside the given task. They start to make other things out of the clay. Are told that the task
was to make sheep and then work in the maths book (Notes 971208).
In the following examples there is a mix between not following explicit instructions and taking one's own initiative. Both episodes occur at the end of work sessions and the teacher instructs the children. It is possible that the children do not hear exactly what she says. It looks to me as if they instead interpret what they hear in the light of previous experience.

At 12.27 Vera asks the children to all sit at their desks and to put their pencils down. A few children open their desks and are told they did not listen as they were not told to put their pencils away only to put them down. Vera then proceeds to tell them that they are to put the work sheet into their plastic folder. (I am not sure if she was more specific or not). Jasper and David use a pause in her talk to take their papers into the hall and put them in their plastic folders in their backpacks. Vera notices them and asks why they do not listen. She said the yellow plastic folders in their desks. David and Jasper look confused. Vera then tells the class that it was too noisy and maybe that was why David and Jasper did not hear (Notes 980108).

The children are taught to tidy work away when finished with a set task. In the next episode they tidy away their work when they are told to come to a new activity. This clashes with the instruction of leaving everything on the desk.

At nine o'clock Vera asks the children to finish the K they are working on and then leave everything on the desk and go and sit in the corner. All the children at Anne's homegroup put their things into their desks first. When they all sit down they are told that they hadn't listened and that Vera had a reason for asking them to leave their work out. She is going to finish a chapter of a story book for them and does not know how much time it is going to take. They were to leave their books out in case there would be more time for work. The children avoid looking at one another. They seem uncomfortable. (Notes 971210).

Most official activities in the classroom are introduced and organised by the teacher. There are often detailed instructions of what is to be done and how it is to be done. Instructions are given for different kinds of activities ranging from how to complete a maths page to where to put their work sheet as in the example above. I classify not following given instructions as challenging. If the teacher notices this type of challenge there are sanctions. In the situation above the children are reminded that they have been told what to do and they should listen to, and follow, instructions.

In the next example the children are to work in their maths book inside the classroom and at the same time have a "shop" in the hall. Here they will take turns to be shopkeeper and each shopkeeper may help four shoppers. The shopper gets 10 crowns and may buy one item priced between 1 and 10 crowns.

The lesson has been in progress for a while and the teacher has been in the hall supervising the shop and goes back into the classroom.

As Vera goes back into the room she meets Rebecca and Ruth who are returning the objects they have "bought" in the "shop". Vera says to them that she hasn't told them to do that and they are to go and sit down. They look confused (Notes 980114).

I have seen this maths task of shopping done once before and on that occasion the children where told to return any "bought" item before shopping again. This time they had not been told to do this but Rebecca and Ruth seem to have remembered these instructions and assumed that they applied this time as well. I interpret the teacher's reaction as if taking one's own initiative can be seen as disregarding instructions and thereby the teacher's planning is challenged.
In these examples the children do not respond verbally when told off. In the first example the children did go outside the set task and seemed to take the admonishment in their stride. In the other examples it seemed to me the children were interpreting the situation differently from the teacher and were not expecting to be told off. They did not protest or try to explain their behaviour but their expressions were rather puzzled.

Challenging Rules
In the previous chapter I attempted to show how rules are talked of and used in the classroom situation. In looking at how the children challenge the teacher’s orchestration strategies the only explicit rules that I find frequently challenged are the ones relating to noise and body placement. The kind of rule breaking occurring below is more unusual.

Rebecca’s name was drawn for the Advent parcel. While she is getting it down from the paper tree Jessica accuses David of having his computer pet in his desk. He denies it but several children say that they have heard it. Vera looks at him and says she hopes he doesn’t have it because he knows the rule, she would have to take them away if they were in the classroom.

Later as Vera stands in the doorway to say good bye to each child I see David trying to hide his computer pet inside his hand by his side away from Vera. He shakes hands and says good bye and walks past Vera. She stops him and points out that she knew he had the toy in his desk and that if it happened again it would have to live with her instead.

Meanwhile Joan is fiddling around with some coloured pencils over at her desk and then slowly makes her way to the door holding a bunch behind her back. She stands in the doorway waiting for Vera to finish speaking to David. She looks tense and squeezes the pencils hard. One of the after-school staff pokes her head in and says she is to come straight inside the next room. With a quick look toward Vera who is talking to David, she hurries past (Notes 971211)

Both David, who is trying to avoid being caught red-handed with his computer pet, and Joan who is removing something which she seems to believe she should not remove, are attempting to hide their rule breaking.

