

Torill Moen

**“Kids need to be seen”**  
**A Narrative Study of a Teacher’s Inclusive Education**



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Torill Moen



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*There's a danger that I focus too much on John and Paul. I have to be aware of that. There are so many kids in this class who need me, and I feel I have an obligation to see them all.*

This utterance comes from “Ann”,<sup>1</sup> a forty-seven-year-old teacher working in an elementary school. “John” and “Paul” are two of the children in her third grade class of twenty-two pupils. John is new in her class and he has recently moved from his mother to his father. He is behaving in a disturbing way, and has been referred to the support services for further clarification and assistance. Paul has been living in a complicated and very difficult domestic situation since he was a small child. Both John and Paul can be exceptionally unruly and unfocused. Even if Ann’s thoughts often return to these two boys, she is aware that she has to see all the children in her class. Paul is not the only one with family problems, many of her pupils are living in difficult domestic situations. Furthermore, there are two pupils from other countries who have Norwegian as a second language, and there is one pupil, a boy, who has problems reading and writing.

This brief description of Ann and her class is not unusual. When the typical Norwegian primary school teacher looks across the faces of her about twenty-five pupils, approximately two to four of the children looking back have “special needs”. Moreover, there are usually some other children who are at risk of formal identification. Teaching these pupils in regular education classrooms is a fact of life for all teachers in this country. The ideology of a school for all is clearly stated in Norwegian legislation and in the national curriculum. This means that every child has the right to attend school in her or his local community and that all teaching is to be carried out inside the class according to individual ability and interests. The school for all is thus defined by equal formal access, by togetherness and by individually adapted teaching within the framework of a class.

It has not always been like this. For decades there was a two-part system with regular schools and special schools that used to be the centre of education for children and youths with special needs. In Norway, as in quite a number of other countries in the Western world, educators and administrators put a great deal of effort into the development of the special schools. The separate system was seen as an expression of care for these pupils, and all the

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<sup>1</sup> All the proper names in this study are pseudonyms.

available expertise was concentrated in an attempt to educate them in the best way possible. Over the years, this view has gradually changed. Knowledge and expertise are still of importance to the education of pupils with special needs, but the segregation of them is now perceived as unacceptable. This current view on education may be understood in light of the democratic-oriented principle, which is part of a larger issue concerning social justice (Howe 1997, Meijer, Pijl & Hegarty 1997). The democratic-oriented principle means that every individual has an equal right to participate in society and to be accepted for what she or he is. Within this view heterogeneity and pluralism are positive, and everybody is entitled to ask for special services without the risk of being segregated or excluded. The consequence of this ideology for education is therefore a single, inclusive school system where different groups or individuals should be together without shedding their distinctive identities or suffering any disadvantage because of them (Haug 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Even if inclusive education is strongly supported in Norway politically, we still have structural traits that may support and even develop segregation within schools. For instance, there can be a contradiction between the general formulation of inclusive education in a school for all and the Education Act which states that extra resources can be given for the education of pupils with special needs. Specialists have the power and the obligation to find out if the child in question has special needs or not. In the 2000/2001 school year, during the data collection period of this study, 5.5 per cent of the children and youths in the Norwegian compulsory school were looked upon as pupils with “special needs”. These are pupils with hearing problems, sight problems, movement difficulties, problems with perception and coordination, with different kinds of syndromes, behavioral problems and so on.<sup>3</sup> This is of course a great paradox, viewing someone as in some way being special or having special needs is itself a way of separating that person from what is considered “normal”. However, these concepts are alive as they must be if extra resources are to be given. Another contradiction is the division that still exists between education and special education in the sense of professional training, subjects and practice. In schools then we find both regular and special teachers.

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<sup>2</sup> The vision of inclusive education is not only a Norwegian phenomenon. It was put on the agenda at “The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education” (UNESCO 1994) where it is stated: “The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school” (p.11-12).

<sup>3</sup> When detailing special needs in these categories, it is important to state that they seldom have a “pure form.”

Bearing these paradoxes in mind how is the idea of inclusive education to be understood? To begin with, Booth (1995) suggests that the word inclusion might be enhanced by contrasting it with its opposite; exclusion and segregation. In what follows, I wish to illuminate the complexity of the term by presenting three paradigmatic ways of looking at differences between children. Several concepts are used to illustrate the first paradigm; the “psycho-medical” approach (Clark, Dyson, Millward & Skidmore 1995), the “traditional approach” (Porter 1997) or the “individual approach” (Haug 2000). This paradigm’s point of departure is that learning problems have an individual medical or psychological origin. The pupil in question is the problem she or he owns the problem and has to be individually treated to be rid of it. Consequently, special needs are understood largely in terms of characteristics of the disabled individual. These characteristics are seen to account for the inability of certain children to learn and develop within the provision made in mainstream education. It follows that the appropriate educational response to these characteristics is some form of remedial intervention, which is delivered in the context of special forms of support and teaching. Along with this traditional, individual oriented paradigm, an alternative way of understanding education has emerged.

The terms used to illustrate this paradigm are, for example, the “interactive” or “organizational” (Clark et al. 1995) approach, or the “system approach” (Haug 2000). What is significant within this paradigm is the acknowledgment of differences between individual children. Education should recognize that all pupils are different and even celebrate these differences because they are the stuff of life (Wedell 1995). This paradigm requires a refocusing away from the individual child and the special forms of provision she or he is seen to need. Instead the attention is turned towards the nature of mainstream schools and regular teachers and their ability to respond to a wide range of individual differences amongst their pupils (Dyson & Millward 1997). The paradigm therefore requires restructured mainstream schools in which separate forms of provision give way to a more flexible and responsive approach in regular classrooms. The view on education is thus a system that encompasses a wide diversity of pupils and differentiates education in response to this diversity. Special educational needs are not seen as objective and individually given. Instead they are seen as social constructs, consequences of education having been created in certain ways.

Both paradigms outlined above have been criticized for being reductionistic, and both have also been criticized for being preoccupied with deficit thinking; the first in an individual perspective, and the second in a system or environmental perspective (Skidmore 1996, Clark, Dyson & Millward 1998, Haug 2000). Consequently several researchers (Skidmore 1996,

Clark et al. 1998, Haug 2000) argue that we need a new framework that rejects the temptation to model the occurrence of special needs as an outcome of a single unidirectional causal process whether this is envisaged in terms of deficits in the individual or deficiencies in school organization or society. It is within this context a third paradigm begins to emerge. This paradigm takes into consideration the individual characteristics, the system or environmental characteristics and the relation between these two aspects. An OECD report has named this point of view an “anthropological model”, emphasizing interaction between the individual and her or his context (OECD 1994).

The number of publications on the topic of inclusive education is impressive. Researchers take a multitude of positions and address a wide variety of subjects such as the historical and social development towards the ideology of inclusive education in for instance the United States (Steinmiller & Steinmiller 1996), the United Kingdom (Sugden 1996) and Norway (Stangvik 1997, Haug 2000). Other focus on factors that may support or hinder inclusive education (Flem & Keller 2000), on legislation, regulation and funding (Pijl & Meijer 1997), on leadership in policy and implementation (Porter 1997), on resources available for the implementation of inclusive education (Labon 1997), on the organization of special education (Pijl & Meijer 1997), on how to define a new role of the “special education teacher” (Zigmond & Baker 1997), on which kind of support is needed if inclusive practice is to be developed within schools (Dyson 2000), on different versions of inclusiveness across various levels in the school educational system (Norwich 2000), and on inclusive teaching and teacher education (Booth, Nes & Strømstad 2003, Garm 2003).

Inclusive education is a complex field of work, and all the issues focused on in these studies are important for further understanding and insight. Nonetheless, along with several other researchers (Pijl & Meijer 1997, Stangvik 1997, Haug 2000) I will suggest that the most critical factor for inclusive education is the teacher her- or himself, and the most important arena for inclusive education is the regular classroom. Increasingly studies have focused on how inclusion is realized in classrooms (Moen & Gudmundsdottir 1997, Pettersson 2000, Sæverud 2003, Viem 2003, Flem, Moen & Gudmundsdottir 2004). However there still remains a need for more inquiry at the realization level (Haug 2004).

This is both the background and the starting point for this study, where the main research question is: *How does a Norwegian primary school teacher deal with inclusive educational practice in her ordinary classroom activities?* In order to understand and gain insight into the teacher’s practice, I spent time with Ann and her class for a period of five months. The focus for my data collection was her activities in the classroom, the organization of these and her

interactions with the children, especially John and Paul. I was further concerned with her thoughts and reflections upon the classroom activities. As will become evident in Chapter two, the theoretical framework of this study rests on an assumption that it is impossible to understand human functioning without considering how and where it grows and develops. I was therefore also interested in how Ann has developed into the teacher she is today.

Classroom reality is complex, multidimensional and occasionally hard to understand (Doyle 1977, 1986). One way to make classroom reality manageable is to construct narratives. Faced with the challenge of realizing an inclusive school for all children, the narrative of Ann presented in this study may make her practice more immediate for us. In this way it may hopefully contribute to provoke, inspire and initiate discussions and dialogues, something which is critical for reflection over practice and its development (Gudmundsdottir 2001). According to Crites (1971) a good narrative constitutes an invitation to participate. Consequently, the rationale for the study is to develop a thinking tool for teachers in particular, but also for teacher educators and others who are concerned with inclusive education. This study may further be regarded as a thinking tool for the research level, a thinking tool which offers new understanding and insights and which hopefully may lead to new research questions. Furthermore, I would like to mention one other reason why this study is important. A great many voices are heard in the debate on inclusion: It is a political vision, and politicians talk about it as an ideal. Researchers have grasped the term and studied it from different perspectives. School administrators discuss how to organize education in an inclusive school environment. Parents use the media to complain when there is a lack of funding and so on. What is remarkable is that the voices of teachers are almost absent in the debate on inclusive education. As will be seen a study like this becomes a narrative in which a teacher's voice clearly emerges.

In Part I of the text, Chapter two and three, I deal with the theoretical and methodological approaches which both frame and guide my research. The first chapter in this section deals with socio-cultural theory outlined by Vygotsky and his successors, and Bakhtin's concept of dialogue. In the next chapter I bring the methodological approaches into focus. Here I first focus on the narrative research approach, before describing the research process of the study. In Part II of the text, Chapter four and five, I attempt to make an overview over Ann's past and present context. Thus, in Chapter four I present some of her past experiences and in Chapter five, I present her current context. In Part III, Chapter six, seven, eight and nine I present four themes characterizing Ann's current teaching practice. Each of these themes is

illustrated by means of a narrative from her classroom practice and further analyzed in light of relevant theory. Finally, in Part IV, Chapter ten, I discuss the findings of the study.



**Part I:**  
**Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework

In this study I am concerned with a particular teacher, Ann, and how she deals with and reflects on the challenge of inclusive education in her current classroom activities. I am also interested in how she has developed into the teacher she is today. For centuries scholars and researchers have studied and puzzled over the question of human development, arriving at a number of alternative theories. On the one hand, we find models that emphasize the importance of the environment for the development of individuals, and on the other hand theories that give prominence to how development is propelled by an inner biological maturing of individuals. These two approaches both represent traditional epistemologies.

Social constructivism offers alternative ideas on the development of human beings. Though there are different versions of social constructivism, what they have in common is the belief that individuals learn and develop when participating in social activities in the world. Society or the world has continuous influence upon the individual or the mind and vice versa. Human beings learn and develop in these mutual processes between the individual and society. In this way, the dualism between the individual and her or his social environment, or what is called the mind-world problem (Prawat 1996) is abolished. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory<sup>4</sup> is one version of social constructivism that connects the entities mind and world.

At a time when psychologists were concerned with simple and universal explanations of human development, Vygotsky developed a rich, multifaceted theory through which he examined a range of subjects, including the psychology of art, language and thought, learning and development in which he included a focus on the education of pupils with special needs. He carried out his research in the former Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. However, his writings were suppressed for many years and did not become accessible until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Since then, his theories have gained more and more recognition and have been developed by scholars in many countries. To the point where today there appear to be four approaches to Vygotsky's theory (Daniels 2001). These are cultural-historical activity theory (Leontèv 1981, Wertsch 1981, Davydov 1999, Engeström 1987, 1999), situated

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<sup>4</sup> Vygotsky used the term "cultural-historical" when talking about his own theory (Chaiklin 2001). Some Soviet psychologists use the same concept as Vygotsky did (Zinchenco & Davydov 1985, Davydov & Radzikhovskii 1985), while others seem to prefer the term "socio-historical theory" (Leontèv & Luria 1968).

learning approaches (Lave & Wenger 1991), distributed cognition approaches (Hutchins 1993, Cole & Engeström 1993) and socio-cultural theory (Wertsch 1985, 1991, 1998). Within each of these broad fields of writing there are of course many differences. However, what is important to see is that these approaches are not discrete, isolated and complete separate. Instead they tend to emphasise particular aspects of the theoretical legacy that was bequeathed by Vygotsky. Cultural-historical activity theory thus focuses on practical social activity, and activity theorists seek to analyse human development within such practical social activity settings. Situated learning approaches emphasise learning and development as a situated activity, drawing attention to the process by which newcomers move from novice to expert within a particular situation. Within the distributed cognition approaches the focus is on cognition as a phenomenon that extends beyond the individual and arises in shared activity. Socio-cultural theory emphasises mediated action. According to this view, mediated action provides a link between individual mental processes and the cultural, institutional and historical context in which such processes occur. Even though I use the cultural-historical activity theory in Chapter nine, I have chosen socio-cultural theory to be my overall theoretical framework.

### ***Vygotsky - Socio-Cultural Theory***

According to Vygotsky (1978), human learning and development occur in socially and culturally shaped contexts. How people become what they are thus depends on what they have experienced in social contexts in which they have participated. The social contexts individuals encounter are where they are at any particular point in time. As historical conditions are constantly changing, this also results in changed contexts and opportunities for learning. Thus consciousness, or the human mind, cannot be considered a fixed category in the sense that it can be described once and for all (Schribner 1985). Quite to the contrary, it is a category undergoing continual change and development, changing and developing in step with historical development and activities on the social plane. Vygotsky's perspective thus focuses on the relationship between human beings and the context, and to explain and understand the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes, he highlighted the role of socially developed cultural tools as mediators between the individual and the social context. The depth in Vygotsky's theory can be further clarified by examining three major themes in his writings as highlighted by Wertsch (1985, 1991). First, there is a reliance on genetic or developmental analysis. Second, he claims that higher mental functioning in the individual is derived from social life, and third, that human action is mediated by tools and signs. In my

examination of these themes I rely on Vygotsky's writings as well as the elaborations on his ideas by his collaborators and scholars influenced by his work.

### Genetic Analysis

Vygotsky was critical of research that considered individuals in isolation, and when arguing for his genetic or developmental approach, he contrasted it with approaches that attempt to analyse psychological phenomena without regard for their place in development. In fact, he devoted more than a fourth of his manuscripts to an analysis of the limitations in psychological theory and methods responsible for this failure (Schribner 1985). He claimed that analyses of "fossilized" or static products would often be misleading as they provided descriptions but not explanations of human mental development, and he asserted that it is impossible to understand human mental functions without considering how and where they occur in growth (Vygotsky 1978). Genetic analysis thus means that focus is placed on the very process by which human consciousness is formed:

*We need to concentrate not only on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established. (...) To encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes - from birth to death - fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for "it is only in movement that a body shows what it is" (Vygotsky 1978, p.64-65).*

Vygotsky (1981b) defined development in terms of fundamental shifts. He thus claimed that at certain points in the emergence of a mental process, new forces of development and new explanatory principles enter the picture. At these points there is a change in the very type of development. In some cases developmental transitions are linked with the introduction of a new form of mediation, whereas in others they are related to a transition to a more advanced version of an existing form of mediation. Consequently he asserted that explanations of human mental phenomena must rely on genetic analyses of several different types of development. Wertsch (1985, 1991) has identified four genetic domains in Vygotsky's writings. These are phylogenesis that refers to general history of mankind, socio-cultural history, ontogenesis and microgenesis. In his own empirical research Vygotsky focused mostly on the development of the individual, on ontogenesis and especially on microgenesis as part of ontogenesis. In microgenesis the focus is on how mental processes develop in an individual over a relatively short period of time, and how different skills are gradually acquired during training (Wertsch 1981, 1985, 1991).

To gain more insight into his ideas on the genetic analysis of human beings, it is useful to focus on his historical approach. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that the key to discovering and understanding higher human mental processes is found in the laws of history. In his discussions on the general history of mankind, it is possible to see what these laws are (Schribner 1985). First, Vygotsky recognized the fact that socially organized activities change in history. The human nature they produce is therefore not a fixed category that can be described once and for all. On the contrary, it is a changing category. Questions about human mental life cannot be separated from questions about how human mental life becomes what it is. He therefore claimed that the past and the present are fused and that the present has to be seen in light of history. Second, changes in social activities that occur in history have a directionality, thus hand-powered tools precede machines and number systems came into use before algebra. Vygotsky claimed that new cultural forms appear slowly, something that is open to question today in a world with increasingly sophisticated technology. He further asserted that each new stage builds on a preceding one, so that everything cultural is in its nature a historic phenomenon. Consequently, the roots of higher mental functions of mankind are to be found in history. They cannot be explained by biological or natural laws (Vygotsky 1978).

When talking about the general history of mankind, Vygotsky speaks in general terms and at first glance it might thus appear as if this is equal for everyone, regardless where they live. The very term employed, general history, also suggests this. However, from what is stated above, it is obvious that Vygotsky rejected this view. Instead he asserted that at any time in history there are always many cultural and social groups working parallel to each other. Societies and cultural groups participate in world history at different tempos and in different ways. Each of them has its own past history influencing the nature of the current change (Schribner 1985).

Another level of history that enters into Vygotsky's system is the person's individual history, or ontogenesis. Vygotsky's discussions on ontogenesis focus on the same topic as his analysis of general history; the characterization of "uniquely human aspects of behaviour" (Vygotsky 1978, p.19). In his writings on the general history of mankind, we have seen that he was occupied with historical circumstances in his attempt to understand human mental functioning. In ontogenesis, however, he focuses on two lines of development. The social and cultural line, as in general history, but also the individual's biological or natural development. However, Vygotsky is criticized for not having been able to provide a detailed definition of these two lines (Wertsch 1985, 1991, Schribner 1985). What he does say is that natural

processes regulate the growth of elementary mental functions in the child. These are elementary forms of memory, perception and practical tool-using intelligence. Social and cultural processes, on the other hand, regulate the individual's acquisition of speech and other sign systems, as well as voluntary attention and logical memory. These acquisition processes constitute the cultural development of a child (Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky (1981b) claimed that these two lines of development operate in isolation during early phases of ontogenesis, and that they interact later on. One shortcoming of Vygotsky's theory is that he did not go on to discuss how these two lines of development interact and interpenetrate. He is especially criticized for not exploring the role of biological factors in a complete account of ontogenesis (Wertsch 1985, Scribner 1985). What he argued was that beyond a certain point in development, biological forces can no longer be viewed as the sole or even the primary force of change. At this point the burden of explanation shifts from biological to social factors (Wertsch 1985). As already stated, Vygotsky was concerned with what is "specifically human" (Vygotsky 1978, p.23), and his basic idea when exploring human ontogeny is that it differs from animal ontogeny in that it combines two lines of development, the biological, natural line and the cultural line. Human thought is thus the intermingling between natural processes on the one hand and cultural processes and experiences on the other (Cole 1996).

What becomes evident from the presentation above is that consciousness and higher mental processes are not given from inception, nor are they produced by nature. Conversely, consciousness is a product of culture. Vygotsky's ideas on genetic analysis and the historical aspect within it is a useful theoretical foundation for this study where the aim is to capture Ann's inclusive educational practice in the here and now, as well as to capture the development that has made her the teacher she is today. As to the historical aspect, this must have an appropriate unit of analysis to be at all feasible (Engeström 1999). The genetic domain featured in this study is thus Ann's ontogenesis that is focused on her life as a pupil and later as a teacher.

### Social Sources of Development

From what has been stated above we can see that social reality plays a fundamental role when it comes to individual mental functioning. To understand the individual it is therefore necessary to understand the social relations in which the individual exists. Vygotsky (1981b) formulated his most general statement about the social origins of individual functioning in the "general genetic law of cultural development":

*Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category (p.163).*

The genetic law of cultural development clearly states that the specific structures and processes of intramental functioning can be traced to their genetic precursors on the intermental plane. Vygotsky (1978) thus claimed that intramental functions are “quasi-social in their nature”. For further insight into this theme, I will first explore Vygotsky’s understanding of internalization. Then I will focus on his ideas about the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky (1978) viewed internalization as a process whereby certain aspects or patterns of activity performed on an external plane come to be executed on an internal plane. In this way it appears to be simultaneously a social and an individual process. It is very important to state that he did not view internalized mental processes as simple copies of external, intermental processes. When examining this issue, Vygotsky used the concept of transformation, and by doing so, he rejected the assumption that the structures of external and internal activity are identical. Internalization is thus a process involved in the transformation of social phenomena into psychological phenomena (Wertsch 1985), or as Leontèv (1981) puts it “(...) the process of internalization is not the *transferal* of an external activity to a pre-existing, internal ‘plane of consciousness’: it is the process in which the internal plane is *formed*” (p.57, italics in original). Vygotsky argued that there is an inherent relationship between external and internal activity. This is a genetic relationship in which the major issue is how internal mental processes are created as a result of the individual’s experiences on the social plane. The point Vygotsky is making here, is clearly illustrated in his examination of the concepts of social speech, egocentric speech and inner speech. Egocentric speech is viewed as the key concept for understanding the transformation of social speech into inner speech. “(...) egocentric speech is the basis for inner speech, while in its external form it is embedded in communicative speech” (Vygotsky 1978, p.27). Egocentric speech then serves as a transitional form between external and internal speech.

When it comes to the concept of internalization, the term itself has been a topic of debate among several socio-cultural researchers (Rogoff 1995a, 1995b, John-Steiner & Mahn 1996, Wertsch 1998, Dysthe 2001). Bearing in mind what has been stated above, we can see the concept may entail an opposition between external and internal processes something that easily leads to a kind of mind-world dualism. Debates on internalization can therefore be quite problematic because various approaches have quite different phenomena in mind when they

use the term. Within the framework of socio-cultural theory Wertsch (1998) argues that the concept can be characterized in terms of mastery and appropriation. Mastery is connected to “knowing how” to use cultural tools.<sup>5</sup> Internalization suggests an image in which processes that were carried out on an external plane come to be executed out of sight on an internal plane. What is striking in this regard is that many, and perhaps most forms of action never progress to being carried out internally. Many forms of action are and must be carried out externally. According to Wertsch (1998) in such cases it would be more appropriate to talk about mastery and “knowing how”.

In addition to being described in terms of mastery and “knowing how” internalization can also be characterized in terms of appropriation. In her reasoning Rogoff (1995a, 1995b) suggests this concept instead of internalization, claiming that internalization refers to a process in which the individual passively transmits something external. Instead of internalization she therefore suggests appropriation, which may be described as having three uses. First, appropriation is simply the same as internalization in which something external is imported. Second, appropriation is still a version of internalization, but this version includes something external that is imported and transformed to fit the purpose of the person in question. Rogoff calls the third use of the word participatory appropriation. With this construct she focuses on the boundaries between the individual and the social context. The construct of participatory appropriation sees the individual as part of the activity, not separate from it. Because the concept of appropriation refers to a process in which the individual actively transmits something external researchers within the socio-cultural approach appear to increasingly prefer to use this term rather than internalization. In this study I will however use the term internalization throughout the text. In doing so I am following Wertsch’s (1998) path; internalization is so widely used both in everyday and professional discourse that I will not try to avoid it or substitute another term in its place.

It was in connection with the zone of proximal development that Vygotsky outlined some of his most concrete ideas about the relationship between intermental and intramental functioning. Before examining this construct, it is necessary to say a few words about Vygotsky’s view on learning and development. In contrast to prevailing theories of his time that dichotomized learning and development, viewing one as an external and the other as an internal process, he looked at their unity and interdependence (John-Steiner and Mahn 1996). Vygotsky (1978) thus claimed that learning or “properly organized learning” results in mental

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<sup>5</sup> I will return to the issue of cultural tools in the next section when presenting Vygotsky’s ideas about mediation.



development and “sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning” (p.90). Consequently he asserted that “(...) 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development” (p.89). Bearing this in mind, he developed his ideas on the zone of proximal development that is defined as the distance between a child’s “actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving” and the higher level of “potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86).

Vygotsky examined the implications of the zone of proximal development for the assessment of human intelligence. He argued that focusing on the level of potential development is just as important as focusing on the actual developmental level. Consequently he was very critical to the existing techniques of psychological testing that failed to address the issue of future individual growth in the individual. He also examined the zone of proximal development with respect to instruction, arguing that instruction should be connected more closely to the level of potential development than to the level of actual development. The important question is therefore how intermental functioning can be structured so that it will maximize the growth of intramental functioning (Wertsch 1985). The relationship between instruction given by “adult guidance” or in “collaboration with more capable peers” is therefore very interesting. If these intermental processes are “properly organized”, they will give rise to increasingly complex zones of proximal development (Wertsch 1985). In order to examine Vygotsky’s ideas on the social origins of individual functioning, I have focused on his understanding of the internalization process and his concept of the zone of proximal development. Both these terms are interesting when focusing on Ann’s current educational practice as well as her development as a teacher.

## Mediation

The close relationship Vygotsky saw between internalization and the social origins of individual mental processes is evident in the following quotation, where he argues that higher mental functions appear initially in an external form because they are social processes:

*It is necessary that everything internal in higher forms was external, that is, for others it was what it now is for oneself. Any higher mental function necessarily goes through an external stage in its development because it is initially a social function. This is the center of the whole problem of internal and external behavior. (...) When we speak of a process, “external” means “social”. Any higher mental function was external because it was social at some point before becoming an internal, truly mental function (Vygotsky 1981 b, p.162).*

It is in the exploration of how human mental functions are connected to external social settings that the concept of *mediation* arises. The idea of mediation is so central in Vygotsky's ideas that Wertsch (1985, 1991) claims it to be the key concept for understanding the whole theory. Vygotsky asserted that higher mental functioning and human action in general are mediated, and the mediational means he pointed to were "tools" and "signs", such as language. Every human action employs mediational means or cultural tools.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between human action and mediational means is so fundamental that it is appropriate, when referring to the agent involved, to speak of "individual(s)-acting-with-mediational-means" rather than to speak simply of "individual(s)" (Wertsch 1991). The mediational means are inseparably connected to individuals' actions. At the same time they are also closely connected to the external world as they are recognised as cultural tools developed within the society. Consequently, the mediational means are part of both the individual and the society, and hence make it possible to build a bridge between them (Wertsch 1991). When discussing mediational means,<sup>7</sup> Vygotsky (1978) invoked the analogy between psychological tools or "signs" and technical tools or simply "tool". Both types of tool are understood as the carriers or mediators of socio-cultural patterns of beliefs and experiences, and thus they both have a mediating function. There is, however, a fundamental difference between them. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that a technical tool serves as a conductor of a human being's influence on the object of her or his activity. It is a means of a person's external activity and is directed towards the external world. In contrast to this external-object orientation of a technical tool, he argued that a sign or a psychological tool is a means of mentally influencing behaviour. It is a means of internal activity, directed toward the mastery of humans themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> Wertsch (1991, 1998) uses the terms "mediational means" and "cultural tools" synonymously when dealing with this theme. I will do the same throughout this text.

<sup>7</sup> Wartofsky's (1979) term *artefact* may provide useful additional insight when dealing with mediational means. Usually understood as tools, Wartofsky has suggested three different levels of artefacts. The first level comprises *primary artefacts*. These are used directly in production, examples of such artefacts being axes, clubs, needles and bowls. Cole (1996) also includes words, writing instruments and telecommunications networks on this level. In a classroom teachers use tools that are created and developed over time in the particular socio-cultural context. In addition to words, these are for example the chalk, the board, the overhead projector and so on. Such artefacts become a part of the social life within the classroom and as such they also acquire social meaning for the participants. Wartofsky's second level, *secondary artefacts* is defined as representations of primary artefacts and actions in which primary artefacts are used. These artefacts include recipes, traditional beliefs and norms. Secondary artefacts play an important role in preserving and transmitting modes of action and belief. The curriculum could serve as an example of a secondary artefact because it incorporates traditional beliefs and norms. The third level, *tertiary artefacts* could be described as imaginative artefacts because they do not appear directly in the practical world. Wartofsky applies his conception of tertiary artefacts to works of art that may colour the way we look upon the world, thus providing a tool for changing and developing current practice.

Vygotsky focused mainly on semiotic mediation. Semiotic mediation is when action is mediated by verbal and nonverbal signs and symbols of social origins. He listed a number of examples of semiotic means: “Language; various systems of counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps and mechanical drawings; all conventional signs” (1981a, p.137). For Vygotsky, semiotic mechanisms mediate social and individual functioning and connect the external and the internal, the social and the individual (Wertsch & Stone 1985). In the introduction to Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language*, Bruner (1962) described the author’s view on the role of semiotic mediation and in particular his view on language:

*(...) he believed that in mastering nature we master ourselves. For it is the internalization of overt action that makes thought, and particularly the internalization of external dialogue that brings the powerful tool of language to bear on the stream of thought. Man, if you will, is shaped by the tools and instruments that he comes to use, and neither the mind nor the hand alone can amount to much (...). And if neither hand nor intellect alone prevails, the tools and aids that do are the developing streams of internalized language and conceptual thought that sometimes run parallel and sometimes merge, each affecting the other (p.vi-vii).*

Of all the semiotic mediational means, Vygotsky believed language to be the most important. He claimed that language was the crucial means employed by humans to organize social interactions, to regulate others and to regulate oneself. Language is thus the “tool of tools” (Vygotsky 1962/2000). In this way people not only communicate with signs, they are also to a large degree controlled by them (Wertsch 1985).

The power of a society’s mediational means in organizing action is often not consciously recognized by those who use them. Often they are looked upon as products of some natural factors rather than socio-cultural factors (Wertsch 1991). Several researchers have used this theme when discussing education of children with special needs (Wertsch 1991, McDermott 1993, Skidmore 1996, Haug 2000). They point to the fact that society and schools have a long tradition of classifying and sorting individuals. In many Western countries, such as Norway, these procedures are mandated by law, and a major implication of these legal procedures is that each pupil with all of her or his uniqueness must be considered in terms of a set of explicit, institutionally defined categories, such as “normal” children or those with “special needs” or “learning difficulties”. The socio-cultural situated categories thus constitute or construct the identity of pupils. According to Vygotsky’s beliefs, these categories and the procedures for employing them play a fundamental role in shaping intermental and intramental functioning. Vygotsky’s ideas on mediation are therefore crucial when exploring Ann’s educational practice. Which mediational means does she use and how is she using them

when interacting with the children in her classroom? Further, how are the mediational means connected to the historical, cultural and institutional setting?

I have now presented the three themes that form the essence of Vygotsky's theoretical framework. Each of these, reliance on a genetic or developmental method, the claim that higher mental functions in the individual have their origin in social processes and the claim that mental processes can only be understood if we understand the tools and signs that mediate them, can only be understood by taking into account the interrelationships with others (Wertsch 1985, 1991). The idea of origins in the second theme necessarily points towards a genetic analysis, and the account of social interaction and mental processes is dependent on the forms of mediation involved. Much of what is unique in Vygotsky's approach is the way the three themes are interrelated. However, he did little to spell out how specific historical, cultural and institutional settings are connected to various forms of mediated action. Increasingly researchers (Wertsch 1991, Dysthe 2001, Hundeide 2001, Elbaz-Luwisch, Moen & Gudmundsdottir 2002, Moen, Gudmundsdottir & Flem 2003) have argued that the ideas of Bakhtin can give useful contributions to Vygotsky's ideas on a developmental approach to the study of human beings. In particular, they focus on Bakhtin's concept of dialogue.