Misunderstanding
I place misunderstanding the teacher’s instructions or intentions within challenging behaviour, as it is an action that goes outside that expected by the teacher. In the examples below, which are drawn from the same work session, I find that the children have understood that which is explicitly said but not the underlying implications obvious to the teacher and the youth worker. The misunderstandings lead to the need of further clarification.

Vera holds up a bunch of smaller rectangular cards. “We are to find out how many people, when were you born Alexander, July isn’t it? How many people were born in July?” , she says. Jasper puts his hand up and says that Anne, who is out of the room, is also born in July. “We are to find out how many were born in July so draw a picture of yourself on this card. It should be of yourself standing up so put the head at the top here and the feet here”, says Vera. “Can we be lying down?” , says Joan. “No, standing”, says Vera.

“Now”, says Vera “you have two tasks to do”. “If we were born in July?” Ruth says, looking
a bit disconcerted. Vera looks puzzled and Ruth clarifies her query, “Are we to draw ourselves if we were born in July?” Vera just says, “No all of you are to draw yourselves”.

“If you do not know your date of birth just write your name and Peter and I will come around with a list with all your birth dates on. We will also help you if you do not know how to spell the month. We will write the month in your scrapbook for you to copy”, says Vera.

Peter starts around the room with the list of birth dates. The first person he comes to is Joan. She does not know her date of birth and Peter says, “It is the seventeenth of August, the seventeenth of the eighth”. Joan writes “17”, Peter says “That’s right, now August”. Joan continues by writing “of the 8”, it now says “17 of the 8”. “No”, says Peter, “you must write August, it is the eighth month, it comes eighth but its name is August”. Joan changes her writing without comment. Peter leaves (Notes 980108).

In the first part Ruth responds to how the teacher has formulated her example. Ruth hears that those born in July are to draw a picture of themselves. She seems to find these instructions puzzling as this would be a new way of dividing up the class. It does not seem as if the teacher realises that it is her own unclear formulation that causes Ruth to ask the question. In the second part Joan is also given unclear instructions. It appears that the instructions are based on an adult understanding of the month’s position in the calendar. Joan does not question the instructions she receives and again it did not seem as if the adult involved realises that the problem was due to unclear formulations on his part. From my experience in the classroom I would say that these sets of instructions were unusually poorly formulated but together they let us see how misunderstandings can cause obstructions in the smooth running of the classroom.

In the above I have grouped challenges under different headings. Some actions have been difficult to place under just one heading but by creating these headings and grouping the actions in this way I hope to shows that although the actions can all be seen as challenging their characteristics are not the same.

**Responses by the Teacher**

When the teacher’s orchestration of classroom activities is challenged she responds in some fashion. Again I have grouped the responses under different headings.

1 Not noticing or ignoring the challenge.
The first response is to ignore or not notice the children’s challenge. At times I could see that the teacher watched the ongoing activity without interfering, at other times I could not judge whether she was aware of the activity.

Alice is working with the word puzzle. Anne walks over and helps her. Vera says that Alice can probably manage on her own. She watches until Anne sits down and then she tells Alice to skip the words she cannot manage.

Later: Vera is reading with Debra when she notices that Anne is standing beside Alice. Vera watches. At the same time Linda who sits back-to-back with Alice asks Louise for help. As Louise comes to help Linda, Alice gets out of her chair and checks what Louise and Linda are doing. Alice says something to them and returns to her seat where Anne still stands. Vera has watched them the whole time but seems to decide not to intervene (Notes 980114).

Here it is obvious that the teacher has noticed the actions of the children. Both Andrea and Anne often help Alice as she appears not to have fully grasped the
rudiments of reading and writing. The teacher often encourages this help, but on this occasion she apparently does not want Anne to help Alice. When she finds that Anne is disregarding her instructions she waits to see what happens. It seems as if she is waiting to see if a telling off will be necessary or not. The reason for not acting could be a curiosity about the children’s intention but on the other hand she could be watching and waiting to see whether the activity was connected with the set work at hand and judge the children’s activities as semi-legitimate.

In the section above I have an example, under the heading avoidance, where Alice spends a long time not doing the set task. I find it difficult to see a reason for this being ignored and suspect that her activities were not noticed but I cannot be sure of this.

There were several occasions every day when the teacher either did not notice children’s challenging behaviour or when she chose not to acknowledge it.

2 Saying the child’s name, questioning the behaviour or action of the child.
The second type of response is also common and does not contain any elaboration of rules or expected behaviour.