### ***Bakhtin – A Theory on Dialogue***

Above we have seen that semiotic mediation comprises at one and the same time components of the life of the individual and of the social system. Of all the semiotic mediational means that Vygotsky outlined, we have also seen that he was mostly concerned with language. One of Vygotsky's contemporaries, the Russian literary critic and theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin<sup>8</sup> also focused on language. He claimed that "language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well" (1986, p.63). He also contended that "Man in his specific human nature always

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<sup>8</sup> M.M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) belonged to various intellectual schools during his early career. In the 1920s a reading and discussion circle was created to study texts by contemporary German philosophers. Among Bakhtin and others, this circle included the musicologist Valentin Voloshinov and the then journalist and organizer of literary events Pavel Medvedev. These two names have also been mentioned in relation to Bakhtin's work due to discussions over the authorship of several texts. In 1929, Bakhtin was arrested for political crimes whose nature is not entirely clear. This arrest, which occurred in the early stages of Stalin's repression, resulted in Bakhtin's internal exile. However, this arrest coupled with his chronic ill health proved to be his good fortune. He was not sent to certain death in the harsher conditions of other camps. As a consequence, however, he often could not publish his own writings, and a great deal of confusion has ensued over who actually wrote several works attributed variously to him and others (Holquist 1990, Wertsch 1991, Morris 1994). I do not intend to add to this debate. However, I will follow Wertsch's (1991) line of thought and suggest that perhaps this issue should remain unresolved because, in Bakhtin's view, the notion of sole, isolated authorship is a bogus one. This will become evident in my exploration of his construct of dialogicality.

expresses himself (speaks), that is, he creates a text (if only potentially). When a man is studied outside a text and independent of it, the science is no longer one of human sciences” (1986, p.106). He further claimed that mind is not given to us as a thing, it can only be present “through realization in texts”. With just these few quotations we can see that Bakhtin’s ideas are strikingly consistent with Vygotsky’s philosophy. Human reflections, ideas and meanings are available both to oneself and others only in the form of a text, spoken or written. Man cannot stand outside these texts, and in order to understand human beings, it is necessary to study the texts they produce. What is important is that these texts occur on the borderline between the human being and the outside world (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994b).

Bakhtin (1986) therefore claimed that all texts are an inseparable part of the culture. He said that texts “cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture” (p.2). He thus criticized contemporary researchers who regarded and analysed texts in isolation. Again it is not difficult to see the similarity between the two philosophers. Researchers (Wertsch 1991, Dysthe 2001, Dysthe & Igland 2001, Igland & Dysthe 2001, Hundeide 2001) have thus argued that the ideas of Bakhtin can give useful contributions to socio-cultural theory, especially when it comes to acquiring a deeper understanding of the link between the individual and her or his historical, social and institutional settings. It is in this context that the concept of dialogue is interesting.

Dialogue or dialogicality is regarded as the most fundamental concept of Bakhtin’s theory (Wertsch 1991). It has even been claimed that all of Bakhtin’s writings are animated and controlled by the principle of dialogue (Holquist 1990). Thus Bakhtin’s concern with dialogicality surfaces everywhere in his writings, and the concept is used in a very wide perspective. All human action is dialogic in nature. Human consciousness and even existence itself may be considered to be dialogic (Holquist 1990). In order to grasp the complexity of the concept, I will first examine other terms indissolubly linked to it. One of these, the concept of utterance, has already been mentioned in one of the quotations. The other two are voice and addressivity.

### Utterance, Voice and Addressivity

When focusing on texts or words as a means for understanding human beings, Bakhtin (1986) wrote that speech can exist “only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects. Speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist” (p.71). He thus focused his analysis on the utterance, what he regarded to be: “the *real unit* of speech communication”

(p.71, italics in original). The boundaries of a concrete utterance are determined by the change of speakers. Any utterance has therefore an absolute beginning and an absolute end. The beginning of a given utterance is preceded by the utterance of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterance of others. According to Bakhtin (1986), any utterance occurs in a particular situation and is thus “a link in the chain of other utterances” (p.84). Each utterance is therefore characterized by a particular referentially semantic content – something which determines how the utterance will be.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, an utterance can be everything from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday life dialogue to a large novel or a scientific text.

However, regardless of how varied they may be, utterances have common structural traits. The first constitutive feature has already been mentioned above. It concerns the boundaries of the utterance, the change of speakers. The second feature is closely linked to the first. This concerns the finalization of the utterance. The change of speaking subjects can only take place when the speaker has said or written everything she or he wishes to say at a particular moment or under particular circumstances. According to Bakhtin (1986), the most important criterion for the finalization of the utterance is the possibility of responding to it, of assuming a responsive attitude towards it. The third feature is the relation of the utterance to the speaker her- or himself, the author of the utterance, and to the other participants in speech communication. The utterance is made by an individual human being, and therefore Bakhtin (1986) argues that there is an individual style to the utterance. He also claims that expressive intonations such as emotions and evaluation belong in the utterance and not in the words themselves. He asserted that emotions, evaluation and expression are not in the words of language, but are “born” in the process of making an utterance (p.87). Each utterance is therefore individual, unique and unrepeatable. However, the utterance does not only exist for the speaker her- or himself:

*Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character. Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the community of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response (“response” in italics) to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word “response” here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account (p.91).*

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<sup>9</sup> Bakhtin paid great attention to this particular aspect, and it is in this connection the notion of *speech genres* occurs. I will deal with speech genres in Chapter six.

Each utterance is therefore filled with various kinds of responsive reactions or answers to other previous utterances. An utterance is also pointing ahead. The speaker assumes somebody who listens to what she or he is saying, and thus expects an answer in the future. The “dialogic overtones” are thus clearly apparent in the utterance, or to put it in Bakhtin’s (1986) words again “(...) all our utterances (including creative works), are filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of “our-own-ness” ” (p.89).

The concept of utterance is inherently linked with the term voice, as an utterance can only exist if it is produced by a voice. According to what has been stated above, a voice will always have a particular intonation or accentuation which reflects the values behind the speaker. At the same time, a voice can never exist in isolation from other voices. For instance, the voice producing the utterance is related to voices that have created previous utterances and it points ahead to the listeners and participants and thus future voices. In the formulation of an utterance, a voice responds in some way to previous utterances and anticipates the responses of other, succeeding ones. Any utterance therefore always has an addressee, whose responsive understanding the speaker seeks. Bakhtin (1986) did not limit the concept of addressee to only those speakers in the immediate speech situation. Instead the voice or voices to which an utterance is addressed may be temporally, spatially and socially distant:

*This addressee can be an immediate participant-interlocutor in an everyday dialogue, a differentiated collective of specialists in some particular area of cultural communication, a more or less differentiated public, ethnic group, contemporaries, like-minded people, opponents and enemies, a subordinate, a superior, someone who is lower, higher, familiar, foreign, and so forth (p.95).*

From the Bakhtinian point of view, the word is thus interindividual. It is by nature always resonant with a multitude of other voices and it thus continually seeks an answer from other words embodied in other voices (Morris 1994). Therefore the word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. Of course, the speaker has her or his own right to the word, but the listener or the other participants also have their right to the words being uttered. Also previous voices, voices that are heard in the words before the author came upon them have their right to the words being used. Every word thus has multiple voices, voices that are sometimes infinitely distant, unnamed almost undetectable, and voices resounding nearby and simultaneously (Bakhtin 1986). Wertsch (1991) therefore suggests that we should use the plural form “voices” rather than the singular “voice” when talking about Bakhtin’s theory. In this study it will appear that Ann has not developed her skills as a teacher independently and isolated from the surrounding world. On the contrary, it will be obvious that her voice both is and has been

intertwined with surrounding voices, that of her pupils, the pupils' parents, her colleagues, principals, the voices of various national curricula prevailing at different phases of her career and so forth.

### Dialogicality

As mentioned above, the principle of dialogicality is present in one way or another in all of Bakhtin's writings. Dialogue is used as an opposition to monologue that refers to any discourse which seeks to deny the dialogic nature of existence. Monologue refuses to recognize the notion of an addressee, and pretends to be and to have the last word (Morris 1994). The concept of dialogue occurs when Bakhtin talks about intramental processes, using such terms as inner dialogue or inner speech (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994b), and it occurs when he speaks about intermental processes, claiming that any utterance is a link in a chain of other utterances and that any individual utterance reflects both previous and future utterances (Bakhtin 1986). The dialogue concept thus means that none of the things we say or do, whether we speak, listen, write, read or think, occurs in a vacuum. For further exploration of this issue I will first focus on meaning as dialogic, second on understanding as dialogic and third on value or belief as dialogic.

In his writings, Bakhtin paid great attention to the concept of meaning, of course claiming that meaning is also dialogic in nature. He asserted that there is no ready-made meaning that is transferred or handed over from one to the other. Rather, meaning develops or takes form in the process of interacting. A message is not transmitted from one to another, but rather constructed between the participants in the process of interaction (Bakhtin 1986). From Bakhtin's treatment of meaning, it is evident that he viewed it as an active process rather than a static entity. He said that meaning can come about only when two or more voices come into contact, for instance when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of a speaker. His insistence on taking both voices into account reflects his ideas on addressivity (Wertsch 1991).

The concept of understanding is closely connected to meaning. Any understanding of speech or an utterance is responsive. Bakhtin (1986) states that: "Even understanding itself is dialogic" (p.121). The listener either agrees or disagrees with the utterance, augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on. Thus in the process of understanding, the listener strives to match the speaker's word with a counter word (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a):



*To understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find the proper place for it in the corresponding context. For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words. The greater their number and weight, the deeper and more substantial our understanding will be (p.35).*

An utterance is not always followed immediately by an articulated response. An active responsive understanding of what is heard can be directly realized in action, or it can remain a silent responsive understanding with some kind of delayed reaction. Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behaviour of the listener. In this way, all understanding is actively responsive. The speaker her- or himself is further oriented towards such an actively responsive understanding. She or he does not expect passive understanding that only duplicates the speaker's own ideas. On the contrary, the speaker expects response, agreement, sympathy, execution and so forth (Bakhtin 1986).

Bakhtin pointed out that speakers always shape an utterance not only to the object of discourse, what they are talking about and their immediate addressee, but also whom they are speaking to. As mentioned above, the utterance is also shaped according to the speaker's particular value or belief. In fact, this value is the *a priori* of all speech (Holquist 1986). The dialogic perspective implies that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else, and in this way any utterance necessarily has some dialogic relation to value. The speaker or the author of the utterance thus presupposes a higher superaddressee (Bakhtin 1986). She or he does so with a greater or lesser awareness. Bakhtin says:

*In various ages and with various understandings of the world, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court history, science and so forth) (Bakhtin 1986, p.126).*

As stated above, the dialogic perspective implies that nothing can be perceived unless it is set up against the perspective of something else. Therefore, no utterance can be put together without value judgements, and consequently, it has an evaluative orientation. This evaluation determines that a particular referential meaning may enter the purview of the speaker. When people change their minds, it is because of evaluation. A change of meaning is therefore always re-evaluation (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a). These ideas are interesting in a study where the focus is on how a teacher interprets, reflects and realizes the society's demand for inclusive education.

Vygotsky and Bakhtin were contemporaries living in the same country. They never met and they never referred to one another in their writings. However, their texts or utterances

have dialogic relationship in a growing number of scientific works on human development (Zinchenko 1985, Wertsch 1991, Dysthe 2001, Dysthe & Igland 2001, Igland & Dysthe 2001, Hundeide 2001). Bakhtin (1986) says:

*Any survey of the history of any scientific question (independent, or included in scientific work on a given question) also produces dialogic comparisons (utterances, opinions, viewpoints) of the utterances of scientists who did not and could not know anything of one another. Here the shared nature of the problem gives rise to dialogic relations (p.124).*

Here “the shared nature of the problem” is connected to their ideas on human development. The dialogic perspective outlined by Bakhtin and the developmental perspective examined by Vygotsky enable us to see human beings as social and cultural creatures. At the same time it is very important to understand that the two perspectives also enable us to see that human beings are not passive respondents to the social and cultural situation in question. On the contrary, as human beings we are always and continually critically appropriators of the social and cultural tools we and others produce (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain 2001).

### **Methodological Concerns**

Vygotsky’s developmental approach and Bakhtin’s dialogic approach are useful when it comes to acquiring insight into Ann’s current educational practice as well as how it is connected both to her past and her present historical, social and institutional settings. Before approaching the research field, however, it is useful to add a few additional comments on methodological issues. As stated above, both Vygotsky and Bakhtin argued for the need to go beyond the isolated individual when trying to understand human development and functioning. When using socio-cultural perspectives as a theoretical framework, the challenge is therefore to examine and understand how human actions are related to the social context in which they occur and to consider how and where they occur in growth. The task for a socio-cultural analysis is thus to find a way to avoid the pitfalls of individualistic and societal reductionism. Mediated action as a unit of analysis provides a means of doing this (Wertsch 1998). Before exploring this issue, I find it necessary to examine the concept of unit of analysis.

### **Unit of Analysis**

Above we have seen that Bakhtin regarded the utterance to be the real unit of analysis. The utterance captures both the individual and the collective or socio-cultural context, and it captures the past, the present and the future. We have also seen that Vygotsky was concerned

with the genetic, historical dimensions of human development. He was, however, also focused on questions concerning units of analysis. Vygotsky (1962/2000) said: “By *unit* (italics in original) we mean a product of analysis which, unlike elements, retains all the basic properties of the whole and which cannot be further divided without losing them” (p.4). Bakhtin and Vygotsky’s occupation with units of analysis is not exceptional. Throughout history many scholars have dealt with the problem of how to understand complex wholes. A major approach has been to break down the complex whole into its constituent parts, which are supposedly easier to grasp. The nature of the complex whole is then explained on the basis of an understanding of these parts (van der Veer 2001). When warning against the breaking down of the whole complex into elements, Vygotsky (1962/2000) employed an analogy from chemistry about the relationship between water on the one hand, and the elements of oxygen and hydrogen on the other:

*It may be compared to the chemical analysis of water into hydrogen and oxygen, neither of which possesses the properties of the whole and each of which possesses properties not present in the whole. The student applying this method in looking for the explanation of some property of water – why it extinguishes fire, for example – will find to his surprise that hydrogen burns and oxygen sustains fire. These discoveries will not help him much in solving the problem. (...) Nothing is left to the investigator but to search out the mechanical interaction of the two elements in the hope of reconstructing, in a purely speculative way, the vanished properties of the whole (p.3).*

Vygotsky’s deep interest in methodological problems of science and in particular with the units of analysis is present at various points in his writings particularly when he is describing his own studies and in his critique of other researchers’ methodological approaches. It is with these writings in mind that Zinchenco (1985) has outlined seven criteria in Vygotsky’s concept of the unit of analysis. For the purpose of this study, I will present four of these. First, a unit must not be a diffuse, syncretic whole of elements, something that combines everything with everything else. It should rather be an integrated whole. Second, the unit of analysis must be a living part of the whole. It must be a unified system that cannot be broken down any further: it may be possible to break the whole into elements but it will no longer be a living and unified unity. Third, the unit must maintain the characteristics of the unified whole, though internal contradictions and oppositions may exist. Fourth, the unit of analysis must be capable of development, including self-development. It must possess the appropriate inherent properties and the potential for being transformed into something that differs from its initial form (Zinchenco 1985).

## Mediated Action as Unit of Analysis

The units Vygotsky selected in his own research did not always correspond to his own ideas and the requirements he himself had formulated (Wertsch 1985, Zinchenko 1985). On the basis of Vygotsky's ideas presented above, Zinchenko (1985) suggests that we use "tool mediated-action" as a unit of analysis.<sup>10</sup> When action is given analytic priority, human beings are viewed as coming into contact with and creating their surroundings, as well as themselves, through the actions in which they engage (Wertsch 1991). Thus action, rather than human beings or the environment considered in isolation, provides the entry point into the analysis.

In these actions individuals typically employ mediational means such as tools and language. According to this view it is possible to make an analytic distinction between action and mediational means. I will, however, follow Wertsch's line of reasoning as presented on page sixteen and claim that the relationship between action and mediational means is so fundamental that it is more appropriate when referring to the individual involved to speak of the "individual(s)-acting-with-mediational-means" rather than to speak simply of the "individual(s)" (Wertsch 1991). This is because when using a socio-cultural approach in the study of Ann, I cannot study her independently or isolated from the mediational means she employs in her actions. The fact that cultural tools are involved means that the socio-cultural presence of the action is always incorporated in my analysis.

From what has been stated above, we can say that almost all human action is mediated action. Therefore it is of course impossible to provide a complete list of action forms and mediational means. Wertsch (1998) has instead outlined some basic pointers that characterize mediated action. First, he follows Vygotsky's line of thought when claiming that mediated action is characterized by an irreducible tension between the individual agent and the mediational means. The essence of examining the agent and cultural tools in mediated action is to examine them as they interact. Any attempt to reduce the account of mediated action to one or the other two of these elements runs the risk of destroying the phenomenon under investigation. According to Wertsch (1998), it may sometimes be productive to abstract these aspects as part of an analytic strategy. In the analytic process of isolating the elements, we need to keep in mind that they are phenomena that do not really exist independently of each other. Second, he claims that mediated action typically has multiple simultaneous goals, and that these goals may often be in conflict. What this means is that in most cases mediated

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<sup>10</sup> By doing so Zinchenko is inspired first and foremost by Vygotsky's ideas on the unit of analysis, and second, by the thoughts outlined by A.N. Leontèv (1981) in the cultural-historical activity theory. I will return to the cultural-historical activity theory in Chapter nine.

action cannot be adequately interpreted if we assume it is organized around a single, identifiable goal. Instead, multiple goals, often in interaction and sometimes in conflict, are typically involved. His third claim is closely connected to Vygotsky's ideas of a genetic or developmental method. Agents, cultural tools and the irreducible tension between them always have a particular past and are always in the process of undergoing further change. Mediated action is therefore always situated on one or more developmental paths. In my focus on Ann, on her development as a teacher and on how she deals with inclusive education in her current classroom it is important to find appropriate units of analysis that mediate her actions within a socio-cultural setting. Narrative research offers an opportunity to define a researchable unit of analysis that incorporates all the criteria outlined above (Gudmundsdottir 2001).

## Chapter 3

### Approaching the Research Field

On our way through life we have continuous dialogic interactions and experiences both with our surrounding world and with ourselves (Bakhtin 1986). All these are woven together in a seamless web, and in this way they may appear enormous in their complexity. One way of structuring our experiences is to organize them into meaningful units. Such a meaningful unit could be a story, a narrative. In Latin the noun *narratio* means a narrative or a story and the verb *narrare* to tell or narrate (Heikkinen 2002). A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant to the narrator and her or his audience. It has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end (Denzin 1989a). For most people, storytelling is a natural way to recount experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life, creating a reasonable order out of experience. Not only are we continually producing narratives to order and structure our life experiences, we are also constantly being bombarded with narratives from the social world we live in. We create narrative descriptions for ourselves and others about our experiences, and we also develop narratives to make sense of the behaviour of others (Zellermayer 1997). According to Polkinghorne (1988) people without narratives do not exist. Life itself may thus be considered a narrative, and inside this there are a number of other stories.

When I want to find out how Ann deals with inclusive educational practice in her ordinary classroom activities and how she has developed into the teacher she is today, I must pay attention to narratives from her present and past experiences. When focusing on narratives as units of analysis, it may at first glance appear as if the individual is being favoured over the social context (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). However, when narratives are looked upon within the framework of socio-cultural theory it is important to remember Wertsch's (1991) thoughts about the irreducible interlinking between the individual and her or his mediational means. When individuals are telling their stories they use mediational means, something that inevitably connects them to their institutional, cultural and social setting. What has to be pointed out time and again is that the stories that occur through the process of narrative research are looked upon as mediated action that captures both the individual voice of the

research subject<sup>11</sup> and the other voices present in the context. According to Bakhtin (1986), these could be past, present and future voices.

### ***Narrative Research***

Narrative research is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, chiefly because teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially “lead” storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). Narrative research is thus the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers collect these stories and then write narratives of experience (Gudmundsdottir 2001). When reading about narratives and narrative research, one gets the feeling that the focus of attention appears to go in many different directions: Very often, the concept of narrative is used in connection with how to represent a qualitative research study. Thus, it is maintained that a case study, a biographical study, a phenomenological study or an ethnographic study, can have a narrative form of representation (Creswell 1998). The narrative representation seems in particular to be connected to teacher biographies and autobiographies (Goodson 1992). Within this tradition it even seems as if the terms biography and narrative are used synonymously.

Others focus on the narrative approach as a method of inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, Carter 1993, 1995, Gudmundsdottir 1997, 2001). It is thus looked upon as a research genre situated within the qualitative or interpretive research family. Other researchers claim that the narrative approach is not a method, but rather a frame of reference in a research process where the attention is paid to narratives as producers and transmitters of reality (Heikkinen 2002). My point of view is that the narrative approach is a frame of reference, a way of reflecting during the entire inquiry process, a research method and a mode of representing the research study. According to this point of view, the narrative approach is both the phenomenon and the method (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

### **Basic Claims of Narrative Research**

When reading about the narrative research approach, we find three basic assertions. We have already seen the first in the introduction to this chapter; that is that human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives. Second, narrative researchers maintain that the

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<sup>11</sup> A main characteristic of narrative research in this chapter is the collaboration process between the researcher and her or his research subjects. Within this approach the research subject is regarded as a collaborator rather than an informant guided by the agenda of the researcher (Altork 1998). This is the reason why I prefer the notion of research subject rather than the more traditional term informant. Other terms I could just as easily have chosen are the notions of collaborator and participant.

stories that are told depend on the individual's past and present experiences, her or his values, the people the stories are being told to, the addressees, and when and where they are being told. The third claim, closely connected to the second, concerns the multivoicedness that occurs in the narratives.

Narrative is regarded as “the primary form by which human existence is made meaningful” (Polkinghorne 1988, p.1). Following this line of thought, human experience is always narrated. The attention in narrative research is consequently focused on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell. According to Carter (1993) human beings come to understand sorrow or love or joy in particularly rich ways through the characters and incidents we become familiar with in novels or plays. The richness and nuances cannot be expressed in definitions or abstract propositions. They can only be demonstrated or evoked through a story. Narratives are therefore inevitably linked to language. The narration of experience comes naturally, like learning a language. This means that young children learn to tell all sorts of narratives, short and long, as they gradually master the language. As children experience through participation in all sorts of social events in their infinite varieties, they also learn to tell stories about them. In this way they gradually learn what kind of meaning culture has imposed upon the various events (Gudmundsdottir 2001). Thus, storytelling as a way of recounting and creating order out of experience starts in childhood and continues through all stages of our lives. When teachers talk about their lives as teachers they naturally use narratives (Butt, Raymond, McCue & Yamagishi 1992, Casey 1992, Measor & Sikes 1992).

People tell and retell their stories of experience both for themselves and for others in various social settings, at different times and to different addressees. This means that the perspective on our experiences constantly changes form as we gain new experiences and engage in dialogues with other people (Bakhtin 1986). Stories cannot be viewed simply as abstract structures isolated from their cultural context. They must be seen as rooted in society and as experienced and performed by individuals in cultural settings (Bruner 1984). Human knowledge and personal identities are therefore continually constructed and revised. Experience of the world, like each person's perception of her or himself, is a continuously developing narrative which is constantly forming and changing form. Within this view human knowledge is regarded as a plurality of small narratives, local and personal in nature, that are always under construction (Heikkinen 2002). There is no single, dominant or static reality, but rather a number of realities that are constructed in interactions and dialogues. Human knowledge of the world is thus relative. As mentioned above, it is dependent upon the



individual's past and present experiences, her or his values, the people the stories are being told to, the addressees, and when and where they are being told (Bakhtin 1986). Bruner (1984) states that you always create or hear about a narrative in terms of your own life experiences and background. Research from this perspective perhaps has an ability to produce some kind of authentic view upon reality, although the belief in the potential attainment of an objective reality or truth is rejected (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

The narrative approach is situated within qualitative or interpretive research method (Gudmundsdottir 1997, 2001). A qualitative approach to the field of investigation means that researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actor's point of view, are thus crucial (Erickson 1986). This understanding of qualitative research directs our focus on to the concept of voice. Several education researchers refer to the voice as the research subject's voice. However, scholars (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, Hoel 1997, Gudmundsdottir 2001, Elbaz-Luwisch 2002, Moen, Gudmundsdottir & Flem 2003) within the narrative approach increasingly use the term voices rather than voice because they recognize that the narratives are in part personal stories shaped by knowledge, experiences, values and feelings of the person who is telling them. At the same time they are also collective stories that are shaped by the addressees and the cultural, historical and institutional settings in which they occur.

Thus several voices occur in the process of narrative research. "One finds no singular voice as any claimed voice is a heteroglossia of culturally situated voices that ventriloquate through the singular voice that is claimed by the individual" (Gudmundsdottir 2001, p.235). The process of claiming voice is therefore basically an interaction between the individual's beliefs and experiences and past, present and future external voices. To use Vygotsky's concepts, it is an interaction between intermental and intramental processes. Narratives are thus mediated actions that connect the individual and the social context. In this way there are a multitude of voices within an individual's narratives. All the three basic claims presented here are closely linked to Vygotsky and Bakhtin's ideas as outlined in Chapter two. It is important to keep these in mind during the entire research process in the study of Ann.

### **The Narrative Research Process**

In narrative research stories of experience are formed through discussions with the research subject in the form of a dialogue. A number of data-collection methods can be used as the researcher and the research subjects work together in this collaborative dialogic relationship.

Data can be in the form of field notes, journal records, interview transcripts, own and other's observations, storytelling, letter writing, autobiographical writing, documents such as school and class plans, newsletters and writing such as rules, principles, pictures (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). For the purpose of this study, I would like to add that data can also be in the form of video-recordings. However, in my opinion literature about narrative research appears to be quite vague about concrete inquiry procedures. In this section I will focus on three themes that appear to be recurrent in discussions on the narrative research approach. First and foremost is the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects. The second is how a narrative is developed from an oral, told story into a written text, and finally we have the hermeneutic or interpretive nature of narrative research.

Several researchers (Kyratzis & Green 1997, Connelly & Clandinin 1990, Altork 1998, Heikkinen 2002) have examined the collaborative, dialogic nature of the relationship between the researcher and her or his research subjects. What seems to be important when discussing this issue is the necessity of time and space for developing a caring situation in which both the researcher and the research subjects feel comfortable. It is further claimed that a non-judgemental attitude (Fetterman 1998) and a sense of equality between participants is particularly important in narrative inquiry because teachers have traditionally experienced that they do not have their own voice in the field of educational research. They may find it difficult to feel empowered to tell their stories. The ideal is that the narrator and the researcher reach a joint intersubjective understanding of the narratives that occur during the research process (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

However, a dilemma may occur if the researcher and the research subjects interpret specific events in different ways, or if a research subject questions the interpretive authority of the researcher (Gudmundsdottir 2001). Closely connected to this dilemma is the question of whether the research subjects always have a better appreciation of the ways they are acting than the outside observer (Phillips 1997). Must the accounts of those individuals whose customs or actions are being explained always be accepted as the correct account of the phenomenon in question? According to Phillips (1997) it is difficult to tell if a particular story that is told is a reflection on the facts of the case or whether it has been shaped by the storyteller. The dilemma outlined here could and should be solved by including both the researcher's and the research subject's points of view in the research report (Hoel & Gudmundsdottir 1999). Perhaps the multivoicedness of the narrative would appear more clearly in this way than it would if the researcher and the research subject have a joint understanding of the narratives that occur during the inquiry process. In the last section of this

chapter, where I give an account of the research process of this study, I suggest that there were no conflicting views between my research subject and myself in this study. The narrative about Ann and the number of other narratives that occur within the whole story are rather the result of a joint intersubjective understanding that developed during the research process (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

Creating a narrative implies a process whereby an accurate story that occurs in collaboration between the researcher and the research subjects becomes fixed in a written text. Ricoeur (1981) has developed useful theories on understanding this process. First, in the dialogic collaboration process between the researcher and the research subjects, one or more stories are written down and become fixed in a text. This means that the narrative in question is no longer tied to the moment it occurred. Second, by fixing the narrative into a text, it becomes “autonomized.” It has been detached from the moment it occurred in and has assumed consequences of its own. Third, the narrative may in this way assume importance that goes beyond the initial situation and becomes relevant in other contexts. The story has been emancipated from its origin and can enter into new interpretive frames where it might assume meanings not intended by the persons involved in the original event. Fourth, the narrative that is fixed in a text is thus considered as “open work” where the meaning is addressed to those who read and hear about it. Looking upon narrative as an open text enables us to engage in a range of interpretations. When examining Ricoeur’s ideas here, it is not difficult to see the similarities between these and Vygotsky’s ideas on the unit of analysis.

Creating a narrative is primarily a process that organizes human experiences into meaningful episodes. The “raw material” for the narratives comes from the intermental life experiences and intramental images that are not available for direct observation. The individual stories that emerge in texts in the creation of narratives are, however, available for direct observations and interpretation (Polkinghorne 1988). In this way, any narrative functions at two levels. The first level comprises the story that has been carefully selected out of a complex situation and has been fixed in a narrative. By selecting one episode from a complex social situation, the event has already been interpreted and infused with meaning: meaning ascribed to it by the narrative under construction, which is the second level (Gudmundsdottir 1997, 2001).

Implicit in what has been discussed so far, is that narrative research is an ongoing interpretive or hermeneutic process. The interpretation starts immediately when one story is selected out of a vast amount of other possible stories, and it continues during the entire research process. Above we have seen that both the researcher and the research subjects

participate in this interpretive process during the entire research period. We have also seen that the interpretation does not end with the finished research report. Quite to the contrary, the final narrative opens for a range of interpretations of others who read and hear about the report (Ricoeur 1981).

I will end this section with some thoughts on the interpretive role of the researcher. Often, researchers occupied with teaching practice are former teachers themselves (Nilssen, Wangsmo-Cappelen & Gudmundsdottir 1996, Reinertsen, Nordtømme, Eidsvik, Weidemann & Gudmundsdottir 1996, Moen and Gudmundsdottir 1997, Postholm, Granum & Gudmundsdottir 1999, Madsen, Svendsen & Gudmundsdottir 2000, Pettersson 2000, Flem 2000). When they enter the classroom to collect their data, the scene is so familiar that it may be difficult to see anything at all. The familiar everyday life of a classroom may, however, be made unfamiliar by looking at it through theory. Theoretical perspectives make it possible to gain further understanding and insight. Theory enables the researchers to achieve an interpretive understanding of aspects of social life (Bruner 1984). Researchers using a narrative approach employ theory in systematic ways both when they approach the field and when they give reasons for the interpretations (Gudmundsdottir 1992). Thus it is the constant interaction between theory and empirical data that makes it possible to understand and gain new insight. The stories that occur within the narrative research approach are therefore always told and interpreted within a theoretical framework (Gudmundsdottir 2001).