About five different activities are going on in the room. At 8.57 Vera tells them that it is time to finish off. They start putting their things away. Alice knocks down a box with word cards. David runs around the room and Vera asks him where he is supposed to be. He returns to his desk (Notes 980114).

After some time of fidgeting Alice takes the lid off the pen and it looks as if she is drawing on the desk. Vera appears takes the pen and puts it in the desk and says, “I don’t want to tell you again” (Notes 971210).

This type of response was frequent. It seems a rather mild response aimed at restoring the immediate order with no further consequences.

3 Lecturing child or telling it off.
The third response I did not find as frequent as the first two. Here the teacher would sharply tell the child to behave or she would lecture the child about the appropriate behaviour inside the classroom.

Vera then writes the day’s planned activities on the board. As she writes she comments on what she is writing and at "class meeting" a child calls out “class meeting, yuck”. Vera immediately counters “Shouting like that is not the kind of behaviour we want.” She continues to say that even if the child in question does not like class meetings that is not a reason for shouting and spreading a bad atmosphere (Notes 971208).

On occasions the telling off would be more elaborated and the reasoning around why certain behaviour is not accepted would be specified. The difference between such behaviour that was acceptable inside the classroom and such that was acceptable at other places was also specified.
4 Lecturing all and making the challenge general.
Occasionally I found that some child's misbehaviour would be used to start a lecture directed at all the children and their behaviour.

Vera goes into the class and says, "So much happens that you decide on you own here, like what happened just now. I told you that you could shop one thing each. I did not say you had to give things back" (Notes 980114).

In this example from earlier on a shop was set up in the hall and two children intend to return bought goods when the teacher notices them. She first tells the two girls involved that they are doing wrong and then proceeds into the classroom and mentions this as something that generally should be avoided.

5 Holding a child's arm to gain his or her attention
The least common response was to take a child by the arm to gain it's attention.

David is roaming round the room. Vera physically holds his arm and asks where he is. "Here" he answers. They are by his desk. "Where?", asks Vera and again David answers "Here!", pointing at his desk. "In what room are you?", asks Vera. "In a room", says David. "In a classroom", says Vera, "and one does not run around there" (Notes 980114).

As they are starting to write the children start talking. Vera tells the three girls in the nearest homegroup to be quiet as they are being noisy. She is firmest with Joan, holding her arm but addressing them all to be quiet and to work (Notes 980109).

In my material these are the only examples of the teacher physically holding a child. The intention did not seem to be to punish but to gain the full attention of the child in question. In regards to David it is possible that it was used partly to halt his roaming around but as this could have been done verbally my interpretation is that it in both cases was used to reinforce the message.

Sometimes the teacher finds it hard to get the children's attention when she is trying to modify their behaviour but the most common reaction to being admonished seems to be compliance. The children seldom protest or try to explain their actions but often they avoid eye contact as they return to their seat or to their work. Occasionally the child repeats the recently discussed behaviour in just a short time.

What is challenged?

In the challenges of the teacher's orchestration it is possible that different aspects of classroom organisation are challenged.

The two main challenges seem to be the challenge to order and the challenge to an activity. I find that in regard to instructions, noise and body placement it is possible to see the children's challenges as a threat to the order of the classroom. The other challenges, i.e., the avoidance of set tasks, the creation of games and the misunderstandings seem to mainly to challenge the planned activity.

In the examples I have used the only challenges directly aimed at the teacher's authority are in my opinion the ones where David and Joan try to hide objects as they leave the classroom and when Debra and Anne play with glue. On the other hand it is possible to see the occasions when children do not follow instructions or take own initiatives as direct challenges of the teacher's authority.

41
Although the teacher’s authority is not directly challenged it is possible to see all the challenges as indirectly aimed at her authority.

In the children’s actions that I have shown it is sometimes difficult to be certain of whether an action is meant to challenge the teacher’s orchestration. Occasionally I saw behaviour that I would class as deliberately disobedient. The majority of the actions I have classed as challenging seemed to develop without intent. They did develop when the children were supposed to be involved in other activities though, and therefore it can seem that the responsibility for the behaviour being judged as challenging lies with the children.

The Matter of Gender

Although gender is not the main focus of my study it is present in social interaction. The significance it is afforded seems vary according to the situation and the participants.

The class I visited consisted of fourteen girls and five boys. In each homegroup there is one boy and two or three girls. When I entered the class I wondered if this would be significant to the day to day classroom interaction.

Although I was aware of gender and expected gender to matter I found myself gradually not being concerned about gender. This could be because the girl/boy difference was seldom accentuated and the children were almost invariably called by name. The occasions when the children were referred to by their gender were so few that when they happened I found them noticeable.

When the Spice Girls pictures were discussed in class meeting in December the teacher ended the discussion by saying that the girls would get a last chance. One of the children immediately countered this with the statement that Robert also had Spice Girls pictures. The teacher then changed her statement to girls and boys and also included other types of collector items being swapped, pointing out that it was not the items that were the problem, but that people were going inside during breaktime.

In the homegroup consisting of Anne, Alexander, Andrea and Alice the interaction at times seemed to be focused around gender. This was mainly initiated by Anne and sometimes included the whole homegroup. In the example below we see that gender has been discussed and certain behaviour considered problematic. These examples are all from the same work session.

(A little later) Meanwhile Anne stands next to Alexander and talks about his work. She leans over him for a while then sits down and takes out her own work.

At 12.17 Anne still hasn’t started to work. She leans over and hugs Alexander who quietly half sings “no hugs, no hugs”. Both Anne and Andrea become engrossed in Alexander’s work. Anne then draws something on her own paper for a second or two, and then she leans over to Alexander again.

Vera arrives - “I don’t like having to tell you more than once, I am not sure if Alexander likes
it when you keep hanging over him and hugging, that is one of the things the boys have complained about, that you don't stop when they ask you” (Notes 971211).

The teacher's reaction shows that this situation is not an isolated occurrence but part of a discussion that has been held earlier. The gender specific in the above interaction seemed to me to be reinforced by the conversation that followed when the teacher left. I interpreted the envelope under discussion as being one of the collector items of Spice Girls paraphernalia.

Vera then turns to the rest of the class and says it is time to put their things away. Anne asks Andrea if she wants an envelope. She says, "yes please", Alexander says that he also wants one but Anne says that she is not giving him one. Andrea tells him that if she gets two she can give him one. Andrea then asks Anne if she know who she, Andrea, is in love with. Anne says "no, who?" and Andrea giggles and says it was someone who was at her day care centre (Notes 971211).

Gender did seem to matter more when the children were introduced to the subject of handicraft instruction in the spring term. About half the class attended wood craft and the other half textile craft. I decided to accompany the largest group and that turned out to be the one going to textile craft. When entering this classroom with two rows of tables the children first filled the row nearest the door and only two children sat in the second row. In the notes below we will see how gender matters here. I will call the handicraft teacher Yvonne.

Yvonne rearranges the seating as the children have filled one row of tables and only two are in the second row. “Maybe you two boys want to sit together”, she says, making it sound obvious that boys prefer to sit with boys. They agree and when Yvonne has placed a few girls where she wants them she asks the two boys whether they want to sit opposite each other or beside each other. It was obvious that the important part was gender, not individuals, as the girls where not asked who they wanted to sit with.

A little later gender is again seen as important.

Yvonne says that they must choose what colour the backing of the garland is to be. She says they are to vote, but maybe the boys should be allowed to choose instead as they would be outnumbered. “That’s not fair”, says Rebecca. Several others protest but the two boys think it is a good idea. Yvonne then goes to fetch some cloth. Alexander has called out that he wants yellow and Robert backs him up. Rose wants pink but the majority seems to want purple. Yvonne brings back green, yellow, purple and blue. She puts the green aside saying that the leaves would not show on it. She then asks how many want purple. Seven children put their hand up. Debra, Alexander and Robert do not. Robert mutters that purple is a girlish colour (Notes 980112).

At the time I found these references to gender interesting as it was the first time that gender had mattered to this extent. It is also the first time I heard anyone specifying an activity or object to be more suited to only girls or boys.

Gender seemed to matter again in the craft session two weeks later. The children are to produce teddy bears by first tracing the outline of them onto cloth, cut it out and bring it to the teacher who will cut the filling.
The first step is to trace the teddy onto the cloth. They are all given white felt and some children are given teddy shapes to trace. The others have to wait. As the waiting draws out in time Yvonne goes over to Alexander and Robert and say that as there will be a long wait they can trace the shape of the teddy from the book and then use their own shape to trace onto the felt. She goes off and then comes back with scissors and says, “here chaps are some scissors”. As Yvonne goes to the front of the room again she turns and looks towards the two boys and says “the chaps know what they are to do?”

“and the girls know what they are to do”, whispers Alice (Notes 980126).

In this we see that the craft teacher treats the boys differently from the girls, she is concerned about them having to wait and specially arranges for them to be able to go ahead with their work. We can also see that this is noted by Alice who comments it under her breath.