### The True Narrative

According to Bakhtin's (1986) notion of utterance and addressee, the narratives may differ depending on to whom the stories are being told. I have touched upon this topic several times, and it naturally raises the question of whether the stories are true or not. When it comes to this crucial element, it is important to remember the second basic claim of narrative research. In fact, this fundamental assertion makes the question irrelevant. According to this view there is no static and everlasting truth. Instead there are different subjective positions from which we experience and interpret the world (Peshkin 1988, 1991).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the question about

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<sup>12</sup> This point could be illustrated by the empirical work of two researchers. Grant (1991) and Gudmundsdottir (1991) were doing fieldwork with the same teacher, although at different times. In developing their stories, both Grant and Gudmundsdottir selected episodes and combined the selected episodes into a narrative. Both researchers wrote narratives about the way Susan Hall, the teacher organized the learning of literature and asked questions about the literary work. Both researchers infused the episodes with different meaning because they were working from different theoretical perspectives. Grant was telling a narrative about Susan Hall as a teacher of critical thinking. Gudmundsdottir was developing a narrative about Susan Hall as an excellent teacher displaying impressive pedagogical knowledge. According to Susan Hall, both narratives about her are true. They

the truth seems to be a recurring theme within literature on narrative research of educational practice. Phillips (1997), for example, claims that a narrative often must be true to be considered acceptable. The point he is making is that we do not always know, or are not always conscious of, or honest about, the reasons underlying our own actions. Consequently, he suggests that the account of an outsider may be more veridical than the first-person story of the research subject. He argues that on some important occasions, such as when policy or future important actions hinge on the acceptance of the narrative, it is particularly important for the account in the narrative to be true (Phillips 1997).<sup>13</sup> In the discussions of this issue, Phillips does not touch upon questions such as what truth, whose truth, from what context, what social location and so on.

Denzin (1989a) on the other hand, contends that narratives are fictional statements containing a varying degree of real lived lives. During the collaborative process of collecting and producing narratives of experience, the researcher and her or his research subjects inevitably remove themselves from the real lived event that was the starting point for the story in question. Consequently, narrative research always presents stories about remembered events and how these were experienced. The notions of facts, facilities and fiction are used in this reasoning. Facts refer to events that are believed to have occurred and facilities describe how those facts were lived and experienced by the interacting individuals. Fiction then is a truthful narrative which deals with the facts and facilities and which is faithful to them both. True stories are thus stories that are believed (Denzin 1989a).

Bruner (1984) follows the same line of thinking when he makes a distinction between a life as lived, experienced and told. A life lived, is what actually has happened. A life experienced consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person whose life it is. A life told, is a narrative or several narratives influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience and by the social context. One may imagine a life which is lived, experienced and told about in a way which depicts a complete relationship between these three terms. In real life there are, however, inevitable gaps between reality, experience and expression (Bruner 1984). Goodson (1992) has developed Bruner's ideas and claims that in narrative research there are not three but four levels. A life is told by

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are true even if the narrative descriptions of her are so different that a stranger reading them would think that they refer to two different teachers.

<sup>13</sup> The point Phillips is making here, was especially interesting in January/February 2003, as we witnessed the political discussions on what was called the "Iraqi conflict." The U.S. President, George W. Bush, and the U.K. Prime Minister, Tony Blair, appeared to have one story about Iraq and Saddam Hussain, while countries such as France, Germany and Russia seemed to have another version.

the person who lived and experienced it, and it is further retold when the storyteller and the researcher collaborate to produce an intersubjective understanding of the narrative. According to Goodson (1992) the relationship between life as lived and experienced and life as told and rendered in text is distinctive. In this study, where one particular teacher is in focus, it is important to remember that the written text is a representation of her life as a teacher. It is not her life as lived or experienced (Bruner 1984). However, the written text should be produced in a way which achieves as much harmony as possible across the levels. When touching upon this issue, it is also important to remember that narrative inquiry in the social sciences is a form of empirical narrative in which empirical data and theory is central to the work. Thus, in every narrative from educational practice there will always be some “facts” (Denzin 1989a) or “particles of truth” (Lincoln 2000).

When touching upon the issue of whether the story is true or not, another question naturally arises, that is how to ensure the quality of the study. This is a recurrent concern when reading about qualitative methods in general (Wolcott 1990, Miles & Huberman 1994, Creswell 1998, Krathwohl 1998). Here it is repeatedly argued to use other terms than those used within the quantitative research tradition. However, the language and criteria for narrative inquiry are continually under development. It is suggested that each researcher must seek for and defend the criteria that best apply to her or his work (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). Wolcott (1990) points to several important aspects when discussing how to ensure the quality of a study. Among other things, he maintains that in the qualitative research process the inquirer is in the field to be studied for a long period of time. The researcher also has to listen to her or his research subjects because the most important aim is to capture the research subject’s voice. He further points out the importance of beginning to write early, to report fully and to write fieldwork notes accurately. Moreover, the researcher has to be candid, and all the time aware of her or his own subjectivity. In this way, Wolcott (1990) claims that qualitative researchers are always striving “to not get it all wrong” (p.126), and bearing this in mind, I would suggest that narrative research is trustworthy or reliable because of the extensive data collection procedures and the whole narrative research process outlined above.

Writings focusing on how to ensure the quality of qualitative research, suggest several verification procedures. I will not go into detail on all of these, rather I will look at five of them as I consider them as relevant to this study. First, there is a focus on prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. As a researcher you are working with people day in and day out for a long period of time. This includes building trust with participants, learning the culture and checking if there is any misunderstanding or

misinformation. Second, in triangulation researchers make use of multiple and different sources of data. This process involves corroborating evidence from various sources to shed light on a theme or a perspective (Creswell 1998). Third, in negative case analysis, the researcher refines a working hypothesis as the inquiry advances in light of negative or disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman 1994). Fourth, in member checks the researcher solicits the research subject's view on the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Miles & Huberman 1994). This technique may be considered to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p.314). This verification procedure involves taking data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account. Fifth, with rich, thick description the researcher describes in detail the participants and the context. With such detailed description, the researcher enables readers to transfer information to other settings (Creswell 1998). All these verification procedures were used in this study, and I will return to them in the next part of this chapter where I explain the research process of the study.

### ***The Research Process***

Vygotsky (1978) said that if we are to understand human beings, their actions, thoughts and reflections, we have to understand them in a process of development, and where and when the individual in question grows. With his concept of dialogue, Bakhtin (1986) had similar ideas, as he focused on the irreducible dialogic relationship between the individual and her or his past, present and future surroundings. Consequently, in order to understand the individual you also have to pay attention to the context surrounding the individual in question.

As mentioned above, narratives are looked upon as mediated action that captures both the individual and her or his context. A narrative as unit of analysis satisfies Vygotsky's (1962/2000) ideas in the way that it is a living proportion of a unified whole that cannot be broken down further. A narrative maintains the characteristics of the unified whole, though internal contradictions and oppositions may exist. A narrative is further capable of development, including self-development. It also has the potential for being transformed into something that differs from its initial form (Gudmundsdottir 2001). The challenge in this study is therefore to capture narratives that tell us something about Ann and her past experiences and present context and practice.

## The Entrance into Ann's Classroom

Research subjects can be selected at random or on the basis of particular preferences. Selecting research subjects for the purpose at hand is the most suitable approach (Miles & Huberman 1994). In this study I wanted to explore how a teacher deals with the ideology of inclusion in her ordinary classroom activities, and I was also interested in the past experiences of the teacher in question. In the process of choosing a teacher, several criteria had to be fulfilled. The teacher had to have one or more children classified as having “special needs” in her or his class. The teacher in question would of course also have to be willing to let me, the researcher, enter the classroom for an indeterminate but most likely long period of time. She or he must also be open to collaborate during the data collection period and if necessary also after this period to talk about and discuss the data and the interpretation. Furthermore, the teacher had to be willing to let me use a video camera to record classroom activities, and to participate with me in conversations which were tape recorded and transcribed. Implicit in what is stated so far is the criteria that the teacher should like her or his work, enjoy talking about the teaching and enjoy reflecting on her or his practice. In other words, I wanted a teacher who enjoyed her or his work and was good at exploring the experiences of teaching.

With these criteria in mind I contacted the community's support services,<sup>14</sup> explained my research project, told them about the rationale for the study and asked if they could recommend some teachers. The support services responded positively, and I was given the names of four teachers working at four schools. The next step was to contact the principals of these schools. Again I presented my agenda and asked if I could contact the teacher recommended by the support services. They all responded positively to my request, and finally I could address the teachers in question. Once again, I explained my study and its rationale and asked if I could observe the class and the teaching. I also told each of them that this was an early stage in my research process, and that I was in the process of choosing a research subject. Therefore, they knew that I would not include all of them in my study. All the teachers accepted this, answered positively to my request and then I made an initial observation in each of these four classrooms. I found that all the teachers satisfied the criteria

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<sup>14</sup> The ideology or philosophy underlying the work of the support services is that its employees should spend as much time as possible out in the schools and kindergartens. The employees should be close to the people that need them, children with special needs, their parents and teachers. Those who are working in the support services therefore know both schools and kindergartens. They know the teachers, including those who could satisfy the criteria important for me in this study. In this way, the support services were the first gatekeeper (Creswell 1998) in my quest to find potential research subjects.



outlined above. After some reflection, I decided to ask Ann if she would like to be that person.

Several years ago, Ann and I were colleagues at the school where she is still working. We were both novice teachers. We never worked in a team together, and we were never in each other's classrooms so we had never collaborated closely. Nor did we become close friends, but I talked with her now and then during breaks just as I did with all my colleagues. We were both interested in our work and we talked about and reflected on our pupils and our teaching. Ann was open and friendly, and I remember I liked the way she talked about her pupils. Even though she was young at the time, the school's story (Clandinin & Connelly 1996) was already that she was the kind of teacher that managed her class and enjoyed her work.

During my career as a teacher, as a special needs teacher and as an employee in the support services (see Appendix 1, p.204-205) I have entered numerous classrooms and in one way or another I can feel how it is to be a pupil or a teacher in the classroom I am visiting. When entering Ann's classroom for the first time I felt there was a warm and friendly atmosphere. In this initial observation I observed her talking to her pupils with a calm voice. I saw her smile to them and they smiled to her. I heard them singing. I heard them laughing. I observed them working with the subject matter. I also observed that she had some challenging children in her class. I supposed that these children could easily have created some chaotic or difficult situations, but they did not do so during my first observation. At the same time, I also observed what I regarded to be a rather "loose structure". In particular, I was amazed to see how she dealt with the transition from one activity to another. However, all the children seemed to know what to do and what was expected of them in different situations. As a former teacher myself, I felt intuitively that Ann had some important stories to tell. I also felt that I would enjoy being in Ann's classroom for a period of time. I further knew it would be easy to collaborate with Ann, and that a sense of equality was already established between us (Connelly & Clandinin 1990).

After this initial observation, Ann was still interested in being the research subject of my study. The next step was to ask the municipal authorities for permission to carry out the research, to inform<sup>15</sup> and ask the pupils' parents if they agreed to letting me enter the classroom, and to formalize Ann's consent, (see Appendix 5A, p.218, 5B, p.219, 5C, p.220, 5D, p.221). I also contacted the Privacy Issues Unit of the Norwegian Social Science Data

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<sup>15</sup> Ann and I decided that she should send the parents a letter of information in which she presented me, the study and its rationale. Along with this letter, we also sent a consent form that the parents were asked to return to the school (see Appendix 5B, p.219, 5C, p.220).

Services concerning the establishment of an index of names, something that was regarded as unnecessary in my study.<sup>16</sup> With permission from Ann, the parents and the local authorities, I could start my research.

### Collecting Data from Ann's Past Experiences

Vygotsky focuses a great deal on the connection between past and present in his theory. We exist here and now, in this very minute, this second, and thus it is only the present moment that is real and tangible. However, while we are prisoners of the moment, being here and now, we also inevitably bring our past with us. What we have experienced and lived through earlier in life is always a part of our present, and while some of this is conscious and accessible to memory, other elements are unconscious and buried. The past is nevertheless a part of the present, and thus these two elements are linked. Bakhtin's thoughts on the utterance and the addressee further link the past and present dimensions with the future. The future is included because our acts in the present have a purpose, and hence they point into the future, linking the present to the future. The past, the present and the future can therefore not be regarded as different realities in life to be considered in isolation and separately; rather they are interwoven.

The only way I could gain access to Ann's past was through biographical interviews where she told stories and reconstructed some of her life experiences (Creswell 1998). The data collection started with biographical interviews focusing on her life as a teacher, even though parts of the interviews also touched upon her childhood and youth. These data provide us with only partial accounts of her life. Much more has happened, but we only have access to a small fraction of her life. When a life is told and later written, the text may attempt to cover the full sweep of a person's experiences, or it may be partial, focusing on a particular set of experiences deemed to be of importance (Goodson 1991a, 1991b).

Having the individual's journal, a sketch of her or his life may be a good starting point for a study (Denzin 1989a). In the first interview I asked Ann to identify an objective set of experiences in her life. I wanted to find facts about something that had already happened, and in so doing I used who, what, where and when questions (Glesne & Peshkin 1992). In this way I obtained facts on where and when she was born, where she went to school, when she had her teacher education, where and when she first started her career as a teacher, how many

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<sup>16</sup> The decision was based upon the fact that Ann who is the main focus of the study had consented in being the research subject. Another reason why it was regarded as unnecessary to establish an index of names was that all the proper names in the study are pseudonyms.

classes she had been teaching in and so on. The facts that were obtained from this conversation were written as a chronology (Creswell 1998).

The compulsory school in Norway has a duration of ten years. The children start at the age of six and finish at the age of sixteen. In some districts, the children can go to the same school during all those years, while in other districts there is a two-part system where compulsory primary and lower secondary school are two separate environments. Children then go to one school from first to seventh<sup>17</sup> grade and enter another school to take grades eight to ten. Ann's school is a compulsory primary school, where it is quite common that the pupils have the same teacher for several years. Consequently, Ann has had six classes during her career. She had her first class from second to sixth grade, her second class from first to sixth grade, the third class only for one year when the pupils were in the sixth grade, her fourth class for two years, when the pupils were in the first and second grades, the fifth class from first to sixth grade and finally, she started with her present class in the first grade. I wanted Ann to tell me about her experiences from these classes.

Interviewing may be conceptualized as the process of "getting words to fly" (Glesne & Pershkin 1992, p.63). As a researcher, I wanted my questions to stimulate verbal flights from Ann, my research subject. Before the biographical interviews, I made an overall interview guide (see Appendix 6 A, p.222) where the questions were rather open ended. With the facts as a starting point, I asked Ann about her various classes in chronological order, if she remembered any particular pupils, if she remembered pupils with special needs, I asked about pupils' parents, her colleagues, principals and the support services. I was very pleased to find that Ann had a great number of stories to tell. During these interviews I did what qualitative researchers should do, I "talked little and listened a lot" (Wolcott 1990 p.127). Only now and then did I add some further questions. Each of the four biographical interviews (see Appendix 3C, p.213) lasted for an hour. They were all tape recorded and transcribed. The data material from this part of the study thus amounts to 90 pages. As we will see, this data material enabled me to construct a narrative of Ann's past experiences.

### Collecting Data from Ann's Current Context and Practice

When it comes to capturing data from Ann's current context and experiences, I of course had other possibilities than when I was looking for data from her past. As mentioned above, there are a number of methods for collecting data as the researcher and the research subject work

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<sup>17</sup> Before 1997 the compulsory school was nine years long. At that time the compulsory primary school was from first to sixth grade, and the compulsory lower secondary school was from seventh to ninth grade.

together during the narrative research process (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). The data collection period lasted for a period of five months. During this period of time I was at the school observing and video recording activities in the classroom for nineteen days, and I had eight interviews with Ann. The interviews were focused on her inclusive practice and connected to observed and video recorded activities in her classroom. Within the field of qualitative research studies there is a great focus on capturing the context of the study. Thick, rich description is crucial when verifying the study in question (Creswell 1998).

As mentioned above, I was a teacher at Ann's school several years ago. I therefore knew the school and the area before entering it as a researcher. Moreover, I used several data sources to capture the context. I did not only talk with Ann during the above-mentioned interviews, I also had informal talks during breaks or on the phone when arranging a new meeting or cancelling another. I also socialized and had informal conversations with the other teachers in the staff room at the school during the data collection process. Furthermore, I had one interview with the principal where the topic was inclusive education at the school level. The dialogue between the two of us could be characterized as a semi-structured interview (Fontana & Frey 1998, 2000), as the principal also talked about anything she felt was of significance concerning inclusive education. After the data collection period was finished, she invited me to come and talk with the staff about inclusive education. The dialogue that occurred after my presentation enabled further insight into the school community. Finally, the data also includes documents such as the plan of the support services, the school's local plan, the class's plan for the year, weekly plans for my observation period, some letters that Ann sent to the pupils' parents, Sambu's <sup>18</sup> book and song, and documents concerning statistical facts about the district (see Appendix 3D, p.214). These multiple data sources enabled me to capture what Geertz (1973) calls the "cultural web" and write a narrative of her current context.

Parallel to collecting data from Ann's wider context, I also gathered data in her classroom. I had two days of observations before entering her classroom with the video-camera. The pupils were of course curious. Ann and I had talked about this in advance, and they were invited to come and look at the camera, to look into its lens and to ask questions about it. After this they did not seem to pay any particular attention to the camera, nor to me for that matter. This was also the intention of my observations, not to disturb or intrude on the ongoing activities in the classroom. I just interacted with the pupils casually and when they

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<sup>18</sup> Sambu is a teddy bear that seems to play a central role in the class. I will return to Sambu in Chapter nine.

addressed me. I remained a researcher and did not cross over the line into being a teacher. In this way, my role could be described as observer-as-participant (Adler & Adler 1994).

As members of a community we always and continually make observations and interpretation of the everyday world (Gudmundsdottir 1992). What distinguishes the observations of a social scientist from those of everyday-life actors is that the scientist or the researcher is systematic and purposive (Fontana & Frey 1998, 2000). The focus for my observations was inclusive education realized in Ann's classroom. In particular, I directed my focus on how she dealt with John and Paul, the two boys briefly presented in the introductory chapter. I brought a notebook into the classroom, divided the pages in two, and started to write my observations. On the left side of the divided page I wrote down my observations, and on the right side I noted immediate interpretations and also questions these observations gave rise to. These data amount to 106 pages of hand-written observation notes (see Appendix 3A, p.208-210). The video-recordings capture ordinary classroom activities such as when the teacher and the pupils are sitting in the class circle,<sup>19</sup> when the children enter the classroom in the morning or after breaks and when they are sitting at their desks working with subject matter. A total of 32 periods were video-taped (see Appendix 3B, p.211-212).

When entering Ann's classroom, I had a great deal of experience from the field. I was also in the process of reading relevant theory. The observations in the classroom together with my own experiences and the continuous reading of theory were all important sources for developing questions I wanted Ann to reflect upon. The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing (Glesne & Peshkin 1992). Parallel to the observations and video-recordings I therefore had conversations with Ann (see Appendix 3C, p.213). Through the dialogues with her, I wanted to capture her thoughts and reflections upon the activities and choices she made in connection with the teaching situation. I wanted to search for reflections on why something happened. I wanted to hear her explanations. I wanted to search for the insider's perspective (Erickson 1986). Before each interview I read my observation notes, watched video-recordings and made an interview guide (see Appendix 6B, p.223). Three of the interviews were video-recorded interviews where Ann and I together looked at classroom activities and where Ann reflected upon what had happened. Even if I had made an interview guide in advance before each conversation, they became a kind of mixture of structured and

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<sup>19</sup> When the pupils in Ann's class sit in a semi-circle facing the teacher and the blackboard, it is called the "class circle". The class circle is often used in Ann's class. Every day starts and ends in the class circle. It is also used when new material is being taught or when Ann has something she wants to talk to her pupils about.

unstructured dialogues (Fontana & Frey 1998, 2000) because other aspects could also arise during the conversations.<sup>20</sup> The main topic in all the interviews was how Ann deals with inclusive education in her ordinary classroom activities. The last interview also touched upon how she looks upon the ideology of inclusive education outlined in the national curriculum. Each of these eight interviews lasted about one hour, and the transcriptions amount to 184 pages. The observation notes, video recordings and interviews laid the foundation for constructing narratives from Ann's current practice.

### Developing the Narrative of Ann

Several years of experiences in the field, my growing interest in the topic of inclusion and the reading of theory helped me to develop the research question outlined in the introductory chapter (Miles & Huberman 1994). In collaboration with my research subject, I wanted to construct a narrative about how she deals with inclusive education and how she has developed into the teacher she is today. During the entire extensive data collection period, I repeatedly reflected upon how I should work with the data material to develop this narrative, and how the story should appear in written text. Even though some writers of qualitative scientific research claim that they use a narrative form of representation, I now and then think the narrative vanishes because the study in question is too divided into parts and/or because of an overwhelming amount of theory. In one way or another, it appears to be a challenge to grasp both the elements and the whole. In my opinion, the form of presentation therefore represents a challenge that perhaps should be explored in more detail within the field of narrative research. In spite of my critical comments here, I could not see any other solution than dividing the text into sections. Even if the past and the present are interwoven, I decided that these two dimensions still should be presented apart. As will be seen, I also had to thematize and split up Ann's current teaching in order to present her present practice. According to Gudmundsdottir (2001) creating a narrative text is basically a hermeneutic or interpretive process where the meaning of the parts is a function of the narrative as a whole, and the meaning of the narrative as the whole depends on the meanings of the parts. In what follows I will describe how the narrative about Ann was developed and fixed in this text.

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<sup>20</sup> In her comments on being a research subject, Ann says: "You have been very skilled in asking me questions about my current teaching and classroom practice. Only a person who has been a teacher herself can ask such questions, only a person who has had the full responsibility for a class herself. Therefore our conversations have been very useful to me. In fact they have been so relevant for my teaching that I have often made changes in my practice after a talk with you" (see Appendix 2, p.207).

In the first three biographical interviews, Ann told me some facts about her life and she reconstructed and told several stories from her past experiences, including narratives from all the classes she had been teaching. With these data in mind, I wrote a first draft of her biography. I then gave the draft, written as a chronology (Creswell 1998), to Ann to read, peruse for any mistakes and see if she wanted to add or delete anything. Ann only had a few minor comments on the draft, and these were cleared up during the last biographical interview. The interesting development as I worked on the draft was that three phases seemed to emerge through the text.

Ann had a great number of stories from her first years as a teacher. Then there was a period for some years where she remembered less. Finally, there was a new phase where Ann could recollect numerous stories. When we talked about this, Ann told me that she had never thought about it before, but now she saw that the one period was a challenging time in her private life. Denzin (1989b) describes pivotal events as the “key event” or the “epiphany”, and he further defines these as interactional moments and experiences that mark people’s lives. He distinguishes four types, the major event that touches the fabric of the individual’s life; the cumulative or representative events, experiences that continue for some time; the minor epiphany, which represents a moment in an individual’s life, and episodes or relived epiphanies, which involve reliving the experience. The second phase in the story of Ann’s past experiences represents cumulative events, experiences that continued for a period of time (Denzin 1989b). When Ann reflected upon her reading of the phases she said: “That was very exciting to read. I was really into it. I could recognize myself, that dividing my teacher history into three parts. That's just like it was, you know. It really has meaning for me” (int 112200, p.1). I suggested calling the different phases: “The good years”, “The heavy years” and “The exciting years”. Ann agreed, even if she claimed that the term “heavy” could just as easily have been “grey”. Thus, the verification procedure used in this process was member checking (Miles & Huberman 1994, Creswell 1998).

There are various types of biographical studies. Among these we find the life history, where the contextual background is important when writing about the individual in question (Goodson 1991a, 1991b, 1992). In a life history, the researcher reports on an individual’s life and how it reflects cultural themes about the society, personal themes, institutional themes and social history (Denzin 1989a). Needless to say, these ideas are quite concurrent with Vygotsky’s thoughts. Ann has been a teacher for twenty-five years. From the beginning of her teaching career up to today there has been a change in society’s attitudes concerning children with special needs. This has also been reflected in the three different national curricula during

this period of time. Ann's past experiences were therefore contextualized within the framework of these different national curricula. This part of the narrative about Ann is presented in Chapter four, entitled "Ann's Past Experiences".

With the story of Ann's past in my mind, I then turned my focus to the data on her current context and practice. To understand a human being, her or his actions, thoughts and reflections, you have to look at the environment, or the social, cultural and institutional context (Wertsch 1985, 1991) in which the particular individual operates. Within the framework of socio-cultural theory, this idea is repeatedly stated throughout this text. Together with all qualitative researchers Denzin (1989b) therefore talks about the importance of using "thick description" in the reports or writings of the study in question. By this he means that the narrative presents both the context and the web of social relationships. As mentioned above, thick description means that the researcher describes in detail the participants or the setting of the study. In this way, the inquirer enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics (Creswell 1998). In Chapter five, entitled "Ann's Current Context and Class", I attempt to give a rich, thick description of Ann's context. The data material used for developing this chapter is my own experiences from the community and the site (see Appendix 1, p.204-205), observation notes, conversations with Ann and the headmistress and documents presenting statistical information about the site. The verification procedures were my long engagement and observation in the field, triangulation of data and member checking (Miles & Huberman 1994, Creswell 1998).

During the entire data collection period concerning Ann's current practice my focus was her inclusive practice and, in particular, how she dealt with the two boys. Thus the research question became the best defence against being overwhelmed by the amount of data which was multiplying. In other words, it helped me to be selective during the entire research process. It is recommended that a start list of codes should be created prior to fieldwork because it forces the inquirer to tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data (Miles & Huberman 1994). When it comes to the topic of inclusive education, I have already stated that I had my own experiences from the field as well as theory on the topic. Carrying such baggage with me, it was particularly important to be aware of my own subjectivity (Peshkin 1988, 1991). In this study, the aim was to capture Ann's actions in the classroom and her reflections and thoughts on these actions. I wanted to have the insider's perspective on her own practice (Erickson 1986), so I had to be aware that I could not in



advance decide what to find. I needed to work more inductively in the way that I wanted my data to suggest empirically driven labels (Miles & Huberman 1994).

As mentioned above, the data material concerning Ann's current practice included observation notes, video-recordings and transcribed interviews. I started the analysis, or interpretation of data immediately (Ricoeur 1981, Gudmundsdottir 2001). At the same time I also read theory that could help me in my interpretation of the data material. These two processes, analysis of the data material and the reading of theory continued during the entire research period and I arrived at the fact that the data material could be clustered into four themes or analytical categories (see Appendix 4A, p.215-216, 4B, p.217): In Ann's class the school day is divided into various activities. The pupils appear to know how to behave during these activities. The first theme or analytical category is concerned with this issue and is presented in Chapter six, entitled "They have to participate in various activities", one of Ann's utterances (int 012401, p.6). Another recurring trait of Ann's practice is how she deals with transitions between the various activities. Already in my initial observation of Ann and her class my attention was drawn to what I regarded to be a rather loose structure in the class. In particular this phenomenon appeared in transition situations. The second theme presented in Chapter seven that looks at this issue, is entitled "The transitions have to be smooth and flexible", another of Ann's utterances (int 112900, p.11).

During my observations in the classroom, when watching the video-recordings and reading the transcribed interviews, my attention was further drawn to the interactions between the teacher and her pupils. I observed that she used a friendly voice when addressing the class as a whole, when talking to individual children in general and when talking with John or Paul. In the interviews she recurrently returns to the issue of interaction between her and the children. She says "Kids need to be seen" (int 012301, p.21), and this utterance is the heading of the third analytical category presented in Chapter eight. Early in the data collection period I became aware of activities where the children were meant to enjoy themselves as a group. Throughout the school day there were several activities where the pupils were together and had shared positive experiences. This theme is presented in Chapter nine and called "They need common, pleasant experiences" (int 101600, p.5). The four themes are all apparent in my observation notes, in the video-recordings and in the interviews with Ann, thus they appear to be recurring patterns of Ann's thoughts and behaviour (Fetterman 1998). All the themes were discussed with Ann. She agreed with my analysis and thus we reached a common understanding of the narratives that occurred during the research process (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). The verification procedures used in this process were triangulation,

member checking and my long engagement and observation in the field (Miles & Huberman 1994, Creswell 1998).

Chapter six, seven, eight and nine illustrating Ann's current inclusive practice are all organized in the same way: First, there is an introduction to the theme followed by a presentation of relevant theory after which Ann's reflections on the theme are introduced. The particular pattern of Ann's practice is then illustrated by means of a narrative from her classroom. Before the chapter ends with a discussion, the narrative is analyzed in light of the theory. Thus, as I see it two "prime movers" in the chapters concerning Ann's current inclusive practice; first, the empirical data and second, the theory used for analysis and interpretation.

Through cooperation in the research process, my research subject and I jointly put the pieces together in order to construct a meaningful whole. In this way, each of us has left our mark on both the process and the product (Gudmundsdottir & Flem 2001). The story of her past experiences presented in Chapter four, the account of her current context presented in Chapter five, and the stories from her current inclusive practice presented in Chapters six, seven, eight and nine will hopefully give life to a credible (Lincoln & Guba 1985) narrative.

## **Part II**

### **Ann's Past and Present Context**

## **Chapter 4**

### **Ann's Past Experiences**

The composition of national and local curricula and the restructuring of schools are of little value if they do not take the teacher into account. Teachers do not merely deliver the curriculum, they also develop, define and interpret it. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the classroom level that ultimately shapes the activities in classrooms (Hargreaves 1989/1993). Some people seem to think that you improve teaching mainly by developing better teaching methods, or improving instruction. They see training teachers in new classroom management skills, in active learning, cooperative learning, one-to-one counselling and the like as the main priority. However, as researchers, we have increasingly come to understand that teachers' development and improvement of teaching involve more than giving teachers new tricks to use.

Teachers teach in the way they do not just because of the skills they have or have not learned. The ways in which they teach are also connected to society's values, traditions and existing organizational framework, and the teachers' own beliefs, backgrounds and biographies. As researchers we have therefore come to recognize that the quality of teachers' classroom work is closely connected to the way they have developed and develop as people and as professionals within a particular social, cultural and institutional context. In this text, we have seen that these ideas are present in both Vygotsky and Bakhtin's writings. In particular, they appear in Vygotsky's writings on developmental or genetic analysis and in Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, presented in Chapter two.

Ann finished the first part of her teacher education in 1975, and she has been teaching ever since. During this period of time there has been a dramatic change in the Norwegian society's attitude to people with disabilities, something which of course has also influenced school policy and formulations in national curricula. Today we have an ideology of an inclusive school for everyone. However, when Ann started her teacher career, there was still a split system with special schools and regular schools.

#### ***A Historical Review***

The development towards a school for all pupils is actually seen as one of the most ambitious dimensions of educational policy in Norway (Vislie 1990). This particular educational reform started in the nineteenth century with the transformation of a highly segregated school system into the common and inclusive school for all pupils in the later part of the twentieth century.

This historical process can be traced by studying various official documents from the period in question. However, in this text I choose to focus mostly on how the developmental process appears in the formulations used in the national curricula of 1974, 1987 and 1997 because these are the prevailing curricula during Ann's teacher career.

### From Segregation to Inclusion

In the Education Act of 1739 it was stated that all pupils should have an equal formal opportunity to participate in the same education. At that time no differentiated or special education was offered. Everybody was given the same teaching irrespective of background and capacity, and consequently school suited some pupils better than others. Therefore as far back as 1881, children with special needs, those who were blind, deaf or mentally retarded, were given the right to education in special schools. That is, they could attend these schools if they were found to be "educatable". Some of the most severe mentally retarded were at home and others were placed in institutions where they were given limited or no education at all. Thus we can see that a process of segregation and exclusion started early in the nineteenth century. Only the non-disabled and "educatable" pupils were allowed inside the common compulsory school (Haug 2000).

As time went by, this was regarded as an unworthy situation. The next step was therefore to ensure all pupils an education, which offered a certain chance of success. For pupils with special needs, this education could be given in special schools and also in the common school that gradually opened up for those who previously had been segregated. The belief in opening the common schools to these pupils was based on the principle of adapted education and integration. Good intentions notwithstanding, this was most often undertaken in a system of organizational differentiation, where special education was normally given in a segregated form outside the classroom. The national curriculum of 1974 states:

*The assistance measures may include specially adapted teaching in the normal classroom, for pupils individually outside the normal classroom, in special groups and in classes. They can also be organized in special schools, in social-medicine institutions and as home teaching (p.66).*

The differentiated organization of schools became more and more complex and the chances the pupils with special needs or their parents had to influence the situation were limited. It was the educational and psychological expertise that decided what would be best for each pupil with special needs. Consequently, different professional groups and interests

directly or indirectly had the power and the obligation to decide what was best for each pupil. In the national curriculum of 1974 it was stated:

*Pupils who need special assistance measures constitute a heterogeneous group with multifarious and often complex difficulties and needs. (...) The school should as soon as possible seek to ascertain each pupil's need for assistance measures. (...) In some cases a comprehensive pedagogical- psychological evaluation will be required. (...) A medical examination may also be required (p.65)*

Extensive clarification and diagnoses were regarded as important and necessary. The pupil with special needs should be helped to function as best as possible in school, and later, in society, especially through strengthening and developing her or his weak sides. Thus the educational principle was compensation (Haug 2000). If we are to connect this view with one of the paradigmatic ways of looking at pupils with special needs, as outlined in Chapter one, the first way, the “psycho-medical” (Clark et al.1995), the “traditional approach” (Porter 1997) or the “individual approach” (Haug 2000) would be the best fit. Within this paradigm, the pupil in question is the problem; she or he owns the problem and must be individually treated to get rid of it.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the direction in Norwegian policy gradually changed, and there was a move towards an integrated inclusive school system, a system where there should be neither special schools nor segregation within the regular schools. It should rather be a school for all. Many teachers, special teachers, certain groups of parents and politicians from the non-socialist parties were opposed to this change. Those who agreed in the vision of a school for all were certain groups of parents and a number of teachers, researchers, interested citizens and politicians in the Norwegian Labour Party (Haug 1998).<sup>21</sup> In the national curriculum of 1987 it was stated:

*The school must manage to utilise the learning possibilities that are found in the pupil group. The teaching must be facilitated in such a way that all the pupils, including those who have special learning needs, benefit from being in the class community and from cooperation. The work forms and cooperative forms must give each pupil the possibility to contribute to the class community according to her or his own expectations and abilities (p.27).*

What is significant here is the acknowledgement of differences between individual pupils. Education should recognize that all pupils are different. Implicit in this view is a refocusing

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<sup>21</sup> According to Haug (1998) the two groups had different political strategies. The supporters wished first to have all pupils present in school, and then use that as the basis for developing the school for everyone. The skeptics on the other hand, wished to create the necessary conditions before proceeding to ensure that the pupils would receive an education at least as good as the one they had been given in the special schools.

away from the individual child, with the focus rather turning towards the mainstream schools and regular teachers and their ability to respond to a wide range of individual differences among their pupils (Dyson and Millward 1997). Therefore, if we are to connect this period to one of the different paradigmatic ways of looking at children with special needs, the second paradigm, the “interactive” or “organizational” approach (Clark et al.1995) or “system approach” (Haug 2000) would be the best fit.

In the current national curriculum, the idea of the inclusive school is formulated as the only option available. Within this ideology, all teaching is to be undertaken inside the class according to individual ability and interests. No one is to be excluded or segregated. Different groups should be together in schools without shedding their distinct identities or suffering any disadvantage because of them.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, within an ordinary Norwegian classroom, there are pupils with varying needs for adaptation of their learning environment. For some, only small changes to their learning environment are necessary, others require radical changes. The challenge for the teachers of today is therefore to continually define their teaching in accordance with their pupils’ specific needs and the available context (Stangvik 1997). In the curriculum of 1997 we find the following statement:

*All the pupils, including those with special difficulties in various areas, must be given challenges which correspond to their expectations and abilities. Individual adaptation is necessary so that everyone will receive equal opportunities to learn. (...) The compulsory school shall be an inclusive community. Pupils with special learning needs shall take part in the social, academic and cultural community in an equal way. This generally requires that all the pupils shall go to school in their home district and belong to a class and pupil community (p.58).*

What matters is what is taking place in the ordinary classroom activities. It is within this ideological framework that the demand for inclusion should be realized. If we are to connect the visions and ideology of the current period to some of the different paradigmatic ways of looking at pupils with special needs, the “organizational” (Clark et al. 1995) or “system approach” (Haug 2000) still may seem to be the best fit here.<sup>23</sup> This historical review on how

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<sup>22</sup> When focusing on an inclusive school for everyone, it is necessary to add a few comments. In Norway we still have special schools for the deaf and hearing impaired pupils. However, if these pupils prefer to attend the regular school in their local community, they have the right to do so. Furthermore, in our country there appears to be a growing number of children and young people with behavioral problems. Our authorities have therefore decided that these pupils may receive their education in other schools. Consequently, there has been a growth in alternative schools for pupils with problem behavior. What is important to note is the fact that these pupils can choose these alternative schools. They still have the right to attend the school in their local community.

<sup>23</sup> I do, however, wish to say that during the last few years there has been an extensive education program for all employees in the support services. This program, initiated by the authorities, has focused on both the individual child and the context. It thus appears to fit with the third paradigm outlined in Chapter one, the “anthropological model” (OECD 1994).

our educational system has developed from segregation and exclusion into a system of inclusion has been focused on the level of formulations (Haug 1998, 1999, 2000), and in particular on how these appear in the three national curricula that have been in force during Ann's career. Below I will examine the level of realization when describing how Ann has lived and experienced the changes that have taken place.

### ***Ann's Past Experiences***

In Chapter three we saw that one basic claim of narrative research is that human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives. Ann has been a teacher for more than 20 years, and has gained a great deal of experience down through the years. When she looks back on her life, it is of course impossible to tell about everything she has been through. Therefore she selects some narratives to tell. By preferring to relate some stories rather than others, she constructs her own history, thus creating her own text, as it were, about her own life as a teacher. In the process of telling and thus constructing her life as a teacher, there will inevitably be gaps between the life she has actually lived, how she has experienced it, and the ways she tells about it during the data collection period (Bruner 1984). In this way the narratives from Ann's past experiences could be regarded as fictional statements with a varying degree of her real lived life (Denzin 1989a). Being the researcher and responsible for this thesis it was, needless to say, my responsibility and challenge to write the text about her, and to put her life into this text. As stated in Chapter three, Ann was an active collaborative participant during this process. Thus there was ongoing member checking, which is found to be important for securing the quality of qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman 1994). For example, Ann agreed to the dividing of the text about her life as a teacher into phases: "I absolutely agree with you, these phases are just as you have seen them. The quotations, and what you have made of them are really meaningful for me" (int 101900, p.1-2). Before entering into these phases, let us have a look at Ann's background.

### **Background**

From her birth in 1953 until she was 19, Ann lived in a small Norwegian town with her parents. She has no brothers and sisters. First she attended seven years of primary school, then two years of lower secondary school before attending three years of upper secondary school. After upper secondary school she went to a teachers college for three years. She had to move away from her hometown to study, and completed her teacher's training at the young age of 22.



Ann has many memories from primary school, and she especially talks about the teacher she had for these seven years. Initially her class had an elderly teacher who quit due to illness after only a brief period in first grade. The new teacher was the mother of one of the girls in the class. It did not take that long before the children realized that they were lucky to have her as their teacher, and over time they also found that they were allowed to do many things their parallel class was not allowed to do, a class that had a teacher with a more traditional way of doing things "wearing a smock and dripping dandruff" (int 092800, p.5).

The children in Ann's class were sitting at each their own desk facing the board. The classroom was pleasant and decorated with the pupils' work. The teacher was creative and artistic, inspiring the children to draw and paint. Ann remembers the joy of lying on the floor in the classroom, drawing something large and hanging it on the wall afterwards. The subjects were dealt with in various ways. There was no traditional question and answer session to check homework. The pupils would prepare quizzes, do group work, write a class newspaper in the afternoons, practice drama, and they would have classes where the only aim was to enjoy and perform for each other.

During lower secondary school she encountered another type of school, where the days were broken into blocks for the various subjects and where she had a number of teachers, one for each subject. School was suddenly excruciatingly boring. Ann describes herself as "wild" during this period. With support from some classmates, she once took the hat of her arts and craft teacher, put it on and went to a café in town. This was to spite the teacher, and the matter was dealt with by the teachers' council. It was both embarrassing and exhilarating at the same time.

After completing upper secondary school at 19, Ann did not know what to do. She applied for some jobs, but also sent an application to teachers college due because of the encouragement and inspiration of her parents. Her mother had also started teachers college, but quit because she did not have the ability "to play the organ or draw" (int 092800, p.7).<sup>24</sup> Ann had the ability to draw and play the organ, so her mother felt she would fit in better. Ann knew little about working life. She was thoroughly familiar with school from a pupil perspective though, so she decided to apply. She was admitted to the three-year course of studies.

In 1975 she completed her college training. She had two years of teacher training and one year of English at the university level. That same year she and her husband, also a teacher, got

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<sup>24</sup> Back in those days, in the 1940s and 50s, one of the qualifications for student teachers was that they could play the organ and draw.

jobs in northern Norway. Suddenly, Ann found herself in something akin to the one-room school. Her classroom had pupils from first, second and third grades. This was a difficult year. She was not familiar with the textbooks used, and there was hardly any cooperation between the teachers. After a year in northern Norway, Ann and her husband moved to the town where she is still living. They left on the off chance of getting a job, as it was difficult for teachers to find employment in those days, but during the autumn of 1976 she nevertheless landed a job at "Valley School".

This school was only four years old at the time, and the only one in a steadily growing part of town. A number of other schools had been planned but not yet constructed. When Ann started, the school building could not hold all the pupils. Some of the teaching was therefore undertaken in two portable classrooms and apartment blocks in the area. During the initial period she was commuting between these premises. She taught some subjects, and also taught some children with special needs. In the autumn of 1977 she was given her own class for the first time. Ann still teaches at Valley School, lives in the neighbourhood and her three children have all attended this school. Her youngest son still attends fourth grade. During her years there she has taken ten university credits in "Reading and writing difficulties", five credits in "Guidance," five credits in "Theme and project work" and five credits in "Theories of gender." She is now working to have her bachelor studies approved. Ann has been a student teacher mentor since 1996.

### The Good Years

This phase started in 1976 when Ann came to Valley School. The national curriculum of 1974 was the curriculum in force. This plan emphasized that instruction should bear in mind the aptitudes and background of the pupils. Adapted education should be offered. To attain these aims the minimum requirements were removed. C-74 was instead portrayed as a framework plan leading to greater liberty for the teacher. Ann does not remember having any special awareness of this curriculum. On the other hand, she felt that she had a great deal of freedom:

*The curriculum we had, we did whatever we wanted. Yes, I did virtually whatever I wanted, really. And if I didn't finish, then I didn't finish what we had planned. There was nobody to come and arrest me for this either (int 092800, p.16-17).*

In the autumn of 1977 Ann became the class teacher for a second grade where the majority were boys. These were boys who liked sports, and were good representatives of the borough and the school. Ann was proud of them, but looking back, she now realizes that the boys had

control of the class, and led the way. The girls did not stand out too much. The tone between her and the class was full of smiles, laughter, humour and flirting. She describes the children as "healthy, active, restless, chattering and wonderful" (int 092800, p.10).

She did a lot with this first class of hers, for example inviting the children to her house, and joining the boys' basketball team on a trip to a tournament in Oslo. Once Ann arranged an Indian party in the class and invited the principal to join. The classroom had been decorated. The walls were festooned with colourful drawings by the pupils, and in the middle of the floor there was a tree, a single birch in a Christmas tree holder. This birch had been decorated with white paper balls glued on to it. There was Indian music and burning joss sticks. The principal came, sat on the floor legs crossed together with the children. Ann read aloud Indian folk tales, and they all ate rice with their fingers. The principal always emphasized the importance of providing the children at Valley School with new experiences, whether at school, in the classroom or outdoors. Ann felt that the principal trusted her, supported her and encouraged her to make such decisions. She also felt that the principal helped to give her self-confidence, to make her proud to be a teacher:

*One of the things she (the principal) gave me was actually pride in working at Valley School. She lifted the school and the teachers. We were lifted by her, you know. We gained a kind of self-confidence and such a start in that we were doing something very important. That this was perhaps the most important workplace in the town, being a teacher at Valley School. (...) particularly this thing with pride in my profession, because she was so good at lifting us (int 092800, p.8).*

In 1975 the Norwegian Parliament had adopted the "Integration Act". There were still special schools that could be used in particular cases, but now children with special needs could attend their neighbourhood school.<sup>25</sup> The compulsory school therefore gradually opened up for those who had been segregated earlier on. In addition to adapted teaching and differentiation, other keywords for the educational practice became "special education," "diagnosis" and "individualization." "Tor" was a pupil in Ann's class.

Tor had great learning difficulties in the subjects, and in all probability he had brain damage. Socially he kept up with the others. He was a good athlete and one of the boys. Moreover, he was nice to everybody. Tor had received extra help since day care, and this continued when he came to the school. A special educator taught him several lessons each week. He was taken out of class even though he did not always want to be taken out. Tor wanted to learn, he showed great stamina in his work and coped fairly well up over the years

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<sup>25</sup> According to Haug (1998), the "Integration Act" is therefore incorrectly named because the law was neutral with regard to integration. Based on an individual evaluation by experts, children with special needs could receive their education in regular schools or in special schools.

in primary school. When Tor was in her class, Ann remembers that she would occasionally prepare other tasks for him, allowing him to work at a slower pace than the others and that he was not required to do as much as the others. She and the special educator cooperated a great deal. However, Tor was always considered in isolation, not in relation to the rest of the class. Ann felt this was frustrating:

*Took him out. Yeah, that's what she (the special teacher) did. And practised and practised. We cooperated so much that I was worn out by it in the end. You know, she only saw him, and only talked about him during all the breaks. I remember I got tired of this, because she didn't see the others in the class at all (int 092800, p.11-12).*

Tor's mother followed up his school work. The curriculum of 1974 also had a section about cooperation between school and the home. However, there was not as much focus on this then as there has been in the later curricula. At that time Ann had no special interest in having parents as active team players: "I don't think I felt that parent relationships were very important. They weren't present that much or involved, that I don't remember using parents very actively" (int 092800, p.13).

The first phase of Ann's professional biography may be characterized as a "good" phase. Her principal supported and encouraged her, and she felt that she was in good contact with the pupils. They liked her and she liked them. This gave her a great deal of inspiration and confidence in herself as a teacher. In the spring of 1982 these children left sixth grade to continue in lower secondary school, so that was the end of Ann's time with them.

### The Heavy Years

After Ann finished her first class, she became the class teacher for a sixth grade the next year, and in the autumn of 1983 she started as the class teacher for a first grade. She also taught this class until the children left after sixth grade. After this she again started another first grade. She taught this class for two years before she took maternity leave. During this phase a lot happened in Ann's life. She was divorced in 1983. She remarried, and in addition to her first son she had two children in her new marriage. She finds it difficult to remember much from this period:

*I remember it was so difficult to recall things. I was really struggling to recall how those classrooms looked. There were so many other things in my life outside school that were important, and there were things that took my thoughts and drained my energy on the private level. There were so many things to deal with. So perhaps I wasn't all that involved in my job (int 101900, p.3).*

At the start of this phase the curriculum of 1974 was still the curriculum in force, then came the curriculum of 1987. Like its predecessor, this new curriculum was also a framework plan. Teachers continued to have great freedom when it came to selecting the material to work with in the subjects. Ann believes she generally carried on as before in her teaching. Even if she was not particularly aware of the new plan, she seems to recall she had moved in its direction even before it came into force:

*I do remember that it was issued (laughter), but it did not take on much importance this one either, I don't think. It really didn't, it more or less replaced the old one, because we had already started to work in the spirit of C-87, I think. I'm thinking of group work, and there may have been some of that, cooperation like. (...) anyway it allowed you to carry on, but it doesn't appear to me as a break or revolution, really (int 101600, p.3).*

The 1987 curriculum carried forward and also made the principle of a school for all clearer. Adapted teaching was therefore to permeate the daily activities in school. It was, however, emphasized that adapted teaching should not result in extreme individualization. Quite the opposite, the instruction should be so planned that all the pupils, including those with special needs, would profit from being part of the community and from general cooperation.

Ann does not remember much about the sixth grade she taught for one year. The first-grade class that she subsequently became teacher for turned out to be a challenging class, and she occasionally had special educator assistance. “Karen”, the special educator who was now connected to Ann's class, worked with a boy with problem behaviour, and she worked differently than the previous special educator had done:

*And then we worked so differently than we had done before with Tor, for example. She (Karen) was much more inside the classroom, virtually never outside. So she also saw other children than him, and was a great support (int 082800, p.17).*

“Elisabeth” was one of the girls Ann and Karen were especially working with. Elisabeth lived together with her mother and younger brother. Her mother was often ill with a mental disorder. One morning, just after school had started, Elisabeth called Ann. In a tiny voice she asked if Ann could please come, her mother was lying in bed and was so strange. Ann and Karen ran down to her apartment, finding Elisabeth with huge eyes standing in the living room. Her little brother was jumping up and down in his cot. Her mother had taken an overdose. After this episode Elisabeth lived in Ann's house for a period of time, an arrangement initiated by the child welfare service. When Ann today reflects upon the conditions Elisabeth grew up under she sees that the girl perhaps should not have lived with her mother:

*This mother was mentally ill. Elisabeth should probably not have lived at home. They were so incredibly tied to each other, meshed in each other, mother and daughter. She had her mother's whole adult life, you know, to consider. And that's way too much for a little girl (int 101100, p.5).*

Ann was a stable person for Elisabeth for six years. She believes that the girl trusted her, while she also believes, looking back, that she could have offered more support than she did:

*I could have gotten more involved with her, spoken more with her, allowed her to use me more. I could have taken her aside only the two of us and given her more care. She really loved care and attention, and I did talk with her, but I could have done so much more (int 101100, p.6).*

Ann taught this class until they left after the sixth grade in the spring of 1989, before starting with a new first grade in the autumn of the same year. This turned out to a class with major challenges. There were two boys with problem behaviour, both of whom had been referred to the support services. One was diagnosed as having AD/HD and was given medication accordingly. The special educator who was assisting in this class did not know what to do, and Ann felt that she was in a very difficult situation. Her most powerful memory from this class is of “Inger”, a little girl who suddenly died.

On a Monday morning at the start of June Ann came to work and was told that Inger had died in an accident the evening before. Only minutes after receiving this message the school bell rang, and Ann had to go to her class. Nobody, not the principal or any colleagues, offered to come with her in this situation. She had to deal with this herself with no preparation. At the time she was frustrated and angry. However, she later acknowledges that both she and the children managed well in this situation and helped each other by talking together. She was forced to tell the children everything that had happened to Inger, and found that the children asked questions about everything, where it had happened, who she was with when it happened, if there was much blood on her, where she was now. In the week preceding the burial she received guidance and advice from a minister and representatives from the funeral parlour. On two occasions Inger's mother came to class. She wanted to come and talk with the children. When they asked what Inger would be wearing in the coffin, the mother returned with the new dress Inger had worn two weeks before for the celebration of Constitution Day in Norway on 17 May. She would be wearing that in her coffin. The children had detailed questions about everything, and through this Ann learned that it is possible to talk with children about most things:

*And then it was so easy to talk with them about this, I remember. (...) I think I found it easier with my own children afterwards. I think I have become better at talking about everything. Because what you can't talk about seems to petrify and just hang there, I think (int 101100, p.4).*

Ann taught this class for only two years. She describes these years as the toughest she had had to that point as a teacher (int101100). She felt she had too many responsibilities. This second stage of Ann's professional biography may be characterized as a "heavy phase". Even though she cooperated well with Karen during parts of this period, the general picture is one where she is much alone with demanding work tasks. The old principal left, and there were three different principals during the period leading up to the next phase. None of these appear to have been particularly important for Ann. In addition she experienced two dramatic events at work, and many things happened in her private life.

### The Exciting Years

Ann was relieved when she went out on maternity leave in the spring of 1991. She had her third son, and needed a break. After staying at home for a year, she was looking forward to returning to work in the autumn of 1992:

*This was a big milestone, really. I had had a wonderful break. I was very tired when I started my maternity leave. I was so happy to get away and then I really looked forward to starting again, really and was really enjoying the idea (int 101900, p.4).*

This time Ann would have special education responsibilities in a first grade where there were children with major needs for assistance. One of them, "Tina", had contracted a disease with a poor prognosis. She would lose her eyesight and eventually also her ability to speak. There were also a number of children with immigrant languages in the class. There were, to put it mildly, many challenges. At that point of time, almost all the Norwegian special schools were closed down. This decision was done in 1987, and it was clearly stated that every child should attend the school in her or his local community. As commented on earlier in this chapter (see Footnote 22, p.53), there should still be special schools for the deaf and partially hearing pupils. However, there were no more special schools for weak-sighted and blind pupils.

The class teacher in Ann's new class was "Liv", recently graduated from teachers college. Starting with the second school year, Ann and Liv decided to share the class teacher and special-educator responsibilities, and they retained this division of their work until the children left after the sixth grade. Ann believes this way of working helped them to share most responsibilities, making it simpler to see the class and individual pupils as a whole, and that this was good for all the pupils:

*I am able to make things work much better in a class for a child with a handicap if I know both the child and the class. That's to say that if I'm the homeroom teacher and only know the class, then this child with the handicap will just be a bother to me. However, if I know the child and am aware of his or her needs, then I will see how the needs of this child and the class may be united. Very, very often. So what's good for them is very often good for the class as well (int 101100, p.11-12).*

In 1997 a new curriculum arrived. While the curriculum of 1987 had separate sections dealing with "Adaptation for everyone" and "Special education", this new curriculum used a different approach. Here pupils with "special difficulties" and "special education needs" are briefly mentioned in the section on "Individual adaptation". This may relate to the political intentions which for a long time have been to make what is special more common. Each and every person should be permitted and entitled to live as normal lives as possible, without segregation and stigmatization. The introduction of the concept of inclusion clarifies this in the current curriculum where it says that: "General school shall be an accepting and inclusive community for all the pupils" (C-97, p.57). This concept also embraces children with special education needs, as everybody, including these children, should encounter an inclusive community in school. From day one Ann and Liv were focused on having all the children inside the classroom together as much as possible:

*These children (those with special needs) should be in the classroom as much as possible. Then we (Ann and Liv) always had discussions about this issue, how could we work with it, what should we do? Our principle was that they should stay in class (int 101100, p.11).*

Thus there were great demands on Ann and Liv. They were forced to use their creativity to find themes and methodological approaches that all the children could benefit from. Pupil activities became important. In particular, Ann knew that Tina's time was brief, that it was important to give her as many experiences as possible. These experiences should as much as possible occur inside the framework of the class and together with other children. One time the class planted potatoes in the little wood by the school. This was secret, so nobody would ruin their experiment. Therefore the potatoes were planted randomly so they would not be discovered. When autumn came the class harvested the potatoes, including Tina, who could feel, smell and taste them. Ann recalls stories about Tina who loved acting and who never turned down a role. In the performance of "Uncle Oscar" by Torvald Sund<sup>26</sup> she played a sheep. She tells of Tina who danced the salsa, about Tina whose regular class chore it was to prepare porridge when there was a football tournament at the school. It was very important

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<sup>26</sup> Torvald Sund is a Norwegian author of children's books.



that Tina should have good years at Valley School. Not the least this was important for her parents. Ann, Liv and Tina's parents had close cooperation through all these years:

*We cooperated so well with her parents. We had her for six years. We were the same people the whole time, and we were part of the ups and downs, and there was so much sorrow. (...) It was so important for them to know their child had a good life at school. Life at school is perhaps the most important outside the home. We made many decisions together with her parents (int 101100, p.12-13).*

In the course of Tina's years at Valley School her illness took more and more hold of her. Many witnessed this: Tina herself, for periods depressed and sad, her parents, teachers and classmates. Ann and Liv wished they could talk to Tina's classmates about this; tell them about the illness so they would be more prepared. Tina's parents did not consent to this. They wanted to spare their daughter from knowing too much, and were afraid she would learn from her classmates if they knew something she did not. For Ann and Liv this was a dilemma, but they honoured her parents' wishes:

*What we wanted, we teachers, was to be ahead of this. But we weren't allowed to do this by her parents. Of course they didn't want the other children to know things she herself didn't, because they didn't want to prepare her. This was a disagreement we had with her parents or rather something we, needless to say, respected (int 101100, p.16).*

Tina had a rare disease. Throughout all the years Ann and Liv worked with her they received guidance from a resource centre.<sup>27</sup> They were also taking part in a Nordic project aimed at developing a software program for children with this disease. Tina had this software installed on her PC when she started third grade, some months after losing her eyesight. In their project report Ann and Liv gave their experiences of working with Tina. A video film has also been made about Tina's schooling at Valley School, emphasizing in particular her relationship to her classmates and how the teachers worked on this. This video has English subtitles. According to Ann, both she and Liv experienced their work with Tina to be meaningful:

*We were so important. We felt so important, and that's a very good feeling. I think she had it as wonderful as possible here at our school with this class and us. It's so easy to claim this, because I know there's no way things could have been better in the situation she was in, really. That's good to know. And Liv and I, well we complemented each other so well (int 101100, p.18).*

The third phase in Ann's professional biography may be characterized as the "the exciting years". Ann felt her job was important and meaningful. She cooperated closely and well with

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<sup>27</sup> This particular resource centre used to be a special school for the partially blind and blind pupils. The school was closed down in 1992, and was then turned into a resource centre. Thus, people working here have particular competence with respect to the partially blind and blind pupils.

Liv, and they experienced how it was possible to combine the needs of the class and particularly Tina's individual needs into a whole. They cooperated well and closely with the parents. In addition to receiving guidance from a resource centre, they were also active participants in a project. In the spring of 1998 the class left Valley school to continue in lower secondary school. In the autumn Ann started with her current class.

### ***Comments on Ann's Past Experiences***

How people become what they are depends on what they have experienced in the historical and social contexts in which they have participated (Vygotsky 1978). As historical conditions are constantly changing, this also results in changed contexts and opportunities for learning and development. Thus the consciousness, or the human mind, cannot be considered as a fixed category in the sense that it can be described once and for all (Schribner 1985). Quite to the contrary, it is a category undergoing continual change and development, a change and development that occurs in step with historical development and activities on the social plane. Bearing these thoughts in mind, I will close this chapter by first examining how Ann experienced being a pupil herself, and second, how she has realized and experienced our society's various demands regarding pupils with special needs.

Being a teacher has both practical and reflective dimensions. In the daily flow of classroom activities these two dimensions are interwoven (Shulman 1985, 1998). How teachers act in particular situations therefore depends upon their thoughts and beliefs. Teacher thinking is thus a central component of teaching practice (Lampert & Ball 1998). When delving into this issue, it is also claimed that teachers' thinking about teaching and their classroom practice are partially shaped by their prior experiences as pupils (Richert 1991, Knowles 1992). Following this line of thought, the pupil period may be regarded as an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie 1975) in which teacher socialization occurs through observation and internalization of particular models of teaching as experienced by pupils. This is interesting when considering Ann's narratives from her own experiences of being a pupil.

We have seen above that Ann has many stories from her first seven years of schooling at a primary school in a small town. She remembers how happy she was and how much she enjoyed being at school. In particular she has fond memories of her teacher through all those years. When as a young teacher at Valley school Ann was assigned her own class, it may look as if she modelled her approach after this memorable teacher. Vygotsky (1978) claimed in his theories that collective activity is expressed in individual reactions. A consequence of this is that development occurs on two levels, initially on the intermental level, that is among

persons in social interaction, then on the intramental level, where the intermental processes have been internalized. In the narratives from her past experiences, Ann tells about her actions and teaching practice. According to Vygotsky's ideas, Ann's actions and practice are based on social intermental processes, and through a process of internalization they have become part of her intramental level. As mentioned in Chapter two, this does not mean that the action becomes an identical copy. However, it may show the connection between what she has experienced as a pupil and her continuous development as a teacher.

From the first phase of her teacher career, Ann recollected only one pupil with special needs. During that time there were many special schools in Norway. The common practice was still that these pupils should be given their education in these separate schools. However, the general compulsory school had started to accept these pupils, and as we have seen, Tor was such a pupil in Ann's class. He received some teaching inside the class, together with Ann and his classmates, and he had special education outside the class with a special education teacher. According to Ann, this teacher regarded Tor in isolation, something which was quite common during this particular period. Ann remembers that Tor had to "practice and practice" when he was together with this teacher outside the classroom. He probably had to train through strengthening and developing his weak areas. When Ann recalls and tells this story, she appears to disagree with what was done. She does not only disagree according to her current perspective on the issue, she also remembers that she was frustrated and that she questioned this type of practice that she experienced almost twenty years ago. However, she appeared to have had these discussions or dialogues with herself. She never talked with the special education teacher about her reflections. Neither did she talk with Tor or his mother about it. According to Bakhtin's (1986) dialogic perspective, nothing can be perceived unless it is set up against the perspective of something else. What is interesting when looking at the story about Tor is that Ann obviously disagreed with the practice of excluding the boy from the ordinary classroom activities. Consequently, she also disagreed with the approval of this type of practice in the curriculum at that time. Ann appears to have had other values or beliefs. According to Elbaz-Luwisch (2002), teachers are constantly called upon to deal with their personal understandings, values and commitments, and the external requirements of teaching elaborated by policymakers, school administrators, parents and members of the public. Hence, conflicting voices may emerge in the stories teachers are telling of their experiences. In Ann's story of Tor, we can hear such conflicting voices.

In the second phase of her teacher career, several of the special schools had been closed down, and more pupils with special needs were coming into Ann's classes. During this period

there was a refocusing away from the individual child with special needs towards mainstream schools and their ability to respond to a wide range of individual differences among their pupils. These visions were outlined in the curriculum of 1987. One special education teacher, Karen, who was connected to Ann's class, practised in accordance with this view as she worked with the children within the classroom and in collaboration with Ann. Contrary to Ann's experiences with the special teacher during the first phase, she seems to appreciate the way Karen was working, being inside the classroom and not regarding pupils with special needs in isolation from the context. This type of practice appears to be in accordance with Ann's values and beliefs. Ann regarded Karen to be skilled at her work, and she liked collaborating with her. The other special teacher Ann remembers from this period was also working inside the classroom, but, according to Ann, this one did not know what to do. Colleague collaboration is particularly important when dealing with pupils with special needs (Flem 2000), and Ann experienced this situation to be difficult.