The situation in the craft sessions shows that gender can be made to matter. In both examples we can see actions or comments by the children which seem to reflect the teacher’s actions.

**Concluding Comments**

In exploring the creation and recreation of meaning by the children and the teacher through their everyday activity I have largely looked at such actions that are initiated by the children. I have looked at how behaviour is discussed through the negotiation of rules, how the children challenged the teacher’s orchestration strategies and her response to this.

In my presentation of the study I have attempted to show the organisation within which the children’s actions take place by describing the parameters that exist in the classroom. These parameters are mainly upheld by the teacher and therefore her orchestration strategies and her interaction with the children have been described and discussed.

I have described, categorised and discussed the children’s actions and how they construct meaning through classroom activities. The children’s actions are varied and can be interpreted in many ways and it is my hope that this has been clear in the discussions of them.

In these concluding comments I intend to look at the material from different perspectives. I will start inside the classroom with the details of interaction, proceed to the wider area of educational ideology and end by looking at the role of schooling in society and children’s place within this.

**Interaction**

In the material presented we have seen that in the area of communication the use of rules gives the teacher a very powerful role in relation to the children. This is reinforced through the teacher’s knowledge of the type of rules which are applicable in the classroom situation. As school has its own rules of conduct (Edward & Mercer 1987) which the children have less knowledge of than the teacher, this role enables the teacher to monitor almost all aspects of public communication within the classroom.
This ability to monitor so many aspects of the classroom interaction and communication may actually work against the curricular aims as discussed by Bergqvist (1990), of making students' differing backgrounds and experiences relevant in the classroom.

At times the children seem to use the rules in the same way as the teacher, that is they use their own knowledge of rules to monitor and direct other children's behaviour. As there seemed to be different motives behind the monitoring of peers the children may also use rules differently from the teacher in that they use them to explore boundaries of acceptable classroom behaviour and to test the applicability of the existing rules.

When Jackson (1968) did his study of *Life in Classrooms* he found that children in school spent a large amount of time waiting. In my study I also found that some of the rules surrounding communication seemed to result in waiting. On the other hand there was less waiting than described in Jackson's study. This appeared to be due to the organisation of class work where the children always had a range of set work to proceed to when finishing the original task initiated in a specific work session.

It appears that the organisation and orchestration of school activities by the teacher is constantly challenged by activities initiated by the children. In this the children go in and out of activities and the intensity of their involvement seems to change rapidly from moment to moment. Although there is more activity within the homegroups than between them the interaction sets tend to shift throughout the day in the manner discussed by Furlong (1976). Some of the activities I have classed as challenges appear private, either in the sense of self involvement or in observation of others. At other times the children interact with others in the challenges and we may see how they work together to try to understand what is going on and we see the same kind of negotiation of meaning Mandell (1984) found in her study of children at nursery schools.

The interaction, the exploration of meaning in the involvement stances described by Mandell, seemed mostly concentrated on the activities which existed alongside the official business of the classroom. There was involvement with the official tasks as well; at different levels the children appeared to find and create meaning in the tasks set them but the extent of "unofficial" activity was high.

I found that the occasions with the highest noise level and the most amount of uncontrolled movement were in the transition between activities or places. This loosening of control was apparently observed by the staff as there were rules aimed directly at these situations. These included rules such "an open desk means a closed mouth", aimed at a change of activity and "when moving around the classroom one should not talk", aimed at moving from one place to another. Mostly the control strategies used by the teacher seems to be aimed at teaching the children self-control. The elaboration of rules used often include showing consideration to others as well as giving yourself the opportunity to concentrate on the set task. These kind of justifications for rules are similar to those found by Wilcox (1982) in the upper-middle-class school she studied.

In the presentation of the study I have shown and discussed behaviour that I have classified as challenging the teacher's orchestration strategies. Some of these challenges involved actions that were in direct opposition to the teacher's planning and other challenges were almost invisible. The challenges by the children seemed
mainly to be aimed at the planned activity or the order of the classroom. The challenges were often short and simple acts such as fidgeting or making too much noise. These mainly seemed challenges to order. The more elaborate challenges, such as the creation of games, I would see as a challenge to the planned activities. If we consider Mayall's (1994) discussion of the power relationship between adults and children and the fact that adults have organisational control over children's activities the challenges to this control can be seen as necessary. I believe that it is through the challenges that the children can explore meaning in their school situation.

The response of the teacher was also varied. Ignoring or not even noticing certain challenges seemed a common response. This seeming lack of response both afforded the children a certain amount of leeway and seemed at times to cause them uncertainty. The implications of this will be discussed further under the next heading in connection with the applicability of rules.

Looking at behaviour and the negotiation of rules in the classroom we have seen that the teacher and the children use rules in different ways. There is negotiation involved but the power relationship between the adults and the children in school seems to make it hard for the children's definition of rules and behaviour to prevail. Mayall found that in the setting of school, children had less leeway for negotiation than they did in the home setting. She says that this was partly due to the children being treated as a group member instead of as individuals. This leads us into the ideology that surrounds the organisation of school.

**Ideology and Practice**

School is to meet both the particular needs of each and every child and at the same time provide the knowledge, skills and values necessary for a member of our society. This causes tensions according to Bergqvist when it is to be put into practice. The idea of child-centered pedagogy that she found prevailing in Swedish schools is at times joined by a public debate about putting the individual in focus.

The activities I observed in the classroom were those that occurred alongside the planned activities. The discussions about a child-centered pedagogy are mainly concerned with the children's learning situation. Here child-centered is often seen as meaning that the initiative to learning comes from children themselves and the teacher acts as a guide (Svedberg & Zaar 1988). In discussions of the individual there is also an overlapping into the area of discipline. Here teachers and other professionals who work with children are also admonished to see the individual. I interpret this as a call to take the personality and history of each child into account when interacting with it even in regards to discipline.

In the second half of this century the classroom structure has developed from being a formal structure with a specific goal, learning of subject matter, and a specific leader, the teacher, to become a more loosely structured arena where the goal of learning is more diffuse and the leader's role is at times negotiated (Goldinger 1979).

During my observations in the classroom I found that the children's relation to the rules and norms of the classroom was characterised by an uncertainty which led to watchfulness. I have shown that even explicit rules, such as raising one's hand, were not always followed by either the children or the teacher. Other norms were not as clearly formulated and the ambivalence this created was even more noticeable.
I found that areas of the teacher's organisation that afforded the children freedom also seemed to cause ambivalence for the children. In the classroom I visited there was a mix between a firm structure coupled with a rather high level of control by the teacher and relative freedom for the children to discuss their work and help each other, to move about the classroom to fetch items they needed and to plan the progress of their work. This freedom the children are granted in the classroom is another aspect that reduces the waiting noted by Jackson.

The ambivalence noted among the children seemed to be in part due to the relativeness of the freedom in the classroom. At times the children would be encouraged to help another child. The teacher would either ask someone specifically to help someone else or if the children did help each other the teacher might afterwards compliment them on their helpfulness. Occasionally the children would be complimented for collecting material they needed and for using their own initiative and the teacher would encourage discussions within the homegroups if it concerned the work being done.

At other times a child would be told off for leaving it's seat, for helping another child or for asking the neighbour for help.

My interpretation is that this fluctuation of the teacher's of allowing an act or considering it positive, and times when the same act leads to sanctions, can be found in the tension between looking at the collective good and seeing to the individual.

I believe that in the organisation of a classroom the collective good of the group is considered by the teacher. The rules and norms applied are those that seem to bring good to the members of the group and which encourage the learning of such behaviour and values considered by a teacher to be positive. In the classroom of my study these norms and values seemed to be helpfulness, tolerance and taking responsibility for one's own work.

In a classroom there are many children present. I believe they are seen to have different abilities and personalities, and that teachers try to deal with the individual child according to the perceived needs of that child. The teacher and the child build up a relationship based on their interaction and knowledge of each other.

The general norms and values in the classroom sometimes conflict with the goals of a set piece of work and the children will then be told off for helping each other or moving about the room. At other times it seems the actions of a child will be regulated due to that act being interpreted by the teacher in the light of an earlier act. If a child has moved about the classroom for no particular reason at other times, maybe the day before, it may be told off even when doing so legitimately in relation to a set task. If a child has been seen as not trying to do it's work, another child who tries to assist it may be told to leave that child alone and not help. In these kind of situations an uncertainty seemed to be created. At times this seemed to lead to the children "keeping an eye" on the teacher and I saw children doing legitimate actions in a sneaky fashion due to, it seemed, not being able to judge the legitimacy clearly.

To sum this up I find that there is a tension between seeing the children as individuals with different backgrounds, experience and needs in a classroom situation and seeing to the needs of the group and the goals of schooling.
Children and their schooling

In the introduction to this thesis I wrote that schools are institutions created for children. This is not the whole truth. Schools are also institutions created for children to acquire such skills and knowledge society considers necessary for the good of the children and for the good of society 3.