When looking at Ann's narratives about Elisabeth and Inger, the teacher appears to be warm, caring and focused on the children. She sees them as whole persons rather than only pupils being at school to learn subject matter. She sees her pupils as individuals in a larger context. This trait was also apparent in her narratives from her first phase, and it becomes increasingly clear through the stories occurring in the third phase. In the stories about Tina, Ann is concerned about Tina and her disease. At the same time she also takes into consideration Tina's environment and context. The classroom activities should be adapted to fit Tina's needs. In this way we could say that Ann's view on pupils with special needs fits with the third paradigm presented in Chapter one, the "anthropological model" (OECD 1994). What also appears in the stories about Tina is Ann's concern with the other pupils in the class. The activities should benefit both Tina and the class as a whole. This is also one of the challenges a teacher faces, working towards several goals at the same time (Doyle 1986), and paying attention to both the individual pupil and the class as a whole. Now and then these goals can be contradictory. This can be seen when Ann talks about the dilemma of whether or not she should tell the other pupils of Tina's disease. Similar to Elbaz-Luwisch's (2002) empirical research on teacher biographies, I have noticed how Ann's stories about her past experiences are imbued with values and beliefs. This will also appear in Part three of the text, where I present her current practice. With these comments on Ann's past experiences it is time to examine her current context.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Ann's Current Context and Class**

Qualitative researchers are interested in giving detailed descriptions of social life, the kind Geertz (1973) has recommended that we recognize as thick descriptions. We have already touched upon this issue at several points in this text. However, when we as narrative researchers write our thick descriptions we are aware that the full reality is far removed from this. Even when we set up a video camera, it can only be in one place at a time and some things cannot be seen from that particular vantage point. Adding more cameras does not solve the problem. Even a small technical matter such as the focal length of the camera's lens makes a big difference, a long lens provides close-up detail, but loses the context a wide-angle lens provides. This issue becomes even more complicated when we realize that there is no objective or everlasting true reality to capture, rather, as we have seen, there are different subjective positions from which we experience and interpret the world (Peshkin 1988, 1991).

However, in spite of these reservations, as narrative researchers we are interested in giving rich and thick descriptions of the field studied. A fuller description is preferable to and epistemologically more satisfying than a sparse description (Becker 1996) because it lets us talk with more assurance about the phenomenon we are studying. Furthermore, detailed descriptions enable readers to transfer information to other settings (Creswell 1998). When reading about thick descriptions, it is possible to be left with the impression that the fuller the description the better. However, the object of any description is not to try to reproduce the field completely. We have in fact seen that this is quite impossible to do. The aim is rather to pick up important aspects, details which can be focused on from the totality of details so that we can gain further insight and understanding of the field being studied (Becker 1996). In this chapter I have therefore selected some aspects that I regard as relevant in an account of Ann's current context and class.

#### ***The Context***

Ann lives and works in a medium-sized Norwegian city with 140 000 inhabitants. It has a number of boroughs or districts. One of these is "Sunside District" which is where Valley school is situated. This school opened in the autumn of 1972 with 200 pupils, the first in a new and expanding suburb. A huge increase in the number of pupils was forecasted, and by the school's fifth anniversary in 1977, it had grown to 950 pupils. Many people moved to the

borough, but many also moved out quickly. During Valley school's five first years a total of 280 pupils had left. However, at the ten-year anniversary in 1982 the situation had shown signs of stabilizing. Two other schools were opened in the district, one primary school and one combined school from grade one to nine,<sup>28</sup> and they had taken over 25 of Valley school's classes. This brief retrospect is intended to draw attention to Ann's current context.

### The Sunside District

In the 1960s more and more people moved from the country into the cities. This was the general trend in Norway and in the region where Ann comes from. New blocks of flats were needed in the cities, and the local authorities had to decide where to locate them. One of the areas that appeared to be suitable in Ann's city was what would come to be called Sunside District. This is in a southern part of the city, bordering on large areas of woodland, lakes and rivers. Some of the farmers in the area attempted to block the new development, but they failed to stop the tide of change. Construction started in the early 1970s. Within a few years the borough had been developed, consisting mostly of blocks of flats and row houses. Fifty-two per cent of the inhabitants live in blocks of flats and thirty-one per cent live in row houses. The borough also has some semidetached and detached houses.

Today around 14 000 people live in this borough and the size of the population has been relatively stable since the start of the 1980s. It is the smallest of the boroughs in the city both in terms of area and the number of inhabitants. Statistics show that Sunside District is the borough with the largest turnover of inhabitants. This is also the borough with the largest number of residents with immigrant backgrounds. A total of 9.7 per cent of the inhabitants come from abroad. Moreover, this is the borough with the largest number of inhabitants receiving social benefits, with 5.4 per cent receiving such benefits, while the rate for the city as a whole is 4.1 per cent.<sup>29</sup> Sunside District is also at the top of the list of child welfare measures. This involves cases where child care is taken over by the public authorities and other assistance measures initiated by the child welfare system.

Roads and streets are well designed for good traffic safety. The row houses and blocks of flats are all designed around common areas with sandboxes and playground equipment. In this respect the borough is well suited for families with young children. The statistics also show that a relatively small number of elderly people live in Sunside District. Today the borough

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<sup>28</sup> Later, in 1997, the Norwegian compulsory school was extended to ten years, and consequently this particular school became a combined school from grades one to ten (see Footnote 17, p.41).

<sup>29</sup> These figures are from 2001. However, they have been relatively stable for years.

has five schools; two primary schools, one lower secondary school and two combined schools for grades one to ten. There is also an upper secondary school in the area and five kindergartens. The district has a church, an indoor swimming-pool and a library, and there are a number of football grounds in the area, indeed for many years now the borough has been recognized for its sports activities.

As with all other city districts the borough has its own support services. The support services is an organizational merger of the pedagogical-psychological service and the child-welfare service. In most Norwegian municipalities these are separate services. The reason for this merger was the wish to have a holistic and interdisciplinary approach when working with children with special needs and their families. The district's support services, which I hereinafter will call the "central support services", employs child-welfare workers, such as social workers and child-welfare educators, pedagogical-psychological counsellors, psychologists and speech therapists. The central support services does not have the capacity to deal with all the cases. If it were to do so, the waiting list would grow so long that months would pass before anything could be done. One of the service's most important visions is the intention that the children who need assistance receive the proper help as quickly as possible.

One measure introduced to give the right assistance as early as possible is the establishment of in-house support services at all schools and in all kindergartens. Instead of going to the boroughs' central support services, parents and teachers initially contact the in-house support services for advice, guidance and help. Thus help is easier to obtain and measures may be initiated more quickly. The central support services has therefore spent some of its resources on strengthening the ability of schools and kindergartens to offer in-house support services. There are great expectations for the in-house support services, and in the plan for the central support services it is stated:

*The in-house support services, as the professional service, together with the unit leader, have been the kingpin of the structure of our activities aimed at children and their families (Plan for the central support services 2001, p.2).*

In an evaluation of the service in 1998/99 it was discovered that the collaboration between the central support services and in-house support services at the schools and kindergartens did not always function well. The plan for the central support services says that this should be rectified by:

*Working to make the regular meetings at schools and kindergartens our common meeting ground where all those involved have and take joint responsibility to effect a good professional, developing and mutually challenging collaboration and interaction arena (Plan for the central support services 2001, p.3).*

The plan thus emphasizes that the in-house and central support services have equal responsibilities for effecting cooperation and interaction. This applies both to system activities and activities for individual children. Those cases that cannot be resolved on the school and kindergarten level are forwarded to the central support services. If there appears to be a lack of competence at the central support services, the case is referred to a resource centre,<sup>30</sup> such as in the case of Tina (see Footnote 27, p.63) or to the psychiatry service for children and young people. As we will see, this is what happens with Paul.

### Valley School

Valley school is a primary school with two classes on each level from first to seventh grades. It is designed in the austere style of the 1970s with two floors and a basement. Within this framework it has a traditional classroom design with each class in its own room. There are also special facilities for home economics, music, arts and crafts and physical education. Moreover, there are some smaller rooms for group work. A new wing built in 1997 has provided ample areas and open and flexible solutions for the two lowest grades. The outdoor area consists of a schoolyard paved with asphalt, a football pitch and a small copse with tall pine trees, called "the school forest". The school has a central location in the borough and is surrounded by blocks of flats.

As mentioned, this was Sunside District's first school when it opened in 1972. While a number of other schools were planned, it initially had to take all the children in the area. As there were more pupils than classroom capacity, all the school's special classrooms had to be used for regular teaching. Moreover, two portable classrooms were used, and two classrooms were set up in an adjacent block of flats. This was the situation when Ann started as a teacher at the school in 1976. The first principal of the school was a woman, the one who was invited to join the Indian party in Ann's class (see Chapter 4, p.57). In connection with Valley school's ten-year anniversary in 1982 a brochure was published where she wrote:

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<sup>30</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 the special education services provided by the Norwegian state were collected under the umbrella of the Norwegian Support System for Special Education. The activities comprise a total of 30 units under a single joint board. These units carry out a variety of tasks and are affiliated in various ways with the national support system. Most services are provided by the state-owned resource centres. Other units affiliated with the national support system are owned by the local or county authorities.



*As a ten-year old, Valley school is still a child – with a child's surplus of opportunities. The school has the opportunity to never stagnate. New pupils every year, new parents and employees arrive with their expectations and demands, with inspiration and challenges. I wish that all our co-actors in the coming years will make Valley school a good place to be and a good place to learn (Anniversary brochure 1972-82, p.2)*

After the first years with too many pupils, the number of pupils at Valley school has remained fairly stable. In the 2000/2001 school year, during the data collection period, there were 268 pupils.<sup>31</sup> In this school year fourteen per cent of the pupils came from abroad and therefore had Norwegian as their second language. Within this group there were ten different languages.

Over the years, the school has had five principals, three women and two men; otherwise the staff has remained quite stable. A number of employees have worked at the school for more than ten years, and some date back to the school's first year. The staff comprises the head and deputy head, twenty-four teachers, a child-welfare educator and four assistants. There are also two positions for care-worker apprentices.<sup>32</sup> There are five cleaners in part-time positions, a janitor and a secretary. There is also an after-school programme<sup>33</sup> with a manager and assistants, comprising four man-years divided between seven persons. The school nurse is in two or three days per week, and the school doctor can be consulted one day every second week.

For several years now the school has had a relatively high percentage of children with special needs. These are children who have had learning difficulties and/or have lived in difficult family relationships. Activities with these children are also emphasized in Valley school's local curriculum, where it states that the school shall:

*Contribute to providing the most vulnerable children and families with quick and appropriate assistance. Provide adapted instruction to each pupil. Ensure that all the pupils belong in the community of a class (Valley school's local curriculum 2000/01 p.2-3).*

In the 2000/01 school year ten per cent of the school's pupils were defined as having special needs. The rate for the country as a whole was 5.5 per cent. When considering the whole borough though, the figure for Valley school is not particularly high. As mentioned above,

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<sup>31</sup> During the 2001/2002 school year there were 269 pupils, in 2002/2003 270, and in 2003/2004 260 pupils.

<sup>32</sup> An inclusive school has many and varied tasks that must be undertaken. In addition to the teachers and pre-school teachers, more and more schools are hiring other specialist groups, for example child-welfare educators and children and young people's counsellors. It has also become more common to have unskilled assistants at schools.

<sup>33</sup> Pupils from first to fourth grade have rather few lessons per week. When school is finished for the day, they can therefore attend the after-school programme and stay there until their parents come home from work in the afternoon.

Sunside District has had a relatively high number of children with special needs for years. Valley school's in-house support services consists of a special education coordinator, two special educators, one working with the first through fourth grades and the other with the fifth through seventh grades, and the school nurse. They have weekly meetings, and every second week they also meet with their permanent representative from the central support services. The in-house support services is responsible for maintaining an overview of all children with special needs at the school and has a special responsibility to ascertain that these children are receiving the proper assistance. To achieve these aims, the intention is to give help, support and guidance to parents and teachers.

### ***The Class***

In Chapter three and in the introduction to this chapter it was stated that it is impossible to capture the full reality. This is also the case when describing Ann's class. Below I have chosen to focus on some aspects that I regard as relevant in an account of her present class. Before presenting these, I wish to state that in third grade the pupils have twenty-one lessons per week. The lessons in one of the subjects, English, are held with another teacher. This is only one lesson a week. The class has Ann as their teacher in the remaining twenty lessons. The school's child-welfare educator is together with Ann and the class seven lessons per week. While four of these are used to support Ann on Tuesdays, during the class's weekly excursions, the other three are used on Wednesdays and within the ordinary classroom activities.

### **The Classroom**

When entering the school by the main entrance, visitors first arrive in a light and airy hall. Here they will find benches, large green plants and a glass showcase displaying works by the pupils. Ann's classroom can be entered from this hall. Two of the classroom walls are decorated with colourful drawings by the pupils. The third wall consists of large glass window panes. The curtains have bright colours: reds, yellows and blues. Under the windows there are shelves with children's books. The fourth wall has a large blackboard. Ann's desk is in the left corner besides the board. On the door leading to the hall there are drawings and notes written by the pupils with ideas on what to play during the breaks. The desks are placed together making four groups. Bookcases with shelves for the pupils' things shield the groups from each other to some extent. A computer, also shielded by bookcases, is situated in a corner. In the middle of the classroom in front of the board is the "class circle". When the pupils in Ann's

class sit with her in a semi-circle facing her and the board, it is called the class circle. Ann’s guitar lies beside her place in the class circle. The pupils are generally in their classroom. The exception is when they go on excursions every Tuesday, and when for two periods each week they have physical education and music in special rooms.

**The School Day**

The school-day in Ann’s class is organized into two teaching units, both are before midday break.<sup>34</sup> The first teaching unit starts with an assembly in the class circle followed by a work period. Thereafter there is usually another assembly in the class circle before the break. After the break, the pupils have lunch, followed by an assembly in the class circle, and then a new work period. The school day ends with a final gathering in the class circle. Figure one shows this organization:

<p><u>First Teaching Unit:</u></p> <p>Class Circle</p> <p>Work Period</p> <p>Class Circle</p>
<p>Break</p>
<p><u>Second Teaching Unit:</u></p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Class Circle</p> <p>Work Period</p> <p>Class Circle</p>

Figure 1: Organization of the school day

When the pupils enter the classroom in the morning, they put their school bags in their places before they sit down at their regular places in the class circle. Then they say hello to each other, check attendance, sing a song, and talk about Sambu (see Footnote 18, page 42). The

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<sup>34</sup> School starts at 8.30 A.M. and ends at 11.30 A.M. On Mondays the class also has one lesson after midday break, and the pupils finish school at 12.45 P.M.

morning ritual ends with Ann telling the pupils about the day's agenda. Thereafter they usually sing a song before the teaching and assisted learning period<sup>35</sup> starts. When this activity is finished the children leave the class circle to attend their regular desks in their groups. Usually the pupils work individually during work periods, but they may also work in pairs or in groups. Before the break there is a new gathering in the class circle where they might sing a song, talk about their work or what they are going to do during the break. When the pupils enter the classroom after break they eat their lunch in their groups. After lunch the pupils have some time to play together before Ann asks them to enter the class circle. Following this is a new teaching and assisted learning period and a subsequent work period. At the end of the school day, the teacher and the pupils again gather in the class circle. Ann then reads a book, reminds the pupils of their homework, sings a song with them and finally they say goodbye.

As seen in Figure one and in the description above, the class circle is frequently used in Ann's class. It is not only used for greetings in the morning and goodbyes in the afternoons, it is also used for teaching and assisted learning. Therefore the class circle appears to be an important meeting place for Ann and her pupils. It is a central arena for teaching, for sharing information and for discourse and dialogues. The class circle appears to be a crucial arena in most classes in the Norwegian primary school (Matre 2003). Therefore, using it the way Ann does is not unusual. The pupils sit close to one another in a semi-circle, facing towards one another and their teacher. In Ann's class the pupils have permanent places in the class circle, and she is the one who decides where each child should sit.<sup>36</sup> Sometimes, during a teaching and assisted learning period a few of the children may be asked to sit at their regular desks close to the class circle. This is done so that they will not get too close to each other. Usually the pupils do not bring anything with them into the class circle. Only now and then will Ann ask the pupils to bring books and pencils with them. In this particular arena it is easy to be attentive, to see and hear what is being told.

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<sup>35</sup> Finding appropriate concepts to describe various activities is challenging. Perhaps the teaching and assisted learning period could have been called the teaching and instruction period. However, when using the term instruction one might come to think of the teacher as the active party, transmitting some kind of knowledge or experience to her pupils, and the pupils as the passive receptive part. As will be seen later in this text Ann does not want her pupils to be passive recipients. To the contrary, she wants them to be active and committed participants, and she assists them so that this may happen. Therefore, rather than using teaching and instruction period, I choose the term teaching and assisted learning period. I will return to this issue in more detail in Chapter six.

<sup>36</sup> On rare occasions some children may have a new place to sit. That happened once, for example, with one of the girls who was sitting next to John. At that point in time John was often restless when sitting in the class circle and the girl told Ann that she felt uncomfortable sitting next to him. Ann understood her complaint and assigned her a new place in the class circle.

## The Groups

As stated above, the class is organized into four groups. Two of the groups have five and the other two have six pupils, and each group has both boys and girls. According to Ann, the groups will be permanent throughout the year. She is the one who has decided who should be in each group. She has also decided where each of them should sit within the group. Ann believes it is beneficial for the children to be in permanent groups with other children:

*It's like being brothers and sisters. They should be together and learn to become friends. And when they get into conflicts, because they do get into conflicts, then they should work it out and become friends again (int 102300, p.6).*

Thus, her main argument for organizing the pupils in groups seems to be the belief that this will benefit their social development. She believes, moreover, that it is good for them to be together in a group when having their lunch. Then they can talk together and have a nice time during the meal (int 112200). When Ann reflects upon why she organizes her class in permanent groups, she also talks about the pupils' parents. Ann wants the parents to be active participants during parents' meetings. She wants them to take part in discussions and dialogues. When there are parents' meetings she therefore asks them to take their child's place in the group. According to Ann, being in a small group makes it easier to talk than when in a large group. Ann also believes it is useful that the parents should come to know the other parents in their child's group. Together with Ann the parents have decided that the group members should visit each other's house once during the school year<sup>37</sup> (int 102400). In this way Ann also believes that the parents will get to know their child's group members better.

## The Pupils

There are ten girls and twelve boys in the class. With the exception of one boy who is challenged when it comes to reading and writing, this class performs on an average level, according to Ann. As mentioned in Chapter one, a number of the children have home situations that are complicated and difficult. Ann talks about a girl who lives with her maternal grandmother because her parents are unable to take care of her, and of a boy who only sees his father occasionally, and when he does visit him, he is accompanied by an adult because of his father's drinking problems. She talks about another boy whose father has a

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<sup>37</sup> Some parents did not attend the meeting where this decision was made. It was therefore decided that other parents should talk with those who were not present (int 102300). Ann also sent a letter to the parents in which she told them about the idea (see Appendix 3D, p.214).

serious mental disorder, of a girl who is often late because her mother does not wake her in the morning, of children living in the conflict zone between parents fighting over the daily custody of the child, and of children she feels are not really seen by their parents. Half of the twenty-two children in the class live with both their parents. Most of the children attend the after-school programme. As mentioned above, Ann assesses John and Paul to be the greatest educational challenges.

John is a new pupil in Ann's class. He started in third grade and is in a group with four other pupils, two boys and two girls. He has previously lived with his mother and two half siblings. Because of his mother's drug problems, John's father has recently been granted custody. His father has a new family with two young children. John's mother and siblings moved house frequently so that John has already attended two other schools. He was surrounded by problems at his previous schools, and he was registered with the support services already in first grade. Ann assesses his performance to be adequate for his age, but in particular during work periods he is restless and not concentrated. He also produces many "sounds", tapping the table with his pencil, humming and so on. This behaviour is also observed when he is at home and when he attends the after-school programme.<sup>38</sup> Ann recalls what she thought on meeting John for the first time:

*I only know that I recognized when I met him, that this is a boy I need to be on good terms with. (...) I need to make friends with this boy. I need to work with him in a way that he will understand that I wish him well, and that he will see me as a helper. Because if I don't, I'll be met with defiance. Defiance and resistance (int 100300, p.20).*

Paul lives with his father and his father's cohabitant. Because of his mother's drinking and drugs problem the father took over custody when he was two years old. Paul has a large family. He has two older brothers, one lives in a foster home, and his mother also has two other children. His father's cohabitant brings her two children into the relationship, and she and Paul's father have also had a baby together. After moving house Paul came to Valley school in second grade. At the transfer meeting between the schools Ann learned that there had been a number of problems concerning the boy dating back to his time in day care. Paul is in a group with five other children, three girls and two boys. Ann considers Paul to be creative and academically proficient, but restless, unruly and not concentrated. According to Ann, Paul says that he finds it difficult to concentrate when at school. He claims to have many thoughts

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<sup>38</sup> When at the after-school programme John often got into conflicts with other children. After Christmas break John's father and stepmother therefore decided that he should stop attending the after-school programme.

inside his head all the time. He calls himself "stupid," and he will often stand and butt his head hard against the wall (int 102300, 011201). He has regularly seen a psychologist from the central support services since first grade. The psychologist has recommended that Paul should be referred to the children's and young persons' psychiatry services for further assistance and follow-up.

When Paul started in Ann's class she knew that he required a great deal of attention, which she was able to give him, and she consequently feels that he functioned relatively well in her class. However, during the first period of time after John started in the class she did not have as much time for Paul. Ann says:

*But he, anyway I think that it worked so well with him last year. Then I only had him and the rest of the class to focus on. At least he received a lot of attention from me last year, something he hasn't got this year because I've had John, and my main focus has been on him. (...) Now that I've started to see him more again and to focus more on him and sit down with him, he's really flourishing again. I really don't know, now, when I've spoken more with him and sat down more with him, then I really think he's calming down (int 102300, p.8-9).*

This quotation draws attention to the question of time. When John started in Ann's class she had to focus on him. She did not have that much time to spend on Paul, and according to Ann he seemed to suffer as a result of this. After a period of time, when Ann again is able to concentrate on Paul, he appears to be more relaxed and focused.

### The Collaborators

As already stated, the child-welfare educator is with Ann and her class seven lessons a week. Ann apparently feels the cooperation between the two of them is good:

*Every Tuesday we plan the coming week. We're on the same wavelength more or less, she and I, when it comes to our approach. We talk well together. I also feel that we work well together in the classroom and on excursions. It's got a little bit to do with chemistry, I think. And I get more time to spend with them (John and Paul) when she's there (int 011201, p.6-7).*

Ann also has regular meetings with the teacher in the parallel class. They meet every week, but according to Ann, these meetings are only used to plan next week's academic progress. She assesses the cooperation with this teacher to be "virtually non-existent" (int 011201, p.18). The school administration has shown its understanding that Ann has a demanding class

as additional lessons have been allocated to this class.<sup>39</sup> Other than this, Ann does not feel she has any support from the principal. She never inquires how Ann is doing, and never asks any questions about the class or individual pupils. Ann has talked with her principal about this issue: “I’ve told her on several occasions, why not try to go round and visit classes some more. But she has so many excuses. There’s so much paperwork” (int 011201, p.20). Ann appears to have similar experiences with the support services.

John's previous school had recommended that he should be examined to determine whether he might have AD/HD. Therefore when John started in Ann's class the special educator from the in-house support services stayed with the class to observe him. She was also present at a meeting with Ann and John's father where it was decided to refer the boy to the central support services for further examination.<sup>40</sup> With that one exception, Ann has not received any guidance from the in-house support services on how to continue working with John. She says: “I wish she (the special teacher) could have been here more and taken a look at things, and given me some advice” (int 011201, p.19). When Paul started in Ann’s class she was told that the special educator from the in-house support services would observe the boy and then provide guidance and serve as Ann’s conversation partner. This has not materialized:

*They told me that she (the special teacher) would come sometimes and observe and advise and help me. I was to have her as a conversation partner. But that hasn't happened yet (int 011201, p.9).*

The special educator occasionally asks how Ann is doing, but has not had any contact with Paul, other than seeing him when in Ann’s class to observe John. Nor has Ann had much contact with the psychologist from the central support services. The psychologist has worked with the boy directly, only having a few meetings where Ann and Paul’s father have been present. These meetings have given Ann recognition and confirmation for what she is doing, but beyond this she feels that she has not received any guidance in helping this boy.

When dealing with the question of collaboration partners, Ann often talks about the pupils’ parents:

*That getting the parents involved, getting them on the same page. That's the main thing. It's, it's probably because I'm a mother too. That I know what you can do for your child, you know. What resources the parents*

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<sup>39</sup> As stated above, the school’s child-welfare educator is with Ann in the class for seven lessons per week. After the data collection period was finished, the administration also decided that one of the care-worker apprentices would be connected full time to Ann’s class.

<sup>40</sup> John was examined by the central support services after the data collection had been finished. The conclusion was that he suffers from Tourette's syndrome.



*can be, when it comes to supporting a child and doing the right things. Make the right demands, set the right limits, give lots of love and care. If things aren't working at home, if things at home are not good for the child, then it'll be a difficult life. And I've seen a lot more of that over the years I've been working and also had kids of my own. I've become more aware of it (int 011201, p.21).*

Ann obviously thinks that the pupils' parents should be close collaborators, and in John's case Ann feels that the cooperation between her and the boy's father and stepmother is very good. The boy's mother lives in another city and Ann has only talked with her once on the phone. The stepmother has known John since he was a small boy. Ever since John started in Ann's class she has had regular meetings with John's father and stepmother. They are always positive and willing to cooperate when she contacts them, and they also contact Ann when they feel it is necessary. In order to illustrate the father's eagerness to help and support his son, Ann tells about the class's Christmas party in December:

*I saw at the Christmas party how well his father helped him. I asked him don't you have the younger kids with you? No, tonight I want to be alone with John, he said. And that's because he wanted to look after him, you know. The father was always ahead of things and stopped and controlled him in a nice way. There was no trouble; nothing went wrong with John the whole night. It went so well (int 011201, p.18).*

Ann has never met Paul's mother, and she finds the cooperation with Paul's father difficult. It is difficult to get in touch with him and he does not attend parents' meetings or other school events. He never checks his son's school bag and does not follow up when it comes to messages, homework or equipment.<sup>41</sup> Ann appears to be frustrated because of this difficult cooperation:

*It's a major problem that I have such bad contact with them. I don't know what I'm going to do. I get so frustrated. There's been so much defensiveness and aggression. I feel that when I call them, it's always on the edge, almost like they're talking through clenched teeth (int 011201, p.10).*

Paul came alone to the Christmas party. Neither his father nor his father's cohabitant came along with him. He was not dressed for the occasion, and he did not bring lemonade or something else to drink as all the pupils had been asked to do in the invitation. Ann seems to be deeply worried because of the insufficient care Paul is receiving.

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<sup>41</sup> There is, however, an exception as in Chapter nine we will see that Paul's father helps his son with one particular school activity.

### ***Comments on Ann's Current Context and Class***

It has been recognized that the way in which teachers realize inclusion in their classrooms largely depends on their attitude towards pupils with special needs. Thus, teachers' attitudes are regarded as a decisive factor in making schools more inclusive (Pijl & Meijer 1997). However, within the framework of socio-cultural theory, teachers' attitudes cannot be considered in isolation and independent of the context. In my presentation of Ann's current context and class I have therefore pointed out some aspects that I regard as relevant in order to understand her teaching practice. In my final comments I will pay attention to some issues that emerge through this chapter.

We have seen that Valley school is situated in a district where a relatively high number of children have been assessed as having special needs. We have also seen that this general picture of the district is reflected in the description of Ann's class. Many of the children in her class need her support and understanding, and as we have seen, she is particularly concerned about John and Paul. A central question concerning the organization necessary for educating pupils with special needs is how the special services are to be provided. The organizational structure in the Norwegian compulsory school may have various forms. Some of these forms are regular class and no support; regular class and in-support for the teacher and/or the pupil in question; regular class as basis and part-time special groups; special groups as basis and part-time regular class (Skaalvik & Fossen 1995). However, the common organizational structure appears to be regular class with in-support for teachers and/or pupils, something that is in accordance with the visions outlined in the current national curriculum. This is also the case for Ann and her class. The child-welfare educator is together with Ann and the children in their ordinary class activities, and both John and Paul participate in these activities.

Teaching in heterogeneous classes is no doubt challenging. Teachers may often be confronted with the question of how to deal with and instruct some of their pupils. Some children may require more instruction time or other learning methods, proficiency and insight. Therefore, teachers will often feel the need to expand their resources. They may, for example, need more time and skills (Pijl & Meijer 1997). The problem is that teachers often have limited access to additional resources. Of course, this does not hold true for all resources. Learning materials, for example, are relatively easy to borrow and photocopy. It is more expensive to purchase materials for new methods or build or refurbish rooms to work in smaller groups and to talk with or give assistance to individual pupils. When it comes to Ann, we have seen that the school's administration recognizes that she has a demanding class. She has therefore been given additional resources (see Footnote 39, page 78), and when the child-

welfare educator is together with Ann, she has more time to spend on pupils such as John and Paul. However, Ann seems to express that this is not enough.

We have seen that she would have liked to have some advice on how to deal with the two boys in her class, and some advice from the support services. Implicit in these reflections is that she believes the support services to have more insight and experience than she has. What also emerges when Ann talks about this issue is her wish to have some personal support. This is connected both to the school's administration and the support services. The current principal does not ask any questions about the pupils, the class or how Ann is dealing with all her challenges, and people working in the support services are so busy and have too many important things occupying their time. For Ann, it appears to be important to be seen, to get some support both from the principal as well as from the support services, thus when Ann talks about these experiences I sense a feeling of frustration and resignation. However, interesting to note is her recurring comments on the pupils' parents. In this chapter her concern with the pupils' parents arises when she describes the class and talks about the individual pupils, when she reflects upon why she organizes the class into groups and when talking about John and Paul. She clearly states that the parents should be central collaboration partners.

When considering Ann's experiences with respect to collaboration it may be useful to reflect in terms of level of formulation and level of realization (Haug 2000). In their local plans both the central support services and the in-house support services state that children with special needs should receive appropriate assistance. Implicit here is that teachers should get advice and support in their daily work with these children. In Ann's case, she feels that both the central support services and the in-house support services are far removed. She does not get any advice or support. In Ann's case, the well intentioned words in the written documents do not reach down to the classroom level. Ann's experiences in this area are not unique. When I was a teacher I sometimes felt the same way, and I have also often experienced that teacher colleagues complain because they feel there is a lack of communication between them and the support services. Employees in the support services, on the other hand, reply that they have too much to do; they are not able to follow up all the cases. Therefore, in Ann's daily classroom practices she is by and large left alone with the children. However, when claiming this it is also important to remember Bakhtin's (1986) notion of voice. In the continuous flow of classroom activities Ann is the one who must make the choices and take the decisions, but according to Bakhtin's theory, when making these choices and taking these decisions, it is also important to remember that she carries with her

other voices. How she deals with her current teaching practice is the focus of Chapters six to nine.

## **Part III**

### **Ann's Current Teaching Practice**

## Chapter 6

### "They Have to Participate in Various Activities"

In the previous chapter we saw that the school day in Ann's class is divided into various activities. This was presented under the heading "The School Day" and illustrated in Figure one (p.73). There are several reasons for breaking up school activities into smaller units. Studies within the classroom management tradition show that this is a way for teachers to deal with pupils' energy (Fenwick 1996). Pupils become unfocused and unruly when they have to keep at the same activity for a long period of time, and to avoid this, the teacher needs to break up the activities into smaller units. Ann appears to reflect in the same way when she says: "There are so many kids in this class that can't remain focused for a long period of time" (int 112900, p.6), and "Variation ...that's what it's about" (int 012401, p.6).