Edwards and Mercer (1981) consider the role of ground-rules in the general understanding of what education is. They say that education is understood to be the transmission of human knowledge and learners can either be seen as passively receiving knowledge or as active processors of knowledge. Edwards and Mercer claim that instead of there being a transmission of knowledge, human cognition is a product of communication at the same time that it is something that is to be communicated. They see education in its broadest form as the process in which this cognition is changed and established through acts of communication.

In a discussion of conceptions of schooling Bergqvist points out that school is usually understood as a pedagogical environment with specific goals and responsibilities and that this conception of school is maintained and reconstructed within the activities of school.

In the beginning of this thesis I used examples from other parts of the world which had been analysed and discussed from an anthropological perspective. In these examples I tried to show that the understanding of school and education is not given, it is constructed and reconstructed over time and in relation to the cultural setting in which it.

I believe that the conception of school as an environment concerned with the transmission of such knowledge society considers necessary for children to acquire lives side by side with the idea that this is to be done at the same time as children are socialised into the citizens needed by that society 4.

When children enter school they enter an environment which, according to Mayall,

"is a closed, complete system, where goals and practices cohere, and where the activities of the teachers (during the school day) are limited to a focus on the teaching and training of the children" (Mayall 1994:125).

In this closed system the teachers work towards goals such as imparting certain knowledge, for example reading, writing and arithmetic to the children in their care. The organisation of the classroom activities and the orchestration strategies used in the day-to-day running of the classroom are geared towards the realisation of those goals.

Looking at the material from my study we can see that much of the orchestration and rules are concerned with the actual realisation of academic tasks. Here we can include the planning of what work is to be done, in which order it is to be done, and the instructions to the children on how to do the work. Another aspect of the orchestration and the introduction of rules is concerned with the creation of an

---

3 This is discussed by Peder Haug (1992), Ingemar Fagerlind & Lawrence J. Saha (1983), Bengt Gesser (1985) among others.
4 This line of thought is further developed by John Boli (1989).
environment seen by the teacher to be conducive to effective learning. Thinking back to the material presented we will remember that the issue of noise and disturbing others was often discussed and the norms regarding this reinforced. This I interpret as being because it is thought that learning, and concentrating on a task, is more difficult in a noisy environment. Another norm which at times was quite strictly upheld was that one should not leave one’s seat without a good reason. It seemed that this reason needed to be connected with some aspect of the set task to be considered valid.

Entering a system as set and complete as this it is hard to see that the novices, the beginners, have any option besides conforming to the standards and norms in existence. Do we then see the children “negotiating, manipulating, kicking against and submitting to” the limitations placed on their actions within the classroom setting as I said I might in my study?

Maybe, maybe not. The children in the classroom I visited did give the impression not to have submitted only to the demands of schooling, but to enjoy it. They were, as I see it, being deliberately socialised to fit into the school system. As they are to proceed through the school system for another nine to twelve years this can be seen as necessary.

On the other hand, from my visit and observation in this classroom I do not believe that the children passively allow themselves to be socialised. The children appeared to be active creators and participants in the classroom activities.

I believe that in the unofficial actions; in the challenges such as creating games within and without the set task; in the interaction with the other children, and in the negotiation of school tasks the children take the school which we have created for them with a specific goal in mind, and in trying to find meaning they actively negotiate, manipulate, recreate and redefine school. In this the children take the school we created for them and make it their own.

Reflections

In my concluding comments I have tried to move the discussion from the one classroom, with the specific teacher and children involved, to a general level where we see the ideas behind school interacting with classroom organisation and children’s negotiation of meaning.

I have not discussed the matter of gender in the concluding comments. The material presented there really belongs to another discussion. All I will say here is that the findings of Thorne (1993), that gender can be made to matter to a greater or lesser degree, is born out by this material.

Throughout the writing of the thesis I have reflected on the picture I present of the class I studied. As I said in the beginning I concentrated on background noise. In most situations in life background noise is not seen as positive and the classroom situation is not different.

Although the children in this study were given quite a lot of leeway in their activities it is in the nature of a study like this that the non-conforming actions by the children are brought to the forefront. In this the teacher’s sanctions and disciplinary actions are also brought to the forefront. This discussion of what occurs within a classroom of very young children is not intended as a criticism to specific teachers.
nor as a contribution to discussions of discipline problems in school. I do not believe the teachers involved in this class considered themselves to have a great deal of disciplinary problems.

I enjoyed watching the activities in the class and I was surprised at the combination of control and freedom that existed. The level of interaction among children and between the children and the teacher was higher than I had expected and is apparent in the presentation of the study.