Doyle (1977, 1986) relates the division of activities to the many goals that are to be achieved within a classroom setting. These are outlined in the curriculum, in the school's own local plan, in plans for the class in question or in individual plans for some of the pupils. If these goals are to be achieved, all sorts of activities will be required. Therefore it is not unusual to vary the activities. Pupils do not sit and work on the same topic or the same subject during the whole school day. Rather they usually deal with various activities. It is also important to add that this is a characteristic and general feature of the socio-cultural setting of schools regardless of where they are situated, how pupils are organized for learning or what educational philosophy the teacher espouses. Thus, even though the pupils are working on a theme or a project, the activities are divided and varied (Postholm 2003).

What is important in this context is that the pupils must manage the various activities. It is crucial that they come to master the appropriate way of behaviour in the different settings that occur during a school day. Within the framework of socio-cultural theory we know that the pupils do not learn this individually, isolated and by themselves (Vygotsky 1978). What need to be focused on are the intermental settings in which the children participate. It is by taking part in these settings that the pupils encounter and experience the appropriate mode of behaviour. In these contexts the teacher is crucial. Therefore teachers should be aware of and know how to deal with the various activities and settings. They should know how to organize them so that the pupils will internalize the accepted and required form of behaviour. I believe that this topic is crucial in all school classes and is particularly important when a teacher has

pupils such as John and Paul in her or his class. This chapter focuses on Ann's actions and reflections on this topic.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

A great deal of research on this theme has been conducted within the classroom management tradition. These studies have given valuable insight into the complexity of teaching (Doyle 1977, 1986, Anderson, Evertson & Emmer 1980, Butchard & McEwan 1998), and further found that one way for teachers to deal with classroom complexity is to break up and vary activities and to have distinctive rules of behaviour within each of the particular settings (Emmer, Evertson & Anderson 1980, Charles 1981, Fenwick 1996, Burnard 1998). Within the framework of socio-cultural theory I offer an alternative theoretical approach to the study of how Ann deals with this challenge. In doing so, I will present Bakhtin's (1986) concept of *speech genre* and the concept of *activity setting* outlined by Tharp and Gallimore (1988).

### **The Concept of Speech Genre**

Throughout this text it has been claimed that social reality plays a fundamental role in individual mental functioning. To understand the individual it is therefore necessary to gain insight into the social relations in which the individual exists. This has been clearly stated in Vygotsky's "general genetic law of cultural development" (Vygotsky 1981b), and this inevitably leads us to examine the social contexts within which human beings operate. It is in this context that Bakhtin's concept of speech genre is interesting. However, in order to fully grasp the content of the concept we first have to examine Bakhtin's concepts of national language and social language.

The term national language refers to the traditional linguistic unities, Norwegian, English, French, and so on, with their coherent grammatical and semantic systems. According to Wertsch (1991), Bakhtin provided relatively little specific detail on how national languages might enter into dialogic contact, however, he was more specific with respect to social languages. A social language is "a discourse peculiar to a specific stratum of society (professional, age group and so forth) within a given social system at a given time" (Holquist 1981, p.430). Synonymous to social languages, Bakhtin (1981) also used the term social speech types, and as examples he mentioned:

*(...) social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, language of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day (p.262-263).*

In Bakhtin's view, a speaker therefore not only invokes a national language, but also a social language in producing an utterance. The particular social language shapes what the speaker's individual voice can say. The process of producing unique utterances by speaking in social languages involves a specific kind of dialogicality or multivoicedness that Bakhtin (1981) termed "ventriloquation", the process whereby one voice speaks through another voice, or voices, in a social language:

*The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concrete contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own (p.293-294).*

In contrast to social languages, where the distinguishing feature is the social stratum of speakers, speech genres are characterized primarily in terms of the typical situations of speech communication:

*A speech genre is not a form of language, but a typical form (a type) of utterance, as such the genre also includes a certain typical kind of expression that inheres it. In the genre the word acquires a particular typical expression. Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication (Bakhtin 1986, p.87).*

Social language and speech genre may be viewed as analytically distinct, but in reality they are often thoroughly intertwined: Speakers from particular social strata, for example teachers are the ones who invoke the speech genres of teaching. Bakhtin (1986) claims that as human beings we are given the speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language, something which we master fluently long before we begin to study grammar. We know our native language, its lexical composition and grammatical structure, not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear in intermental contexts and that we internalize in live speech communication with people around us. The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with one another. In Bakhtin's view it is no more possible to produce an utterance without using some speech genre than it is possible to produce an utterance without using some national language. According to this view, any utterance entails the invocation of a speech genre:



*We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical forms of construction of the whole (“forms of constructions of the whole” italics in original). Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skilfully in practice (“in practice” italics in original), and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence in theory (“in theory” italics in original). (...) we speak in diverse genres without suspecting that they exist (Bakhtin 1986, p.78).*

Consequently, Bakhtin (1986) claimed that even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite genres, sometimes rigid ones and sometimes more flexible, plastic and creative ones. The concept of speech genres is thus used to describe the broad set of linguistic conversations which speakers more or less tacitly agree upon as operative for any particular discursive context, spoken or written (Morris 2001). Bakhtin did, however, recognize that the study of speech genres was in its infancy, noting that “no list of oral speech genres yet exists, or even a principle on which such a list might be based” (1986, p.80). He did, nevertheless, provide sample lists of the kind of phenomena he had in mind, which included military commands, everyday genres of greeting, farewell and congratulation, salon conversations about everyday social, aesthetic, and other subjects, genres of table conversation, intimate conversations among friends and everyday narration (Bakhtin 1986).

Bakhtin claimed that the extreme heterogeneity of speech genres should not be underestimated in any way. When discussing this issue he categorized speech into primary and secondary genres. Primary speech genres are simple and connected to concrete everyday life events. Secondary speech genres arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organized cultural communication. According to Bakhtin (1986), secondary speech genres are often written, occurring in novels, plays, all kinds of scientific research and so forth. During the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary genres. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones where they lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. Bakhtin points out the irony that genres have been studied in the areas of rhetoric and literature, whereas the enormous ocean of extraliterary genres from which those two disciplines have drawn their forms has remained unexplored. Yet it is from this ocean that they draw their life (Holquist 1986). What ensures the connectedness of all genres, from the most intricately written novel to the simple salutations with which a teacher greets her pupils in the morning, is the fact that they are all constructed out of the same material, words. Genres are constructed with words as they are present in communication. Communication is concerned with what happens when real people in all the contingencies of their myriad lives actually speak to each other, and as we have seen, communication is never a purely individual

act. Among other things it is constrained by the typical situation and hence the particular speech genre (Holquist 1986).

In Chapter two, we saw that Bakhtin focused on utterances. As we recall, he did not view the individual language user to be an absolute free agent with the ability to choose any words to implement a particular intention. He constantly returned to the idea that all speech involves some kind of intermingling of voices, thus excluding a neat monologic perspective (Wertsch 1991). At first glance it therefore may seem that his heavy emphasis on dialogic processes would preclude the identification of distinguishable forms of speech. However, one of Bakhtin's accomplishments was to specify forms of structure that organize dialogic processes. It was in this connection that he viewed speech genres as the means by which communication and mental actions are organized. According to Wertsch (1991), these thoughts make it possible to consider Bakhtin's ideas in light of the tool-kit analogy. Bakhtin himself did not use this analogy when talking about speech genres, it is, nonetheless, implicit in what he says:

*(...) a speaker is given not only mandatory forms of the national language (lexical compositions and grammatical structure), but also forms of utterances that are mandatory, that is speech genres. The latter are just as necessary for mutual understanding as are forms of language. Speech genres are much more changeable, flexible, and plastic than language forms are, but they have a normative significance for the speaking individual, and they are not created by him but are given to him (Bakhtin 1986, p.80-81).*

Thus various speech genres may be considered as items in a tool kit. However, Bakhtin (1986) also comments on the problem that arises when a person does not know a particular genre. Many people may feel quite helpless in certain spheres of communication because they do not know the speech genre suitable for the situation in question. He says:

*(...) a person who has an excellent command of speech in some areas of cultural communication, who is able to read a scholarly paper or engage in a scholarly discussion, who speaks very well on social questions, is silent or very awkward in social conversation. (...) this is entirely a matter of the inability to command a repertoire of genres of social conversation, the lack of a sufficient supply of those ideas about the whole of the utterance that help one's speech quickly and naturally (Bakhtin 1986, p.80).*

From this we can again see that it is obvious that Bakhtin connected the concept of speech genre to typical situations of speech communication. Every setting requires its corresponding genre, and in this way the concept of speech genre is closely connected to language. When looking at it from this angle, it could at first glance appear to be more constrained and narrow than Bakhtin perhaps intended. In the quotation above Bakhtin says that a person may be "silent or very awkward" because she or he does not master a particular speech genre. When using these words we can see that the concept of speech genre is not only exclusively

connected to utterances and words. It may also include the total behaviour connected to typical situations, and it is in this connection that Bakhtin's theories take on special interest and usefulness when it comes to formal schooling. The school day is divided into various activities or settings and it is important that pupils master the different forms of speech communication and behaviour required for these various settings. It is equally important to reflect upon how a teacher deals with this challenge. These thoughts presented here are crucial, and I will reflect further upon them in the discussion part of this chapter.

### The Concept of Activity Setting

The concept of activity setting offers additional insight into how we can come to understand intermental settings or typical situations. Although the concept may be the subject of abstract theoretical analysis, it is well known to us all. Activity settings are the social furniture of our family, community and working lives. They are the events and people of our work and relations to one another, they are the small recurrent dramas of everyday life, played on the stages of home, community, workplace and schools (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). They are the teacher and one of her pupils collaborating to find a lost book, the girl telling her class about a dramatic event with sensitive questioning by her teacher, the boy who learns to play a board game through the help of a patient classmate, and when Ann, for example, gathers the pupils in the class circle in order to talk with them about a particular theme or topic. Thus, activity settings are intermental contexts that have the nature of collaborative interaction, intersubjectivity and assisted performance (Tharp and Gallimore 1988). In this connection, the concept of intersubjectivity means that the participants have a common understanding of the situation in question (Wertsch 1984, Matusov 2000).<sup>42</sup> The notion of assisted performance is closely connected to Vygotsky's theory on the zone of proximal development that was presented in Chapter two. Therefore, assisted performance defines what a child can do with the help and support from more capable others (Vygotsky 1978).<sup>43</sup>

According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), it is crucial that activity setting is understood as including both cognitive and external, social components. Leontèv (1981) also emphasizes the individual and social nature of activity when claiming that it includes both the individual and her or his culturally defined environment. He further claims that if we remove human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist. With all its varied

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<sup>42</sup> The concept of intersubjectivity is crucial and it constantly surfaces in this study. In Chapter eight I will present it in more detail.

<sup>43</sup> I will touch upon the idea of assisted performance in more detail when presenting the concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976) in Chapter seven.

forms, the human individual's activity is a system within the system of social relations; it does not exist without these relations (Leontèv 1981). Below, I will look into the concept of activity setting in more detail, and in doing so, I will follow Tharp and Gallimore's (1988) suggestion and discuss the "who", "what", "when", "where" and "why" of the term.

Activity settings do not include persons at random. The individuals or the "who" of activity settings are not there by accident. For example, within the physical frame of a classroom the participants are most often the teacher and her pupils. The "what" of activity settings involves two dimensions. The first dimension focuses on a description of the ongoing operations. These may include such things as the distribution of textbooks and the reading of passages in a reading lesson. The second dimension focuses on the scripts of the operations, on how they are carried out. Scripts describe the stable patterns of behaviour in any particular context of the activity setting. It is the activity in question that influences the choice of scripts (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). Interaction scripts therefore arise in the context of culturally generated activities. Thus one interaction script is used when the teacher and the pupils gather in the class circle to talk about a particular topic, and another one is used when a class is on an excursion. According to Leontèv (1981), humans do not simply find external conditions to which they must adapt their activity. Rather, these social conditions bear with them the motives and goals of their activity, its means and modes. In other words, society produces the activity of the individuals it forms. Therefore, scripts need not be consciously known to be used routinely in everyday life. In fact, many of the most pervasive scripts are so embedded in the culture that they are taken for granted (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). Interesting to note here is that the concept of speech genre and the concept of interaction scripts have some essential corresponding ideas. The difference between them appears to be that Bakhtin's main focus was on language and speech communication appropriate to typical situations, while Tharp and Gallimore appear to be most interested in the stable patterns of behaviour required for the setting in question. This is an issue I will return to in the discussion section at the end of this chapter.

Activity settings in the ordinary community, family, working life and in schools are patterned in time. This fact leads us to the question of "when" for activity settings. In this connection it is important to look at the variety of schedules. Activity settings in schools may be more or less permanent during a school year. Thus every Tuesday Ann and her class have an excursion, and every Wednesday the pupils have an English lesson. Other activity settings are more irregular. Sometimes teachers also have to handle and deal with unexpected and

unprepared situations.<sup>44</sup> Two points are vital when it comes to activity settings in schools. First, activity settings cannot exist without time and authorities who organize and schedule them. Second, an activity setting should only occur when there is a goal to reach. In everyday life, activity settings occur as often and for as long as it is necessary to reach a goal. When the goal has been achieved, the activity should be ended (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). This is of course a major challenge for teachers. What happens if the activity in question lasts after the goal has been reached or if the particular activity has to end before the goal has been achieved? I will return to the question of goal attainment when discussing the “why” of activity settings below.

Activity settings must also have a place to exist; the “where” of activity settings. In ordinary life, that place is where the production can best occur or where the goal can be reached. For instance, a farmer will not socialize his daughter or son into farming only through discussions in the living room. Schools are special because activity settings are perhaps more ill-placed here than in any other major institutions. This may be discussed as the “decontextualization” of the school. In schools, instructions may often take place far removed from the intended tools, the intended materials or the intended eventual use of the product. In this way there is much truth in the adage that schools only teach how to talk about things (Tharp & Gallimore 1988).<sup>45</sup> An activity setting finally consists of individuals engaged in goal-directed actions, something that leads us to the “why” of activity settings.

According to Leontèv (1981), the main feature that distinguishes one activity from another is its object. An activity’s object is therefore its real motive. Therefore, the question of why an activity setting exists must be discussed in light of motive. The motive has an energizing function as it leads to actions which are directed towards a goal. What distinguishes one activity from another is the underlying motive. An activity is further realized through many conscious, or targeted actions, all pointing towards the overarching motive behind the activity (Leontèv 1981).<sup>46</sup> Individuals initiate such actions. It is, however, important to bear in mind that actions stem from social interactions in a given social, cultural and historical context (Engeström 1999). The motives are not always identical for all members in an activity setting. This can be illustrated by looking at a reading-lesson activity setting. Its goal is to teach

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<sup>44</sup> I will return to this issue in Chapter seven.

<sup>45</sup> In the current national curriculum, C-97, there is a “warning” against this. For example it is stated that: “The local society must be used in an active way in the teaching. (...) The school must utilize the neighbourhood and local community to exemplify, instantiate and complement the subject syllabuses” (p.61).

<sup>46</sup> Leontèv’s thoughts will be accounted for in more detail in Chapter nine when presenting the cultural-historical activity theory.

reading, something that energizes the teacher's practice during the lesson. However, for many fledgling readers this goal, as articulated by the teacher who controls the activity, provides no motive. Therefore, the teacher must often provide supplementary motivation. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), it is important that activity settings should tend to create motivational homogeneity for members, and according to Leontèv (1981), the understanding and the meaning of the activity provide the reason for the activity settings to exist and continue.

### ***Ann's Practice***

Bakhtin (1986) connected the concept of speech genre to typical situations, and as we have seen, he recognized that there is neither a list of various speech genres nor principles on which such a list might be based. Therefore, it is impossible to present a "fair" and complete list of the various typical settings in Ann's class and their corresponding speech genres. Recognizing this fact, in Chapter five I have nevertheless pointed out some recurring and consequently typical situations in her class. However, even though my focus in this chapter is on various settings and their corresponding speech genres, I will not pay equal attention to all of them. To grasp the depth and complexity of this issue I have rather chosen to highlight one typical situation that occurs in Ann's class. This is the teaching and assisted learning period situated within the class circle setting. Below I will first present Ann's reflections concerning this typical situation. Then I will tell a story from a teaching and assisted learning period in her class. In my opinion illuminating one typical situation may contribute to further awareness of and insight into the topic. The main reason for choosing the teaching and assisted learning period rather than other typical situations, such as work periods, breaks or lunch, is due to the fact that this particular activity is, needless to say, crucial within the socio-cultural setting of schools. Another reason for choosing this activity is that it takes place in the class circle. The class circle is the most frequent setting in Ann's class, and she seems to look upon it as crucial. She says: "Being together in the class circle, I think that is our most important meeting" (int 102300, p.1). In this text I am concerned with my research subject's point of view (Erickson 1986), therefore her utterances are interesting and as a researcher I want to explore them in some detail.

### **Ann's Reflections on Teaching and Assisted Learning Periods**

In Chapter five we saw that the class circle is used for various activities. It is not only used for greetings in the morning and goodbyes in the afternoon. It is also used for teaching and

assisted learning. Ann says: “When we're going through new things and perhaps making a new front page in the workbooks, then I use the class circle” (int 102100, p.5). This statement is verified through my observation notes and video-recordings (see Appendix 3A, p.208-210 and 3B, p.211-212). When using the class circle for teaching and assisted learning, Ann's intention appears to be that the pupils should feel comfortable, that it should be easy to pay attention to what is going on and that they should not disturb one another. She says:

*And then I have to be aware, ...they can't sit too close to each other and everybody should have a place to sit where they are able to look at me and at the board and where they are able to write (int 102400, p.5)*

Depending on what they are to do, she therefore will at times ask some of them to move their desks into the class circle (vid 101900). Then there will be more space left to the others who sit in their regular places in the class circle. However, sitting comfortably, being able to listen, talk and write does not appear to be enough. According to Ann, the children should also be active and interested in this situation. Therefore she not only thinks about the organization of the pupils in the class circle, she also reflects upon the activities taking place:

*I always reflect upon how we could work with a topic in another way than just using pencil and book, other than me passing on some kind of knowledge (int 100300, p.6). They need activities that grab them. Then they are so interested and committed (int 112900, p.9). Eight-year-old children can't just sit producing and producing, working in their books. They need variation (int 102401, p.9). When they explore and investigate ... when they do it themselves, I think there's a greater chance to remember, because they really experience what we're talking about. I think they learn in this way, not only by listening to me talking about things, you know. Well, I think kids should be active when learning. There's no doubt this is the way they learn (int 102400, p.4). It's an important part of schooling, allowing the children to explore and be active (int 112200, p.4).*

In my data material I find several examples of how Ann practises these ideas. As will be seen, they are realized in the story presented below. They also appear when the class works on the topic of weather (vid 011101, 011501, 012201), or when they work on their maths (vid 102300) or on how to write letters (vid 112700). Ann obviously wants her pupils to be active and committed. At the same time she also recognizes the fact that eight-year-old children cannot be focused on the same topic for a long period of time. This issue was also touched upon in the introduction to this chapter. She says:

*I don't think I should ask kids to be focused for more than twenty minutes. Many of them can't manage more (int 112900, p.6). It's best to keep the activities short (int 102500, p.5).*

So far we have seen that Ann takes many issues into consideration when gathering the pupils in the class circle for teaching and assisted learning. She reflects upon the placement, how to teach so that the children should become interested, active and committed participants, and she considers the question of time. Implicit in all these reflections are, of course, the pupils' voices, something that can be illustrated in the following quotation where she considers how to organize the particular lesson that will be presented later in this chapter:

*I would have preferred that each one of them could have tried (whether items float or sink). We could have had a group activity where everybody could have tried. But I didn't dare ... it could easily have become too chaotic. I was afraid it would develop into something ... because they have been quite restless, in particular John's and Paul's groups. When left alone with them, I felt it was too risky. Well, you know, water... anyway, I decided to gather them in the class circle (int 102400, p.1-3).*

Therefore, when planning the teaching and assisted learning periods, Ann does not appear to look upon the individual and the environment as only being isolated from and independent of each other. Rather she takes both the individual and the environment into consideration.

During the data collection period all the pupils, including John and Paul, seemed to manage the various activities within the class circle setting quite well. All of them appeared to master the morning ritual and the end-of-the-day ritual.<sup>47</sup> The pupils also seemed to manage the teaching and assisted learning periods of the class circle activity. However, in two of the interviews (int 100300, 241000) Ann commented that this was not always the case with John. He managed the class circle settings during the first teaching unit quite well, but in the second teaching unit and at the end of the day he could sometimes be unruly and unfocused:

*Sometimes, at the end of the day, ...when we're in the class circle he may sit there and ape me. It's awful (int 102400, p.16). He provokes me sometimes when he sits there and mimics me. He really does. It's always during the last part of the day (int 100300, p.21).*

John had been in Ann's class for a couple of months when she said this. Thus, at that point in time he was still relatively new in her class. What is important to note is that John does not always behave in an inappropriate way. Ann says that this happens "sometimes", and in the story presented below this will become evident. Even if this particular activity occurred in the second teaching unit in October, John behaved in an appropriate way. Ann feels that Paul, on

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<sup>47</sup> According to Ann they are especially interested when she reads a book before they go home: "Well, then we read the book, and that's so nice. It's such a nice end to the day. All of them are so attentive and interested" (int 031000, p.16).



the other hand, manages the class circle setting. He did, however, have some problems with the setting when he started in her class:

*Thinking back, he was so unruly, much more physical in a way. He wanted to lie under the bench (int 102300, p.8-9). When he started in this class, well, well I demanded that he sit on the bench. I wanted to focus on a few things when he started (int 112900, p.13). Then, gradually he managed. He really did. As time went by, he managed so well (int 102900, p.8-9). I think he manages so well. If we're going to talk about what he masters,...I think it's because he's so easy to get interested. He's so interested. Absolutely (int 102300, p.10).*

Below I will tell a story from the teaching and assisted learning period in the class circle setting. It is called the “float-and-sink” story. This story is of course unique. It was video taped during the second teaching unit, Thursday, 19 October and later fixed in the text presented below. It has happened once and will never happen again in exactly the same way. However, even if the story is unique it focuses on a typical situation, the teaching and assisted learning period when in the class circle. We have seen that Ann wants her pupils to be active and interested participants in the activity that is taking place. This is what happens in the “float-and-sink” story. Thus, the story also focuses on a feature of Ann’s teaching practice.

### The “Float-and-Sink” Story

After the children have finished their lunch Ann asks them to take their pencils and workbooks into the class circle. This time she wants them to sit on the floor behind the benches so that they can put their workbooks on the benches and write in them there. Four of the children are asked to sit at their regular desks. These desks are close to the class circle, and Ann asks the pupils to do this so they are not too close to each other in the class circle. When Ann sits at her place in the class circle and all the pupils are facing her and the board, the lesson can begin. For a period of fourteen days the pupils in both the third-grade classes have been working on the topic of water, a topic determined by the national curriculum. Among other things it is stated that pupils in third grade should “explore what floats or sinks in water” (C-97, p.210). Consequently, the topic is also listed in the year plan for third grade at Valley school, and both the third-grade classes are working on it at the same time. In front of her, on the floor Ann has placed a bowl of water:

- (1) Ann: *(She looks at the pupils and smiles at them:.) Today we're going to perform an experiment. We're going to test whether different things float or sink. In the other class the pupils guessed whether Christian (the teacher in the parallel class) floats or sinks . What do you think, does he float or sink?*
- (2) The pupils: *(In a loud voice:.) Sinks!*
- (3) Ann: *Sinks. Yes, that's what I said too. He certainly sinks. But what can he do to float then?*

The children offer several suggestions. He can use a beach ball, put on a life jacket, he can float on his back or he can swim:

(4) Ann: *(Smiles at them and says:) Yes. Well, now you can start with a new page in your workbooks. Then you divide the page in two. (As she is saying this, she leaves her chair, moves towards the board and starts to illustrate what she is saying by drawing a big "page" on the board. Then she draws a line to divide it in two).*

All the children do the same in their books:

(5) Ann: *On the top of this column (she points to the left part of the page), we write FLOAT, and on this column we write SINK (as she is saying this, she writes the words on the board).*

The pupils talk together as they are writing the two words on the top of each column in their books. When they are finished, Ann shows them a piece of chalk and asks what they think, will the chalk float or sink? Some of the children guess it will float, while others think it will sink. Ann asks a girl to come and put the chalk into the bowl of water. The chalk sinks. All the children seem very excited, and they shout "Yes". Ann and the pupils then agree to write "chalk" in the "sink" column. Then Ann writes the word on the board, and the pupils write in their books. When finished, Ann shows them a piece of plastic, and asks what they think, will it float or sink? Some children suggest it should float while others say that it will sink. Ann then asks a boy to come and put it on the water. At first it seems as if the plastic will sink, but then it floats:

(6) Ann: *That was very strange. (She picks the plastic up, looks at it, looks at the children and says:) Do you know something (she looks at the children) there's a hole in it. (She puts it on the water, and it floats. She picks it up, puts it on the water again, and then it sinks).*

The children start to talk. Some of them address themselves to Ann, others to their classmates:

(7) Ann: *(In a loud voice:) You have to remember to raise your hands to speak. (She waits until everybody has calmed down. Then she continues in a low voice:) Or we can't do this. Why does it both float and sink?*

Many children raise their hands. They appear to be very focused on the task, particularly Paul who is waving his hand apparently eager to answer:

- (8) Ann: *(She looks at Paul, smiles at him:) Paul, you want to answer the question. What do you think?*
- (9) Paul: *(Paul gets up. He looks very excited and says in a loud voice:) Because on one side the water can't come into it, but on the other side water comes into it, and then it sinks.*
- (10) Ann: *Yes, perhaps that's it, Paul.*
- (11) Paul: *Yes, it is (he sits down again).*
- (12) Ann: *(She still has her face turned towards Paul:) What happens if we are rowing in a boat, and there's a hole in the boat, Paul?*
- (13) Paul: *It sinks.*
- (14) Ann: *Why does it sink?*
- (15) Paul: *Because the boat will be heavy.*
- (16) Ann: *Ok. Yes, so this is just like a boat, perhaps?*
- (17) Paul: *Yes.*

Ann and the pupils agree on what to write. Under the sink column they write “plastic with water” and under the float column, they write “plastic”. Then they look at several other items and test whether they float or sink. After having carried out the experiments they write the names in the correct columns, the teacher on the board and the pupils in their books. Then Ann picks up a needle from one of the drawers. She puts it very carefully on the water. It floats. Then she picks it up and puts it on the water again. Now it sinks. The children can offer no explanations for what is happening, so Ann starts talking about the surface membrane.<sup>48</sup> Because of the surface membrane, the needle can float when it is carefully placed on the water. When the needle is not carefully placed on the water, the surface membrane will be destroyed:

- (18) Ann: *(The needle is floating on the water. Ann looks at the pupils, then she nods her head towards John:) I put the needle on the water in two different ways, didn't I?*
- (19) John: *Yes, you did.*
- (20) Ann: *How did I do it the first time, John?*
- (21) John: *You placed it...*
- (22) Paul: *(Interrupts John and says in an eager voice:) Carefully.*
- (23) John: *You placed it very carefully.*
- (24) Ann: *Very carefully, and that was because I didn't want to destroy the surface membrane. Because of that, it could float. But if I put it down with the needle point,...what happens then?*
- (25) John: *It will be destroyed.*
- (26) Ann: *Yes, it will be destroyed, and then it will sink, because...*
- (27) Paul: *There will be a hole in it (the surface membrane).*
- (28) Ann: *(She smiles towards Paul:) Yes!*

After some discussions Ann and the pupils agree to write “needle” in the float column. Then Ann asks the children to take their pencils and workbooks and go back to their desks (vid 101900). The sequence in the class circle has lasted for 27 minutes and 8 seconds.

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<sup>48</sup> The pupils are familiar with the term. On excursions in the woods they have seen and talked about what happens when insects and flies walk on the water.

### *The Speech Genre of the “Float-and-Sink” Story*

The national language used in the “float-and-sink” story is of course Norwegian. Within this national language there are at least two social languages. First, one social language typical for Ann and her teacher generation and second, a social language that is typical for eight-year-old Norwegian children. These social languages have dialogic interactions in several ways. The most obvious dialogue appears in the interactions between Ann and her pupils. However, within the theoretical framework of this study it is also natural to assume that these two social languages are in a dialogue on Ann’s intramental level when, for example, planning her work for the next day or following week, or when she recalls what has happened the past day or week. When reflecting upon these experiences her social language is inevitably in dialogue with the social language of the pupils. Another social language that ventriloquates through Ann’s voice is of course the social language of our authorities (Bakhtin 1986), manifested in the national curriculum.

The “float-and-sink” story takes place in the class circle. Within this context, the participants are not free to behave in an unrestricted way or to say whatever they want. Even if they do have some degree of individual freedom, they are constrained within the typical situation (Bakhtin 1986). As stated in Chapter five, the class circle is a context for teaching, interactions, dialogues and conversation, something which is also true for this particular setting: Ann tells the pupils what they are going to do (1), she asks questions of the class as a whole (1, 3) and of individual children such as Paul (8, 12, 14, 16) and John (18, 20, 24). In this way she initiates discussion and dialogue. Implicit in discussions and dialogues is that the participants should both talk and listen to one another. This is also what happens during the float and sink lesson. However, at a particular point in time the pupils seem to be so eager and excited that they start talking at the same time. This is not in accordance with the speech genre of the typical situation. Ann therefore asks them to raise their hands to speak (7). This is the only time Ann refers to something reminiscent of a rule of behaviour. With the exception of this utterance, everybody, including John and Paul, appears to manage the speech genre in question. In the story from Ann’s classroom presented here, we have seen that both John and Paul have been positive and active participants during the entire lesson. The other pupils have witnessed this. One could imagine this experience is important for the two boys and the rest of the class, both in a short-term and a long-term perspective. A classroom is a public place (Doyle 1977, 1986), and all classroom activities accumulate a common set of experiences that becomes part of the children’s history. In this history, John and Paul will not only be remembered as unfocused and unruly, but possibly also as active and committed schoolmates.

Important to note is that the particular speech genre does not appear to be too rigid or too firm. Rather it is quite flexible, allowing room for some degree of spontaneity, impulsiveness and commitment. The pupils answer one of her questions simultaneously and without raising their hands (2). In the dialogue between John and Ann, Paul interrupts John (22). Neither Ann nor John appears to react in any way to the interruption. John continues to talk (23). The same happens later in the dialogue. Paul seems to be very eager and "into" the subject, and once again he talks without raising his hand (27). Ann does not censure Paul. Rather she confirms his utterance by saying "yes" and smiling at him (28). The flexible style, making room for some degree of spontaneity and impulsiveness, is also a hallmark of activity settings in everyday life activities outside school. What is important here is that Ann does not lose control, rather she appears to manage the situation in a smooth and flexible way. The children are attentive and focused on the topic. They listen, take turns in the dialogue and write what they should write in their workbooks. In this way one could say that each of the children has this particular speech genre in her or his tool kit.

We cannot know exactly how the pupils have internalized the speech genre. What we do know, however, is that they have encountered this typical situation in numerous intermental processes. Ann has had this kind of practice for years, and the class has used the class circle from the very first day they attended school. In this way we could repeat Bakhtin's thoughts and claim that they are given the genre in the same way as they are given their national language. It has probably become so embedded in the culture of schooling that they take it for granted. In this way one could say that the particular speech genre is given to them in the same way as they have acquired their national language. Not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances and, I would also add, from concrete behaviour they have encountered in intermental contexts at school. The speech genre of the class circle may be regarded as a primary speech genre. It is not very complex. Rather it is concrete, simple and closely connected to what happens in the classroom. We have already touched upon the fact that the starting point for this particular lesson is given in the national curriculum and in the year plan for the third grade. These plans represent secondary speech genres. The plans are written, thus they are removed from the immediate relation to the actual reality of classroom life.

#### *The "Float-and-Sink" Story as an Activity Setting*

With the exception of myself, the researcher who is video-recording and observing the classroom activities, the "who" of the float and sink lesson are Ann and the pupils. The child

welfare educator is not present during this lesson. This situation is not unusual. Even if there are children with special needs in a class, the most common situation for Norwegian teachers is being alone with their pupils (Skaalvik & Fossen 1995). On this particular Thursday in October the class is to perform an experiment. The pupils are to check whether different items float or sink, and they are to write the results in their workbooks. This is the “what” of the activity setting, and Ann is the one who is orchestrating the operations needed for the activity. She asks the pupils to enter the class circle and to bring their pencils and workbooks with them. She also asks them to sit on the floor and to put their workbooks on the bench in front of them. Some of them are even asked to sit at their desks so that they do not crowd each other.

The participants, Ann and her pupils, cannot individually and independently decide from the activity and the context which interaction script to use. Rather it is the typical situation itself that influences the choice of script (Leontèv 1981). Therefore, the interaction script used in this particular context is not chosen at random. Ann wants her pupils to be active, and committed and interested. She wants them to participate in dialogues and discussions. It is therefore also important that everybody listens to what is being said. Above we have seen that the characteristics of an activity setting are collaborative interaction, intersubjectivity and assisted performance (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). In the illustration presented above we find examples of collaborative interactions between Ann and the pupils. This appears most clearly in the dialogue between her and Paul and in the dialogue between her and John. There appears also to be intersubjectivity between her and the pupils. It appears as if the participants have a common understanding of the situation (Wertsch 1984, Matusov 2000). Finally, we can also see examples of assisted performance. This occurs when Ann talks about and shows the pupils how to work in their workbooks (4, 5). It also occurs when Ann asks them to raise their hands to speak (7).

The “when” of this particular lesson has to be seen in light of the topic of water. The class has been working on the topic for a period of fourteen days. On excursions in the woods, the pupils have already focused on water, looking at the river and some ponds in the area. The “float-and-sink” story is one of the last lessons within the topic and the teacher is the one who has organized and scheduled time for this particular lesson. It does not occur at random. Instead the “when” has to be regarded in light of this particular period where the pupils are to work with water. However, the water lesson takes place inside the classroom, far away from water in its original settings. As stated above, this could be a trait of formal schooling (Tharp & Gallimore 1988), the “where” of activity settings in schools is often inside the classroom

and far away from the natural context. Closely connected to this is the fact that within schools one often talks about things rather than experiencing and doing them (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). In the “float-and-sink” story the pupils are both talking about and doing things, and as we have seen above, this appears to be a recurring feature of Ann’s practice.

When commenting on the “why” of this particular activity setting, it is again important to keep in mind that the goal of the activity setting originally stems from a social, cultural and institutional context. As stated above, the theme is decided in the class plan for the year and in the national curriculum. In my further comments on the “why” I will use the concept of motive rather than goal in keeping with Leontèv’s theories on this issue as mentioned above. According to Leontèv (1981), the basic characteristic of human activity is its object orientation. An activity’s object is therefore its real motive. Thus we can say that the motive of this particular lesson is to test whether items float or sink. This motive appears to have an energizing function for all the pupils. All of them, including John and Paul, participate in the activity. They seem to be eager, excited and focused on the task. Perhaps this particular activity setting where the participants are both doing and talking about the topic tends to create some kind of motivational homogeneity among the pupils (Tharp & Gallimore 1988).

Finally, according to Leontèv (1981), an activity is realized through many targeted actions, all pointing towards the overarching motive. What Leontèv is referring to is the multidimensionality of teaching (Doyle 1977, 1986), a feature of teaching that becomes very clear when we analyze the “float-and-sink” story. The pupils sit down on the floor with their pencils and workbooks in front of them, they listen to Ann, they listen to each other, they participate in the conversation, some of them try whether an item floats or sinks, and finally they write the results of the experiments in their workbooks.

## ***Discussion***

In the introduction to this chapter I claimed that it is crucial that children should master the various settings of the activities they participate in during a school day. To attain further insight I have presented a story from Ann’s classroom, a unique but at the same time typical story of what happens during a teaching and assisted learning period. When analyzing the story in light of the concepts of speech genre (Bakhtin 1986) and activity setting (Tharp & Gallimore 1988) I found that Ann is both firm and flexible when it comes to the speech genre of the setting. I also found that she takes several aspects into consideration when organizing and carrying out the lesson. Therefore both the two theoretical concepts were useful for understanding what happens during this particular setting.

In Chapter one, we saw that the political vision in Norway is a school for all pupils, defined by equal formal access, by togetherness and by individually adapted teaching within the framework of a class. Consequently the children have their own individual goals and the teacher may give them individually adapted tasks to work on. However, the teacher will always have a need to address all the pupils together and to teach the class as a whole. This is what Ann does in the teaching and assisted learning periods. Her challenge in these settings is to make her pupils active and interested. We have seen that activity is always inextricably connected to motive, and that the motive has an energizing function as it leads to actions directed towards a goal (Leontèv 1981). In a school class, the pupils may often have different motives for the activity in question. Some of them want to finish quickly, others would prefer do other things and some want to continue with the same activity. Consequently, the motives are not necessarily identical for all the pupils, which is an extra challenge for teachers. In the “float-and-sink” story there appears to be motivational homogeneity (Tharp & Gallimore 1988) among the participants. However, this has not occurred by itself. A number of targeted actions are necessary if motivational homogeneity is to occur.

We have seen that Ann organizes the pupils so that they can feel comfortable, they are seated in such a way so that they can easily pay attention to what is going on, and they do not sit too close to each other. We have also seen that the class, working on the topic of water, does not only talk about water. The pupils really experiment with the topic, and we have seen how the setting opens up for activity, dialogue and conversation. All these factors appear to be important when it comes to creating motivational homogeneity among the pupils. In my opinion, the aspects focused on here are important when teaching heterogeneous classes. It is further equally important to consider the aspects’ interconnectedness. For example, one could imagine what would have happened if the pupils were sitting too close to each other, or if the class had just talked about floating and sinking objects for nearly thirty minutes. One could also imagine what would have happened if the teacher had been very rigid with respect to the pupils’ behaviour. Children have to participate in various activities during a school day, and when teachers are planning these, it is important that they should reflect upon the “what”, the “when”, the “where” and the “why” of these settings. All these elements are connected, and if one is ignored it might be difficult to achieve motivational homogeneity or to reach the goal of the activity.

We have seen that Ann reflects upon the duration of an activity, and that she claims that the pupils cannot remain within the same activity for a long period of time. The pupils can only maintain their focus for short periods before the teacher risks them becoming restless,



unruly and inattentive. Looking back at my own experiences as a pupil, I remember how boring it could be to deal with the same activity for a long period of time. Often we had to continue and continue, and when finally we finished the one activity, we could even be given new tasks that were practically identical to the one we had just completed. When I was a novice teacher I also remember how I sometimes struggled to keep the pupils on task, and with my perspective of today I think I perhaps put too great demands on some of the children. Ann is aware of the question of time connected to various activities. She has obviously experienced that this is a crucial element, and above we have seen she claims that eight-year-old pupils cannot be focused on one activity for more than twenty minutes. However, the “float-and-sink” story shows us that this is not always the case. The pupils are focused on the same activity for nearly thirty minutes, which is perhaps due to the motivational homogeneity in the class. In my opinion it is always important to reflect upon the question of time when planning and carrying out various school activities.

We have seen that the speech-genre concept takes both the individual and the context, or to use Bakhtin’s term the “typical situation”, into consideration. In my presentation of the concept we could see that Bakhtin first and foremost connected this to speech communication, to individual utterances. However, we also saw that Bakhtin’s use of the concept could be understood in a wider perspective. Even though he focused on speech communication when discussing speech genre, it could be understood as including not only speech communication, but the total behaviour appropriate for the setting in question. However, he did not go into further detail on these ideas. For the purpose of this study, if we were to look at the concept of speech genre as only being connected to speech and individual utterances, it would be too narrow, too constrained. Tharp and Gallimore’s ideas on interaction scripts, on the other hand, examine particular forms of behaviour required for the activity setting in question. However, they do not focus on language and speech communication, and consequently this concept also becomes too narrow and constrained. When discussing the issue of various school activities and claiming that the pupils should master these, I propose a concept that includes both speech communication and the total behaviour required for the activity in question and call it the *activity genre*.

The concept of activity genre takes both the individual and the context or the typical situation into consideration and, as stated above, it is also connected to both speech communication and the total behaviour required for the situation in question. Thus when looking at the teaching and assisted learning period in Ann’s class, the activity genre appropriate for this setting implies that the children should sit in the class circle, participate in

conversations on the topic in question, listen to one another, be active participants while not disturbing one another and write in their books as the teacher told them to do.

As mentioned above, there are several typical situations that occur during a school day. For Ann and her class, these are illustrated in Figure one (p.73) and presented in Chapter five. Being in the class circle implies various typical activities, while work periods imply other typical activities. Then there are breaks and lunch. Other typical situations implicit in the figure are when the children enter the classroom in the mornings or after breaks and the transitions between two activities. I will claim that each of these recurring, typical situations requires its own particular forms of behaviour, typical forms of utterances and consequently its own activity genre. This is so because the pupils are not free to behave in whatever way they want (Leontèv 1981, Bakhtin 1986). Rather it is the typical socio-cultural setting that “decides” how the situation in question should be dealt with. Each one of these situations requires its own activity genre. Following this line of thought, there is a heterogeneity of activity genres in school. Pupils ought to internalize these various activity genres, put them in their tool kit (Wertsch 1991) and use them for different settings. School is a very important socio-cultural setting. In Norway children become part of this setting when they attend school at the age of six, and they continue to be part of it for at least ten years. It is crucial that they come to master this setting, or from what has been stated above, it is crucial that they should manage the various activity genres needed within this setting. Thus, when they manage the various activity genres, they have learned to be pupils. Following this line of thought, learning to be a pupil may even be regarded as the most important “subject matter” within school (Dysthe 2001, Hundeide 2001, Moen 2003).

In Chapter two it was stated that social reality plays a fundamental role when it comes to individual functioning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981b). Consequently, we can say that children learn to be pupils when participating in various social contexts at school. In other words, they internalize the various activity genres of the typical situations by taking part in ordinary classroom or school activities. However, some pupils do not internalize all activity genres as effortlessly and easily as others, a fact that raises a number of questions. Perhaps the typical situation in question is not that clear and obvious for all the children. Perhaps the teacher gives conflicting and divergent signals to the pupils, allowing some form of activity genre at one moment and sanctioning the same form of activity genre in another moment. Such divergent signals may confuse the children and even lead to disciplinary problems. Studies within the classroom management tradition show that experienced teachers establish rules and procedures early when school starts after summer holiday, and that these rules will be

maintained during the entire school year (Emmer et al. 1980). Another reflection that arises when focusing on how some pupils do not internalize the activity genre required for the setting in question, is whether the genre is too rigid or too constrained. Perhaps the firmness of the activity genre makes it impossible for some of the pupils to participate without breaking the rules. In my opinion it is crucial that teachers reflect upon this issue.

While Bakhtin's concept of speech genre helps us to focus on various typical situations and their corresponding required speech genre, the concept of the activity setting enables us to acquire further insight into the complexity of typical settings. Considered in isolation and independent of each other both concepts are, needless to say, useful theoretical tools. When looking upon them in light of the "float-and-sink" story I would, however, claim that they are even stronger and more powerful when considered in relation and connection to each another. What becomes obvious is that the reflections presented here in the final part of this chapter could not have occurred by looking at the empirical data isolated from theory. Neither could the reflections have occurred by looking at the two theoretical concepts isolated from the empirical data. As stated in Chapter three, it is the constant interaction between theory and data that makes it possible to understand and gain new insight.

## **Chapter 7**

### **“The Transitions Have to Be Smooth and Flexible”**

In the previous chapter our attention was focused on the fact that the school day is divided into various activities, where I maintained that each activity implies its own particular activity genre. The task for the teacher is to deal with this challenge so that the pupils eventually master all the activity genres. When the children manage these they have internalized the role of being a pupil. However, when focusing on the phenomenon of various activities the transitions between the activities must also be taken into consideration.

It is important that transitions should be organized in a way that enables a smooth flow from one activity into another (Shultz & Florio 1979). Depending upon how they are arranged, transitions may, however, also lead to confusion, unnecessary activity, noise and nonconformance. Transitions may provide an opportunity to misbehave because they make it difficult for the pupils to turn their attention from one activity to another, and make it hard for them to concentrate on the new activity (Charles 1981). It is therefore crucial that the junctures between different activities should be marked so that the pupils can recognize that the activity in question will be changed and that a new activity genre is required.

In a classroom the teacher and the pupils therefore need ways of signalling to each other that something new is going to happen. The teacher needs to communicate to the pupils that the activity, and its corresponding activity genre, is going to be changed, and the pupils in turn need to recognize these changes and show the teacher that they have understood. If they are not able to do so, they may exhibit behaviour that is considered inappropriate by the other participants in the situation (Shultz & Florio 1979). Signals for contextual changes are especially critical in the early grades when children are not yet fully socialized into the culture of schools and at the beginning of each school year, when pupils have not yet learned what constitutes a new context for interaction (Emmer, Evertson & Anderson 1980). This chapter examines how Ann deals with transitions between activities.

#### ***Theoretical Framework***

Studies focusing on changes from one activity to another show that smooth transitions between activities are crucial. In such transitions the pupils' attention is turned easily from one activity to another. Some studies focus on how teachers successfully deal with this challenge (Shultz & Florio 1979) and others (e.g. Charles 1981) identify and examine

transition mistakes. The studies referred to here are situated within the classroom-management tradition. Below I will show how Ann deals with transitions in her class, and I will do so in light of Wood, Bruner and Ross' (1976) concept of *scaffolding*, Rommetveit's (1974, 1979) concept of *prolepsis* and Bakhtin's (1981, 1986, 1994) concepts of the *authoritative word* and the *internally persuasive word*.

### The Concept of Scaffolding

In Chapter two we saw that Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of proximal development as the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and her or his potential development as "determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p.86). Therefore, tutorial interactions are a crucial feature of infancy and childhood, and they occur both in ordinary everyday activities and of course within schools. It is within this framework that Wood, Bruner and Ross's (1976) concept of scaffolding is interesting. Even if the authors did not explicitly draw on Vygotsky's work when formulating their ideas, the concept has clear parallels to the zone of proximal development because it deals with the nature of the tutorial process, the means whereby an adult or "expert" helps somebody who is less adult or less expert (Stone & Wertsch 1984).

Studies building upon Vygotsky's theory and the scaffolding metaphor have focused on various topics, such as whole-class scaffolding (Hogan & Pressley 1997), detailed analyses of experienced and expert tutors working in one-to-one relationships with pupils (Lepper, Drake, O'Donnell-Johnson 1997) and scaffolding pupils in reading and writing processes (Roehler & Cantlon 1997). These studies focus on the tutorial process for the cognitive development of learners. However, as will be seen in this chapter, the concept of scaffolding is also useful for understanding how a teacher deals with transitions. As stated above, transitions from one school activity to the next are critical points, and it is important that teachers assist or scaffold their pupils so they manage these situations. When Wood et al. (1976) discuss the scaffolding metaphor they use the terms tutor and tutee. For the purpose of this study, I prefer to use teacher and pupils.

According to Wood et al. (1976), the scaffolding process consists essentially of the teacher controlling those elements of the task that are initially beyond the pupil's capacity. The teacher further permits the pupil to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within her or his range of competence. In this way the activity may proceed to a successful end. The teacher cannot always know if a pupil simply ignores a suggestion or whether she or

he misunderstands it, therefore the teacher has to continually interpret the pupil's actions and responses. When John for example has problems focusing on the task during work periods, Ann has to interpret and find out what the problem is. According to Wood et al. (1976), the teacher must have at least two theoretical models to which she can turn. One is a theory of the task or problem and how it may be completed. The other is a theory of the performance characteristics of the pupil in question. The actual pattern of the scaffolding will then be both task and pupil dependent. Therefore, when it comes to John, Ann has to focus on both the boy and the task to find out why he is not doing his work. Wood et al. (1976) have offered an analysis of the critical features of the scaffolding process provided by the adult during an interactive problem-solving session. This scaffolding process is divided into six parts.

The teacher's most obvious challenge is to get the pupils interested in the task and for them to maintain this interest. The first feature of the tutoring process is therefore recruitment. In the "float-and-sink" story presented in the previous chapter we saw an example of how Ann worked to get the pupils interested in the task and how she kept this interest alive. The second feature of the scaffolding process implies a reduction in degrees of freedom, something that involves simplifying the task. The task is not made easier, but the amount of help is adapted to the pupils' skills. The teacher also has to keep the pupils in pursuit of a particular objective, which is the third feature. This indicates that the teacher's task as a tutor is to guide the pupils in the direction of particular goals and involves both keeping the child in the field and a development of zest and sympathy to keep her or him committed. In the "float-and-sink" story we saw that Ann guided the pupils not only by talking about what floats or sinks, but also by experimenting. In this way the pupils appeared to be active and committed during the whole lesson.

The fourth trait of the scaffolding process focuses on the teacher marking or accentuating certain features of the task. In this process she may use different scaffolding devices to stress what is relevant for the task.<sup>49</sup> The teacher's marking provides information about the

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<sup>49</sup> In a scaffolding process there are various ways teachers can assist their pupils. For example, a teacher may ask questions about a pupil's work, provide hints, subtle suggestions and guidance so that the pupil will progress. Such forms of assistance are termed instructional assistance (Hogan 1997). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) have developed a theory of teaching that includes six ways of scaffolding learners in their activity. First, they point to modelling as a scaffolding device. Second, contingency management is a strategy that supports a performance or an action with a reward or punishment, depending on whether or not the behaviour is wanted. Feedback is the third way to support pupils. This means that pupils are given a response to their actions or performance. Fourth, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) point to instruction as a scaffolding device. Fifth, questions may also help pupils in their learning process and sixth, cognitive structuring gives a structure both to actions and thought processes. Cognitive structuring does not call for a specific response, but it provides a structure for organizing elements in relation to one another. All these scaffolding devices outlined here are well known in the daily flow of classroom activities and teacher practices.

discrepancy between what the child has produced and what she or he would recognize as appropriate production. The fifth feature of the scaffolding process claims that problem solving should be less risky or stressful with a teacher than without. However, one should be aware of the risk in creating too much dependency on the teacher. Finally, demonstrating or modelling solutions to a task involves more than simply performing in the presence of the pupil. This often involves an “idealization” of the act to be performed and may involve completion or even explication of a solution already partially executed by the pupil her or himself. In this sense the teacher is imitating in idealized form an attempted solution tried or assumed to be tried by the pupil with the expectation that she or he will then imitate it back in a more appropriate form. In the “float-and-sink” story we saw that Ann used the board to model for the pupils how they should write in their books, and that the pupils in turn wrote in their books.

In this early analysis of scaffolding the emphasis was placed on the adult’s role as a support for the child for achieving the goal. Little attention was paid to the interactions between the tutor and the tutees. According to Stone (1993), this is an enduring limitation of the scaffolding metaphor. There is no specification of the communicative processes involved in the adult-child interaction constituting the scaffolding process. As we saw in Chapter two, these mechanisms are crucial to Vygotsky’s theoretical framework. Stone (1993) claims that the effectiveness of interactions, and therefore the potential for new learning within the zone of proximal development, varies as a function of the interpersonal relationship between the participants. When analyzing the learning that takes place in the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1978) argued that this process involves the transfer of task responsibility from the social or intermental level to the individual or intramental level, or from other-regulation to self-regulation. In essence, the child’s task approach is mediated by the verbal and nonverbal directives provided by the adult during the interaction. One concept that seems to have promise as a means of making sense of certain communicative dynamics within the zone of proximal development is Rommetveit’s<sup>50</sup> concept of prolepsis.

### The Concept of Prolepsis

Rommetveit (1974, 1979) claims that whatever is said, meant and understood has as its prerequisite that something else is taken for granted, that there is a tacitly assumed

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<sup>50</sup> The Norwegian psychologist and theoretician Ragnar Rommetveit’s view is compatible with a Vygotskian approach to intermental processes. Therefore, his ideas are used in texts on this issue (see for example Stone & Wertsch 1984, Wertsch 1985, 1998, Stone 1993).

commonality with respect to interpretation. For example, when the pupils enter the classroom in the morning, they first put their bags by their desks. Then they go to the class circle and join Ann in the morning ritual described in Chapter five. This is also what Ann wants them to do even though it is not explicitly stated. According to Rommetveit (1974, 1979) every interactional code is contingent upon some kind of tacitly taken-for-granted agreement with respect to interpretation. When a speaker talks to listeners she or he assumes by a tacitly endorsed contract that they are talking about the same topic. In the example above, Ann assumes that the pupils understand she wants them to attend the class circle and join her in the morning ritual. When presenting these ideas Rommetveit (1974, 1979) also argues that what is attended to and what is tacitly taken for granted in any particular case of social interaction are dependent upon background experiences. Thus one could say that on the basis of background experiences, the pupils in Ann's class know they are to go to the class circle when entering the classroom in the morning.

What from an external point of view may be regarded as wrong presuppositions may often more appropriately be conceived of as assumptions through which the listener is made an insider of a tacitly shared here-and-now. The listener is made an insider because the expanded social reality is taken for granted rather than explicitly spelled out. According to these thoughts, intersubjectivity<sup>51</sup> is not only something that is achieved through a process of interaction, it must also in some sense unreflectively be taken for granted in order to be achieved. From what is stated above, we can see that Rommetveit focused on the foundations of intersubjectivity rather than assessing what is made known when something is said and understood in particular situations. According to Stone and Wertsch (1984), this mode of reasoning is the reverse of what is routinely proposed by investigators who are interested in communication. Here intersubjectivity is viewed as being created or reinforced through an interactional process. Following Rommetveit's (1974, 1979) line of thought, to assess what is made known, we must inquire in each particular case what is tacitly assumed to be the case. It is within this context the concept of prolepsis occurs.

Prolepsis refers to a communicative act where the speaker presupposes some unexpressed information. Interactions taking place in a scaffolding process are proleptic because they assume an understanding on the part of the child of the significance of functional information in the task. We can see that these thoughts presented here are similar to Wood et al. (1976)

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<sup>51</sup> As stated in Chapter six, the concept of intersubjectivity here involves the participants having a common understanding of the situation in question (Wood, Bruner & Ross 1974, Matusov 2000). This concept will be further explored in Chapter eight.



who claim that the tutor both needs a theory of the task or problem and how it may be completed, and a theory of the performance characteristics of the pupil in question. Thus, the teacher's initial utterance in a scaffolding process assumes a perspective on the task and an appropriate solution strategy that must be spelled out for the pupil. The child in turn makes a connection between the teacher's remark and the task approach and is consequently exposed to a new perspective on how to deal with the task. In this process, the teacher may start with a general question and then follow that question with more specific verbal or nonverbal directives that provide the meaning presupposed by the initial general directive. In this way the child comes to understand what was presupposed by the initial directive and is led to construct the teacher's understanding of the goal and the appropriate means for achieving it (Stone & Wertsch 1984, Stone 1993).

According to Rommetveit (1979), the use of presuppositions creates a challenge for the listener, a challenge that forces the listener to construct a set of assumptions in order to make sense of the speaker's utterance. If the pupil does not act on the teacher's hint, the teacher has to proceed to help the child. When the communication is successful, this set of assumptions recreates the speaker's presuppositions. Thus the listener is led to create for her or himself the speaker's perspective on the topic in question. The result for the listener should be a new perspective on the immediate context or a new situation definition (Wertsch 1984). The new understanding is not necessarily more sophisticated or more functional. It is merely more consistent with what was presupposed by the teacher. Rommetveit (1979) suggests that the process of creating presuppositions pulls the listener into a new perspective on the situation at hand, one that the listener may adopt as her or his own. Thus the participants move towards a growing intersubjectivity. According to Stone (1993), the involved individuals must share some minimum set of presuppositions about the situation at hand, and the participants must respect each others' perspectives. Then the actors are engaged in an interpretive exchange, and the nature of the inferences involved in constructing a shared situation definition is a function of the past, present and anticipated future interactions between the participants.

### The Authoritative Word and the Internally Persuasive Word

In Chapter two we saw that dialogue was regarded as the most fundamental concept in Bakhtin's theory. In his view the "primordial dialogism of discourse" (Bakhtin 1981, p.257) is to be found in the ways in which one speaker's concrete utterances come into contact with or "interanimate" the utterances of another. One such form of dialogic interanimation is direct face-to-face communication between persons. This is the form of communicative activity that

typically comes into mind when one thinks of dialogue (Wertsch 1991). This is also the kind of dialogue that occurs within a classroom, for example between the teacher and her pupils. It is in this connection that Bakhtin's concepts of the authoritative and internally persuasive word<sup>52</sup> are interesting.

The concept of the authoritative word is based on the assumption that some utterances and their meanings are fixed. They do not change, even when they come into contact with new voices. The static and dead meaning structure of the authoritative discourse allows no interanimation with other voices. Instead of functioning as a generator of meaning or as a thinking device, an authoritative text, spoken or written "demands our unconditional allegiance" (Bakhtin 1994, p.78). Therefore it is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us. It allows "no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it" (Bakhtin 1981, p.343). He also says:

*The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it (Bakhtin 1981, p.342).*

According to Bakhtin (1981), the authoritative word enters our consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass, and one must either totally affirm it or totally reject it: "One cannot divide it up – agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part" (Bakhtin 1981, p.343). The authoritative word is fused with authority and it stands and falls together with that authority. It is not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are equal (Wertsch 1991). It cannot come into contact with other voices. Therefore, the authoritative word "can only be transmitted" (Bakhtin 1981, p.344). When Bakhtin discusses these ideas we can see that the authoritative word is not isolated from the surroundings. It has not entered the present moment from nothing. On the contrary, the authoritative word is strongly anchored in the past:

*The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, originally connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the words of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged ("acknowledged" italics in original) in the past. It is a prior ("prior" italics in original) discourse (Bakhtin 1981, p.342).*

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<sup>52</sup> Bakhtin used "authoritative word" and "internally persuasive word" synonymous to "authoritative" and "internally persuasive discourse". I will do the same in this text.

As examples of authoritative texts, Bakhtin (1981) cited religious, political and moral texts as well as “the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.” (p.343).

In Chapter two we saw that Bakhtin’s dialogic perspective implies that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else. Therefore, in contrast to the authoritative word, Bakhtin also presents the concept of the internally persuasive word. As opposed to the authoritative discourse, the “internally persuasive word is half ours and half someone else’s” (Bakhtin 1981, p.345). He adds that the internally persuasive word has no authority per se as it is: “affirmed through assimilation and tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word’” (p.345). Implicit in this quotation is that the internally persuasive word is not in a static and isolated position (Wertsch 1991). Instead its semantic structure is open. Contrary to the authoritative word, the internally persuasive word therefore allows dialogic interanimation, and consequently it awakens new and independent words. Bakhtin (1981) says:

*Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. (...) we can take it into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it in a new situation in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning, and even wrest from it new words of its own (p.345-346).*

When dealing with this issue Bakhtin talks about the process of distinguishing between one’s own voice and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thoughts. He claims that the internally persuasive discourse presupposes a specific distance. The process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse is activated rather late in development, and when thought begins to work in an independent way there is a separation between the internally persuasive word and the authoritarian word (Bakhtin 1994). This process becomes especially important when someone strives to liberate her or himself:

*The importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse. (...) When thought begins to work in an independent way, there is a rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter for us, that do not touch us (Bakhtin 1994, p.79).*

From what has been stated so far, we can see that when someone’s discourse is internally persuasive and acknowledged by us, various possibilities emerge. When we encounter another’s voice with our own voice we may experiment with the other’s words:

*While creatively stylizing upon and experimenting with another's discourse, we attempt to guess, to imagine.(...) In such experimental guesswork the image of the speaking person and his discourse become the object of creative, artistic imagination (Bakhtin 1994, p.79).*

Therefore one could say that this kind of discourse functions as a generator of meaning or as a thinking device (Wertsch 1991). Bakhtin (1981) also claims that consciousness awakens one to independent life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it. The internally persuasive discourse is therefore of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness. These ideas are also interesting when considering the current Norwegian national curriculum. Here it is stated that the pupils should take “responsibility for their own choices and actions” and that they should “seek the truth and do what is right” (C-97, p.19). Implicit in this excerpted text is that the pupils should be active and reflective participants in society. They should not only totally affirm the authoritative words of others.

According to Bakhtin (1981), both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word, one that is simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive. At the same time he claims that such a unity is rarely a given. More frequently there is a “sharp gap” between the two categories. It is the struggle and dialogue of these two categories, the authoritative word and the inner persuasive word that form or determine the individual consciousness (Bakhtin 1981).

### ***Ann's Practice***

During a school day in Ann's class there are many transitions. In the first teaching unit, for example, the first transition is when the pupils enter the classroom in the morning, another is when they leave the class circle to work at their regular desks. Then there is a new transition as the children again enter the class circle and a final one when they leave the classroom to have recess. These transition situations are prepared, foreseen and expected by the teacher. Thus she can plan or decide in advance how to deal with them. According to Doyle (1977, 1986), unpredictability is one of the hallmarks of classroom complexity. Therefore, unexpected transitions may also occur. For example, during a teaching and instruction period when the teacher and the pupils are gathered in the class circle discussing a particular theme, something unpredictable may happen. Perhaps someone knocks on the door, enters the classroom to speak to Ann, or one of the pupils may suddenly feel unwell. Such occurrences will interrupt the activity in question, and the teacher has to work at getting the class back into the current activity again. Therefore, teachers have to deal with both expected and unexpected transitions in the daily classroom activities.

Below we will see that Ann has many thoughts and ideas on transitions. When looking upon her reflections and actions Ann appears to have experienced that it is wise to deal with transitions in a smooth and flexible way. As in the previous chapter I will tell a story from Ann's class and analyze it in light of the theoretical concepts presented above. It is a story about an unexpected transition that occurred during a teaching and instruction period in the class circle. There are several reasons for choosing this story. The main reason is that the particular story illustrates Ann's practice concerning transitions. Second, it may be regarded as a typical story in a wider perspective because similar events happen all the time in classrooms all over the world. Finally, as will be seen, it is a nice story, and as such it feels good to fix it in a text. As we saw in Chapter three, a narrative fixed in written words may be regarded as an open text that enables us to engage in a range of interpretations (Ricoeur 1981). Before telling the story I want to present Ann's reflections on transitions.