The amount of times my notes contain the sentence “It is very quiet and everyone is working concentratedly” is not apparent in this presentation. During the study I was surprised at how often the classroom went completely quiet and all the children became involved in the set task. These occasions have not been brought out or discussed since the purpose of this study was not to look at how children do school work, but to look at the activities they are involved in alongside the school work.

There are many questions that remain unanswered, some more specifically to do with actual school work and others regarding the social organisation. As school to a great extent is about doing school work I would find it interesting to look closer at how the young children organise their work.
Literature


Appendix 1

Hej föräldrar till klass XX

Jag vill på detta sätt informera och få ert medgivande till att jag, som forskare, vistas tillsammans med erna barn under ca en månads tid under denna och nästa termin. Jag går en magisterutbildning vid Tema Barn och skall i min utbildning skriva en magisteruppsats som ska vara klar våren 1998.

Jag är intresserad av att förstå hur skolan fungerar, hur barn och lärare lever sitt liv tillsammans i klassrummet. Jag har därför bett erna barns lärare, XX, att jag får tillbringa tid i klassen så att jag kan observera hur vardagen ser ut i ett klassrum. Jag ska inte studera hur barn lär sig eller om de uppför sig bra eller dåligt, utan hur de formar sin vardag tillsammans.

När uppsatsen är klar kommer inget barn eller lärare att kunna identifieras. Jag handleds under uppsatstiden av universitetslektor Ann-Christin Cederborg.

Om ni har några frågor så ställer jag gärna upp på det. Har du/ni några invändningar mot min studie eller deltagandet i klassen så var snäll och kontakta mig så fort som möjligt på tel. 013-172756.

Med vänlig hälsning

Katarina Ayton
Magisterstudierande
Tema Barn
Linköpings Universitet

Handledare
Ann-Christin Cederborg
Universitets lektor
Institutionen för pedagogik och psykologi/Tema Barn
Linköpings universitet
TEMA BARN

är ett av de fem temana inom den tvärvetenskapliga forskningsorganisationen vid Linköpings universitet. Forskningen vid tema Barn rör sig mellan ett studium av barn och studiet av barndom. Det handlar om hur barn tolkar, förstår och kommunicerar sin erfarenhet och det handlar om hur barndom avgränsas och ges en utformning i olika kulturer och i olika historiska perioder. Utgångspunkten är i båda fallen en strävan efter ett barnperspektiv och ett viktigt mål är att knyta samman kunskaper på individnivå med kunskaper på samhällsnivå.

Temainstitutionen har en gemensam skriftserie, Linköping Studies in Arts and Science, där huvudsakligen doktorsavhandlingar publiceras.

Tema Barn har två egna rapportserier:

Working Papers on Childhood and the Study of Children distribueras direkt av tema Barn. I serien ingår även material som används i forskarutbildningen.

Magisteruppsatser från tema Barn publiceras som en särskild rapportserie.

För ytterligare information, beställning av rapporter, avhandlingar eller publikationslista kontakta oss på tema Barn.

Postadress: Tema Barn
Linköpings universitetet
581 83 Linköping

Tel: 013-281000

Besöksadress: Tema Barn
Hus T
Universitetsområdet, Valla

Fax: 013-282900
The Department of Child Studies

Linköping University hosts an interdisciplinary Institute of Advanced Study known as the Institute of Tema Research. The Institute of Tema Research is divided into five separate departments, each of which administers its own graduate program, and each of which conducts interdisciplinary research on specific, though broadly defined, problem areas, or "themes" (tema in Swedish, hence the name of the Institute). The five departments which compose the Institute of Tema Research are: the Department of Child Studies (Tema B), the Department of Health and Society (Tema H), the Department of Communication Studies (Tema K), the Department of Technology and Social Change (Tema T), and the Department of Water and Environmental Studies (Tema V).

The Department of Child Studies was founded in 1988 to provide a research and learning environment geared toward the theoretical and empirical study of both children and the social and cultural discourses that define what children are and endow them with specific capacities, problems, and subjectivities. A specific target of research is the processes through which understandings of 'normal' children and a 'normal' childhood are constituted, and the roles that children and others play in reinforcing or contesting those understandings. The various research projects carried out at the department focus on understanding the ways in which children interpret their lives, how they communicate with others, and how they produce and/or understand literature, language, mass media and art. Research also documents and analyses the historical processes and patterns of socialization that structure the ways in which childhood and children can be conceived and enacted in various times, places and contexts.