### Ann's Reflections on Transitions

As stated in Chapter three, qualitative researchers strive "to not get it all wrong" (Wolcott 1990). As qualitative researchers we stay in the field for a rather long period of time. We make efforts to build trust with our research subjects. We check if there are any misunderstandings or misinformation and we use multiple and different sources of data. Thus, in my data material I find information on how Ann deals with transitions in the video-tapes, in my observation notes and in the interviews (see Appendix 3A p.208-210, 3B p.211-212, 3C p.213). For example, when the pupils have finished their work in their groups and the teacher wants to gather them in the class circle, she asks them to put their books and pencils away and come to the class circle. Then, after a short period of time she goes to her place in the circle, takes up her guitar and starts to play and sing a song. Then the children enter the class circle and join her singing. She may also start to clap a rhythm, with the children responding by clapping the same rhythm as they enter the circle, or she may just start talking about what they are going to do next and then the pupils will enter the circle. There are several examples of this kind of practice in my data material. When reflecting upon her various ways of dealing with transitions she says:

*I use various techniques. I don't know how much you have observed, but well what I think is, I just have to start with something. It could be a song, a rhythm, a game. It's a way of starting (int 011701, p.4). I can't just stand there and tell them to go to the class circle. It has to be something that interests them. There has to be an attraction (int 011701, p.5). I try to do something appealing to get them into the class circle (int 112900, p.12).*

Ann does not command the children to enter the class circle. On the contrary, she appears to deal with them in a smooth and flexible way. She says:

*I'm very aware of this issue. The transitions have to be smooth and flexible. There are so many kids here that can't manage it in any other way. There's no use in trying to force them. It doesn't work. What works is the way I do it. When I just start with something appealing then they'll come. Not everybody at the same time, but they'll all come (int 112900, p.11-12).*

As will be seen in the story below, one appealing way is to start clapping a rhythm. This activity appears to stimulate the pupils' participation. When reflecting upon this as a means for entering into a new activity, she says:

*Well, you know, rhythm, kids like rhythm, they really do. It seems as if they just have to go to the circle when I start clapping a rhythm. They have to get into the rhythm. So it's very efficient. They really like to clap rhythm, but the rhythms can't be too difficult, because you want everybody to participate (int 011701, p.4).*

Obviously one of the main arguments for dealing with transitions in this way is that it works. What does not work, according to Ann, is when she tries to command or force them to go to the circle. When Ann reflects upon this we can also hear the pupils' voices within her voice. She says:

*And then really there must be tolerance so you're not frowned upon (...) or getting picked on every time you're late for class circle or even for class, for that matter. I don't think people should be picked on because they arrive at different times, really (int 112900, p.11).*

However, when analyzing the data material and seeing that this pattern recurs, I also found a negative example (Miles & Huberman 1994) where she tried to direct or "force" Paul to enter the class circle. This happened one day when everybody except Paul had entered the class circle. A teaching and assisted-learning period was to start, but Paul appeared not to be paying attention to what was going on. He had finished his task but was still dealing with something else at his desk. Ann went over to him, talked to him directly and tried to lead him to the class circle. Paul resisted and refused to do what Ann asked him to do. He finally lay down on the floor and Ann returned to the class circle. Then, after a while, Paul came into the class circle and joined the activity (vid 102400). When Ann reflects upon Paul and transitions, she says:

*The transitions may sometimes be difficult for Paul. It works well when I just start with something, a song or something. Then he'll come. I can't just stand there and be forceful. That won't work. Besides, if I do, I'll show all the other pupils how he can be. He'll come when I start, because he's so interested and committed. He really is (int 102300, p.12). As far as possible I allow him to decide himself when to come. That's what I*

*do, and he always comes. It works, and besides in this way there's no negative focus on him (int 112200, p.2).*

John appears to manage the transitions in Ann's class.<sup>53</sup> When reflecting upon him, Ann also states that her smooth and flexible style is best for him. As with Paul, he would have become stubborn and obstinate if she had undertaken the transition in another way. According to Ann, she has experienced that the authoritative word (Bakhtin 1981) does not work in her class. She says that she could perhaps have strengthened her own authority as a teacher if she handled the transitions in another way, but she says: "I have no need to do that" (int 291100, p.12). Below I will present a story that illustrates Ann's practice. I have called it the "birds-in-the-trees" story. As with the story in the previous chapter, this one is of course also unique. It was video-taped on Monday, 22 January, and later fixed in the text presented below. It has happened once and will never happen again. However, as already stated, it represents Ann's general practice when it comes to transitions.

### The "Birds-in-the-Trees" Story

It is the first teaching unit this particular Monday morning in January. The pupils have entered the classroom, put their schoolbags by their desks and moved to the class circle. They are quiet, perhaps still tired. Ann takes her guitar, starts to play and together with the pupils she sings their usual morning song. Then they take attendance before Ann writes the date on the board. She then tells them what they are going to do during the day. They follow this with another song, and finally, after this initial ritual, the topic of the lesson can start. Ann and the pupils are continuing their work on the topic weather. They have been working on this topic since early January, immediately after Christmas vacation, and according to the year plan for the class it will cover a four-week period. The topic is also to be found in the national curriculum where, among other things, it is stated that pupils in third grade should "observe and describe various kinds of weather" (C-97, p.210). Therefore Ann starts by telling the children how she experienced the wind during the weekend. She asks them about their experiences with wind, and some of the children tell their stories. Then she asks the children to think about how they could describe what wind is. If they had to tell somebody who had never experienced wind what it really is, what could they say? Paul says: "Wind is living air".

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<sup>53</sup> However, one day there was going to be a fire drill at the school. The pupils were prepared as they had been told about this in advance. The transition of leaving the classroom to go outside turned out to be difficult for John. Ann says: "He went haywire. In fact I had to grab hold of him, yell at him and shake him so that he got in place" (int 102400, p.17).

Ann writes this utterance on the board, and continues to write down other suggestions from the children. When finished Ann and the pupils start to read together what has been written down. When they are doing this, the children begin to turn towards the window. More and more children turn towards the window obviously looking at something outside:

- (1) Paul: *(Gets up, turns towards the window, points at some birch trees outside and says in a loud and laughing voice:) Look, there's living leaves.*  
(2) "Magne": *No, they're birds.*  
(3) Ann: *(Turns towards the window, looks outside, says:) Yes, they're birds. (In a stating voice:) There's lots of them!*

Most of the pupils leave their places and walk to the window. A few are still sitting at their places in the class circle. All of them appear to be focused on the birds outside. They talk aloud, laugh and address Ann and each other.

- (4) Ann: *(Leaves her place in the class circle, moves towards the window and says in a rather loud voice:) I think that these visitors are called waxwings. Do they have a little tip on their heads?*  
(5) The pupils: *Yes, they have.*  
(6) Ann: *Yes, then they're waxwings. They're waxwings.*

More pupils leave their places and move towards the window. They laugh and talk together and seem to be very excited when the swarm of birds flies away and then suddenly returns to the trees again.

- (7) Ann: *Why do they sit in the top of the trees?*

The pupils are still focused on what is happening outside. They laugh and talk together. None of them answers Ann's question.

- (8) Ann: *(In a loud voice:) Do you know why they're sitting there? Do you know what they're doing there?*

None of the pupils pay attention to Ann's question.

- (9) Ann: *Well, well, well (As she says this she returns to her place in the class circle, sits down and starts to clap a rhythm. She continues with the clapping and says:) Waxwings, waxwings, waxwings.*

Some of the pupils return to their places and start to clap and repeat after Ann.



- (10) Ann: *(She still claps the rhythm, says:) Sitting in the trees.*  
(11) The pupils: *(They clap the rhythm together with Ann, and repeat:) Sitting in the trees.*  
(12) Ann: *(Claps and says:) Sitting in the top of the trees.*  
(13) The pupils: *(Clap and repeat:) Sitting in the top of the trees.*

Increasingly pupils return to their places in the class circle. When they sit down they join the others in the clapping and repeat what Ann says. John has gone to his place but Paul is still standing looking at the birds in the trees.

- (14) Ann: *(Claps and says:) Fly like a swarm of bees.*  
(15) The pupils: *(Clap and repeat:) Fly like a swarm of bees.*

Paul turns around, looks at his classmates, sits down at his place, joins his classmates and starts to clap and repeat after Ann.

- (16) Ann: *(Claps and says in a lower voice:) Waxwings. Waxwings.*  
(17) The pupils: *(Clap and repeat also in a lower voice:) Waxwings. Waxwings.*  
(18) Ann: *(There is a pause when Ann looks at the pupils. Then she asks:) Do you know why they sit in the top of the trees?*

Ann and the pupils agree it is because the birds are looking for food. When Ann asks what kind of food, the pupils suggest maggots, cones, leaves, berries, before they finally agree upon buds. During this conversation, some of the pupils are still a bit unruly. Among these is Paul who still appears to be elated by the appearance of the birds.

- (19) Ann: *(Addresses herself to the class as a whole, says in a loud voice:) You have to raise your hands to talk. (Then she turns towards Paul and says:) Paul, you have to be quiet. Please, raise your hand to speak. I know you can do that.*

The children including Paul calm down, and then Ann says that they are to continue their conversation about the weather (vid 012201). The transition lasted for 4 minutes and 42 seconds.

### *Scaffolding in the “Birds-in-the-Trees” Story*

Ann and the class have a conversation about weather when something unexpected happens. A large flock of waxwings suddenly appears outside. The children lose their focus on the topic weather and instead turn their attention to the birds in the trees. What happens is of course interesting and exciting for both Ann and the pupils, and apparently in order to see the birds better they leave their places in the class circle and move towards the window. However, after a period of time, Ann’s task is to assist or scaffold the pupils back to their places so that they

can continue with the topic of the lesson. In this scaffolding process Ann needs a theory of the task or the problem and how it may be completed, and she further needs a theory of the performance characteristics of the pupils in the class (Wood et al. 1976). When considering Ann's reflections on transitions, she appears to be well aware of how to deal with such situations. She says she has to deal with them in a smooth and flexible way. Moreover, she also seems to have experienced that the transitions should be appealing because then she knows they will work. Implicit in these reflections is also a theory on the performance characteristics of the pupils, and in particular Paul and John. She clearly states that smooth and flexible transitions are necessary for these two boys. She says she cannot force them to enter into a new activity. If she tries to do so, she claims they will respond to her demand with defiance and obstinacy. We have seen this confirmed with Paul in the negative example presented above (vid 102400).

According to Wood et al. (1976), the first feature of the tutoring process is recruitment. In this particular transition the task for Ann is to capture the pupils' attention, to get their focus away from the waxwings so that they can return to the class circle and pick up where they left off on the topic of weather. In this process she does not immediately command the pupils not to look at the birds. Instead she allows them to leave their places, to look at the waxwings, to talk and to laugh. However, after a period of time, she apparently wants the activity to change. The task is to get the pupils' attention away from what is going on outside and to recruit them into a new activity. Ann therefore starts to clap a rhythm in accordance with the word waxwings. As she does this, the pupils start to return to their places in the class circle, join her clapping and repeat what she says.

The second feature of the scaffolding process focuses on how to adapt the assistance to pupils' skills (Wood et al. 1976). According to Hogan and Pressley (1997), interactions within a scaffolding process become an exploratory process where the teacher tries various prompts before hitting upon one that gets the pupils to make the desired inference. When initial prompts fail, the teacher must think of new ways of assisting the pupils. Ann first tries to catch the pupils' attention by means of questions (7, 8), but the children do not respond to these. Then she starts to clap a rhythm (9) and by doing this she appears to guide them in the direction of the goal, which is the third phase of the scaffolding process. She appears to capture their commitment by means of the rhythm. To repeat once more, the goal in this

particular case is first to turn their focus away from what is going on outside, then to calm them down so finally they can continue with the lesson.<sup>54</sup>

The fourth feature of the scaffolding process focuses on the teacher using different scaffolding devices to stress what is relevant for the task. In this particular story we can see that Ann uses various scaffolding devices. She asks questions (7, 8) obviously intended to create a joint focus of attention inside the classroom. She models what they should do in the way that she sits down at her place (9) and finally starts to clap the rhythm (9, 10, 12, 14, 16). Paul is the last one who returns to his place in the class circle. In accordance with Ann's own beliefs she does not try to force or command him to sit down. Rather her scaffolding device appears to be that she gives him time so that he himself can discover that there is a discrepancy between his actions and the rest of the class. When he discovers this he returns to his place in the class circle. The question of time is a crucial point that I will return to in the discussion section of this chapter. The fifth feature of the scaffolding process focuses on the risk in creating too much dependency on the teacher. Both expected and unexpected transitions are challenging, and it is hard to imagine that such situations could be totally independent of the teacher. However, in this particular story we see that when Ann starts to clap the rhythm most of the pupils easily recognize the change of activity. This was obviously an important and useful scaffolding device for the task of getting the pupils to return to their places.

A key feature of the scaffolding process is that the tutor provides just enough support for the learner to make progress on her or his own (Hogan & Pressley 1997). Paul was the only one who needed more time to figure out what to do. Because the optimal level of support is different for each pupil, teachers must be well acquainted with their pupils' needs and with the task or problem in question. Pupils vary in the amount of assistance they need, and in how close or proximal the next skill level is for them. According to Wood et al. (1976), the tutor's aim with every child is to allow her or him to do as much as possible on her or his own. It is the child's success or failure at any point in time that determines the tutor's next level of support or assistance. Where possible, the tutor leaves the child to her or his own devices and only intervenes if the child encounters difficulties. When given time, Paul does not get into difficulties and Ann does not need to give him any further assistance. The sixth and final feature of the scaffolding process deals with demonstration or modelling solutions to the task in question, something that has already been touched upon. When Ann discovered the birds in

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<sup>54</sup> Even if the goal is to continue with the topic of the lesson, we also see that this particular transition becomes an activity where the pupils may learn about waxwings. This is an issue I will return to in the discussion.

the trees through the actions of her pupils, the focus of attention was turned to what was going on outside. Then, after a while she wanted the pupils to return to their places in the class circle. She sat down at her place (9) and started to clap (9, 10, 12, 14, 16). The pupils modelled her in the way that they returned to their places, started to clap and repeat after her.

### *Prolepsis in the “Birds-in-the-Trees” Story*

To function appropriately on the intermental plane the participants must be able to direct one another’s attention to specific objects or events (Wertsch 1985). In many cases the responsibility for directing attention is equally distributed between the interlocutors. In the story presented in this chapter, the teacher does most of the regulating. According to Wertsch (1985), such asymmetric control situations typically arise when adults help children to carry out tasks. In schools teachers usually take responsibility for regulating the children’s attention both because the adults are more competent than the children in defining the task and also because they have greater status and power (Wertsch 1985, 1991).<sup>55</sup> Even if the concept of prolepsis encompasses the interaction between the teacher and pupils, in this part of my analysis I will focus mostly on Ann’s utterances. In the presentation of the concept we saw that the idea is that whatever is said, meant and understood has as its prerequisite that something else is taken for granted (Rommetveit 1974, 1979). Therefore when Ann talks to the children in this particular transition, what she says rests upon some taken-for-granted commonality with respect to interpretation.

When talking about the topic weather, Paul (1) and Magne (2) suddenly discover a large flock of birds outside. Ann (3) follows up their initiative and turns her focus on the birds. Following Rommetveit’s line of thought we can say that she tacitly agrees to turn the focus away from the topic of the lesson, even if this agreement is never explicitly uttered. One could of course also suggest that first Paul’s and then Magne’s presupposition appears to be that they can interrupt, that they can start talking about something else than the topic in question. Whatever the case, the birds appear to be interesting and the pupils leave their places to move to the window. Ann (4) seems to tacitly agree with this. She does the same herself, leaves her place and moves to the window. When standing there, she tells the pupils that the birds are waxwings (4). The children have not asked Ann what kind of birds they are. It is impossible to know exactly why Ann tells them this. Perhaps she presumes that this is a part of her role

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<sup>55</sup> In this particular story Ann has the responsibility of leading the children through the transition. I would, however, suggest that the children take responsibility for initiating the learning that may occur during the transition.

as a teacher, to inform the pupils about the name of the birds. Or perhaps she presumes that the children would like to have this kind of information. One could only speculate on her presuppositions because in this particular setting they are never made explicit.

She continues to tell the pupils that they are waxwings (6) and in the following utterances (7, 8) she starts to ask questions about the birds. When interpreting these questions in light of the concept of prolepsis we find at least two possibilities. First, Ann tacitly assumes that the children would like to know why the birds sit in the top of the trees, and second, Ann wants the children to turn their focus away from what is going on outside, and rather have a joint focus of attention inside the classroom. However, the children do not pay attention to her questions. In other words, they do not seem to understand what was presupposed by Ann. Therefore, the teacher has to follow up these questions with more concentrated verbal and nonverbal directives. Consequently she starts to clap the rhythm (9), and she continues to do so (10, 12, 14, 16) until all the pupils, including Paul, have returned to their places in the class circle, joined the clapping and started to repeat the rhythm. What is important to notice is that Ann never explicitly says that they should go back to their places in the class circle and join the rhythm. It seems as if Ann and the pupils here share a set of presuppositions about the situation at hand, that there is some kind of interpretive exchange between them (Stone 1993).

One of the things we learn from this story is that the use of presuppositions creates a challenge for the pupils. This is a challenge that forces them to construct a set of their own assumptions to make sense of the teacher's verbal and non-verbal directive. Most of the children immediately respond to the teacher's hint, they appear to know what to do when the teacher sits down and starts to clap. We are unable to know exactly how the pupils have internalized this specific activity genre. What we do know is that they have encountered this kind of activity in other transition situations, and as we have seen, Rommetveit (1979) argues that what is attended to and what is tacitly taken for granted in any particular case of social interaction is dependent upon background experiences. However, Paul needs more time to figure out Ann's perspective of the situation. Ann seems to observe this, and she therefore continues with the activity until Paul finally understands what to do. Then he sits down and joins his classmates in the activity, and finally all the pupils have taken their places in the class circle and all seem to have a joint focus of attention. Thus one could say that the participants have moved towards greater intersubjectivity even if this has never been explicitly spelled out for them.

Ann's practice in this particular transition appears to be in accordance with her general attitude on such situations. She does not want to give the children directives, rather she wants

to capture their focus in other ways. We have seen that Rommetveit (1979) suggests that the process of creating presuppositions pulls the listener into a new perspective on the situation at hand, one that the listener eventually may adopt as her or his own. This appears to be the case in Ann's class. It seems as if through prolepsis the pupils are led to create Ann's perspective of the situation for themselves. When all the pupils have attended their places in the class circle and regained a joint focus of attention, Ann once more (18) asks them why the birds sit in the top of the trees. She still seems to tacitly assume that the children would like to know, and now the children do reflect upon her question. However, some of the children, including Paul, are still unruly, and Ann then gives them a clear directive (19) to be quiet and raise their hands if they want to speak. This is an issue I will look into more closely in the analysis below.

#### *Authoritative Word and Internally Persuasive Word in the "Bird-in-the-Trees" Story*

As stated above, unpredictability (Doyle 1977, 1986) is a trait of classroom complexity. The story presented in this chapter is such an example. What happens in Ann's classroom this particular Monday morning in January is unexpected. A flock of waxwings is sitting in some birch trees outside the school, and Paul (1) and Magne (2) interrupt the topic in question and start talking about the birds. Ann could then have used the authoritative word and commanded the children to keep their focus on the topic of the lesson. She could have done that because of the power difference between her as a teacher and the pupils (Wertsch 1985, 1991). However, as we have seen, the authoritative word demands that it is acknowledged, and according to Ann such discourse does not work in her class, and it especially does not work with John and Paul. As we have seen from Ann's utterances on transitions and also from the negative example presented above, the two boys will reject rather than affirm the authoritative word. Ann has obviously experienced this kind of response before. Also interesting to note are Ann's comments when reflecting on how to deal with transitions. As we have seen, she states that she has no need to strengthen her own authority by commanding the pupils, or in Bakhtin's words, using the authoritative word. Instead she allows them to focus on the birds outside the window before she initiates a process that moves the class towards a joint focus of attention inside the classroom and they finally return to the topic of the lesson. It is when looking at this process that we see that the concept of the internally persuasive word is useful.

Instead of using the authoritative word Ann obviously wants to enter into dialogue with the pupils so she starts asking them questions (7, 8) about the birds. In the presentation of the concept we saw that when someone's words are internally persuasive and acknowledged as

thus, various possibilities emerge. When Ann asks the pupils why the birds are sitting in the treetops none of them answers. This lack of verbal response from the pupils leads to another initiative from Ann (9). She starts to clap at the same time as she says the word “waxwings”. This initiative is not an authoritative word, rather it is again internally persuasive, obviously intended to interanimate with the pupils’ voices. To refer to Bakhtin (1981) once again, the internally persuasive word is “half ours and half someone else’s” (p.345). Therefore, Ann’s utterance (9) when she starts to clap the rhythm has no static and fixed authority attached to it. Its semantic structure is open, and as such it allows for dialogic interanimation. Consequently it awakens new and independent actions, and as we can see from the story presented in this chapter, the pupils, including Paul, decide themselves to start to clap and repeat after Ann. They are not forced to do so from an externally authoritative discourse, rather they appear to decide what to do “from within” (Bakhtin 1981). As already stated, Bakhtin (1981) claimed that the internally persuasive discourse presupposes a specific distance. Contrary to the authoritative word that cannot establish contact with other voices, the internally persuasive word distinguishes between Ann’s voice and the voices of her pupils. It distinguishes between her thoughts and the thoughts of the pupils. This becomes very clear in the “birds-in-the-trees” story, and it becomes particularly clear when regarding Paul and his actions.

When the children do not calm down in the way Ann seems to want, she asks them to raise their hands to speak (19). Here one could suggest that the teacher uses the authoritative word. Because of the power difference between her and the pupils she is the one who can use this kind of discourse. We can also see that she addresses herself directly to Paul. She asks him to be quiet and to raise his hand to speak, and she claims to know that the boy can behave in this way (19). This communication appears to be both authoritative and internally persuasive. According to Bakhtin (1981), this kind of communication, being simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive, rarely occurs. However, it appears to take place in this particular situation. At any rate, Ann’s utterance (19) implies that all the pupils calm down so that they can finally continue with the topic of the lesson.

### ***Discussion***

In this chapter the focus has been on transitions between classroom activities. As stated above, most transitions are expected and foreseen by the teacher, but sudden and unexpected situations may also often occur. The story presented in this chapter is an example of such an unexpected situation. When analyzing the story in light of the theoretical concepts presented above, we could see how Ann assists or scaffolds her pupils through this particular situation

until they finally are able to return to the topic of the lesson and continue their work on the topic weather. The concept of prolepsis further enabled us to see the developmental process of increasing intersubjectivity among Ann and her pupils, and finally we saw that Ann uses the internally persuasive discourse rather than the authoritative word when she scaffolds the pupils from one activity into another. The particular transition presented here lasts for nearly five minutes. During this short period of time several things happen. The pupils leave their places to look at the birds outside and they laugh and talk together. Then they return to their places in the class circle and join Ann in clapping the rhythm and repeating her utterances about waxwings. Following this, they talk about why the birds are sitting in the treetops before they finally return to the topic of the lesson and continue their discussion on weather.

In the story presented above we have seen that Paul is the one who starts or initiates the sequence. He is also the last one to return to his place in the class circle and to join the class in the activity of clapping and repeating after Ann before they finally continue with the topic of the lesson. What is particularly important to reflect upon here is that Paul is given time. Ann gives him time so that he himself can figure out what to do. None of the scaffolding devices briefly presented earlier (see Footnote 49, p.108) includes the question of time, and based on the story narrated in this chapter I would suggest that *time* could be a scaffolding device because I recognize that children are different, and all school classes have pupils with a wide variety of needs and skills. Consequently they will react or respond in various ways, and some will need more time than others. In my opinion it is crucial that teachers take such reflections into consideration, even though I am well aware of the dilemmas time as a scaffolding device may introduce.

During transitions some pupils easily turn their attention from one activity to another, and the task for the teacher is therefore to keep their attention focused while waiting for those who need more time to make the transition. Another dilemma could be that the other pupils observe that in this particular case Paul is “allowed” to decide or figure out for himself when he will join the others. This could of course lead other pupils to think of doing the same. However, this does not happen in this particular transition. All the others, including John, continue with the activity until Paul joins them. Instead of “forcing” Paul to go to his place and join the activity, Ann gives him time as a scaffolding device, and it works. It is also important to note that in this way there is no negative focus on him, rather an atmosphere is created in which there is some freedom for the pupils. This appears to establish a safe environment where mistakes are appreciated as part of the learning process (Hogan & Pressley 1997). What is also interesting to note is that Ann uses other scaffolding devices than



time. In this particular story she uses rhythm, and in my data material I also find that she uses songs as a means to lead children during transitions. In addition to time, I would also suggest that such tools as *rhythm* and *songs* are useful scaffolding devices during transitions. In my opinion these analyses offer crucial insight and are consequently something to reflect upon, both for teachers working in the field and for further research.

We have seen that Stone (1993) criticizes the scaffolding metaphor for paying too little attention to the interactions between the tutor and the tutees. Both the concept of prolepsis and the concept of the internally persuasive word allow us to gain insight into this issue. What is important to note here is that Ann does not use the authoritative word and command the children to turn their focus away from the birds so they can continue their work on the topic weather. Neither does she explicitly state that this is what she wants them to do. Instead we have seen that there is a developmental process from an initially shared experience towards an increasing intersubjectivity between her and the pupils. Therefore, when Ann starts to clap the rhythm and says the word “waxwings” it is not only taken for granted that this signals to the pupils that they should go to their places in the class circle, it also appears to be tacitly presupposed as a frame of reference.

One can only speculate what would have happened if Ann had used the authoritative word and immediately demanded that the children forget about the birds and continue their work on the topic of the lesson. How many of the children would have affirmed this demand? Would anyone at all have done that? Probably only a few of the children would have managed to do as they were told, and what would Ann have done next? Would she have continued to command the pupils? What about pupils like John and Paul in such situations? Bearing in mind what we have seen above, I would therefore also suggest the *internally persuasive word* as a scaffolding device as I recognize that today’s children most often do not totally affirm what the teacher tells them to do. Instead they are active and reflective participants in various school activities, something that we also want them to be. In my opinion it is important to give this issue a great deal of thought.

Being a teacher is risky business. As long as we are working with people we can never fully foresee what will happen. Classroom activities cannot be completely controlled, and if you want to flourish as a teacher you have to tolerate and even value that things do not always go according to plan. New experiences may occur in the intersection between what is planned and what is unexpected (Smidt 2003). This is what happens in the story presented above. Something unexpected and unforeseen happens, and the activity in question has to give way to something else. The children initiate the topic waxwings, and Ann follows up their

initiative to teach them about these particular birds, their name, what they are doing in the treetops, and what kind of food they are looking for. Many of the children will probably remember these facts the next time they see a flock of waxwings in the air. In this way this particular transition turns out to be a learning situation.

Yinger (1987) suggests that teaching can be described by the metaphor of improvisational performance, something that is interesting when we look at Ann's practice as described in this chapter. Improvisation is a form of action especially suited to situations that discourage or prevent carefully considered processes such as planning, analysis and reflection (Yinger 1987). Such situations usually include the need to be immediately responsive to changing activities and events. In the story presented above, we have seen that the planned activity, the class reflecting upon the topic weather, is interrupted. Ann immediately deals with this interruption, and she does so in a smooth and encouraging manner without long pauses or delays. Within the framework of socio-cultural theory we have seen that intramental functioning has its origin in intermental processes (Vygotsky 1978). According to Yinger (1987), the working method of improvisation is retrospective because it uses patterns from past experiences to order future actions. When improvising, a teacher begins with an outline of the activity and details are filled in during the activity as the teacher draws from an extensive repertoire of prior experiences to respond to what the pupils say and do in the present moment (Livingstone & Borks 1989).

As stated in Chapter three, I take a narrative research approach to this study and I therefore suggest that Ann's repertoire may be in forms of narratives from past experiences, something that is also confirmed by her utterances on how to deal with the challenge of transitions. She has experienced that she has to deal with such situations in a smooth and flexible way, and that she has to capture the pupils' commitment rather than demand them to stay within an activity or proceed on to a new one. However, when looking at Ann's actions and reflections on transitions, it is important to remember that she has been a teacher for more than twenty years. Consequently she has a great deal of experience to build upon when dealing with transitions in such a smooth, flexible and, I would add, elegant way. She has a repertoire to build upon, otherwise she could not have improvised in the way she does.

## **Chapter 8**

### **“Kids Need to be Seen”**

The previous chapter focused on transitions between various activities, and found that it is important that pupils should master these situations. The role of the teacher is therefore to help and support the children during transition processes. In Chapter seven we witnessed how Ann assisted the whole class, and in particular Paul, through a transition that suddenly occurred. In this situation we saw that Ann appeared to be consciously aware of what was required of the class as a whole to manage the situation and also what individual children such as Paul needed.

Being aware of individual children is important, something Ann appears to be very concerned about. She repeatedly says things like “Kids need to be seen” (int 012301, p.21). Within the framework of socio-cultural theory it is, however, crucial to add that seeing the child is not a one-way process where the teacher is the only active party. On the contrary, it implies a mutual relationship between the teacher and the children, an interpersonal relationship characterized by interactions, communication and dialogues. As we saw in Chapter two, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized intermental processes. With his general genetic law of cultural development he even claimed that such processes were the foundation of individual human mental functioning. Therefore, several researchers, basing their theoretical framework on Vygotsky’s thoughts, have focused on interpersonal relationships.<sup>56</sup> Various concepts are used to describe these processes, for example assisted performance and joint activity (Tharp & Gallimore 1988), guided participation (Rogoff 1990), participatory appropriation and apprenticeship (Rogoff 1995 a, b) and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger 1991).

In a classroom and within ordinary classroom activities there are innumerable opportunities for the teacher to see, communicate and interact with the children. There are countless situations where she can interact with the class as a whole and where she can have dialogues with individual children. This chapter focuses on Ann’s reflections and actions concerning the topic of seeing the children.

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<sup>56</sup> In particular, researchers deal with this issue when discussing Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The issue of interpersonal relationships, or what Vygotsky (1978) called intermental processes, surfaces everywhere in this study, not surprisingly, I might add, as we cannot understand a person, Ann and her reflections, thoughts and actions, without also paying attention to her surroundings. Therefore, I have already presented theories relevant to the topic of this chapter. Of particular interest is Bakhtin's concept of the internally persuasive word and Rommetveit's concept of prolepsis, both presented in the previous chapter. To gain further insight into the phenomenon I will first focus on the concept of *intersubjectivity* (Wertsch 1984) and follow this with a presentation of Bakhtin's ideas on *value judgment* and *expressive intonation* (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a, 1994c).

### **The Concept of Intersubjectivity**

According to Wertsch (1984), intersubjectivity exists between participants who act in the same activity setting when they share the same definition of the situation and they know that they share it. For example, when the pupils in Ann's class enter the classroom in the mornings, they set their backpacks down by their desks and enter the class circle to attend the morning ritual together with Ann. Both the pupils and the teacher appear to share this particular definition of the situation. Other similar definitions of intersubjectivity range from a shared social world between the child and adult through the process of negotiation of meanings (Kozulin 1990) to a mutual understanding that is achieved between people in communication (Rogoff 1990), or the sharing of a social world through the process of negotiation (Putney 1996). Intersubjectivity is also described as a space where the participants connect and create mutual understanding (Wink & Putney 2002), something we have already witnessed in the stories presented in the two previous chapters.

In studies of interpersonal relationships between caregiver and child in Western middle class families, Rogoff (1990) has shown that intersubjectivity varies according to the age of the child. Thus, in early infancy intersubjectivity is shared emotional commitment, while intersubjectivity connected to objects and events outside the participants occurs later. This could be described as primary and secondary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen 1980). Primary intersubjectivity is thus the very first joint eye contact between mother and child, the very first interaction face to face in the mother-child relation. Secondary intersubjectivity occurs later when the child and the mother or caregiver have shared attention on an object, for example a toy. Thus, during early phases of development, intersubjectivity is usually not created at the

level of verbal formulations (Wertsch 1985). Later on, intersubjectivity often occurs by means of semiotic mediation, what could be described as tertiary intersubjectivity (Matusov 2000).

Above we have seen that Wertsch (1984) connects intersubjectivity to the concept of situation definition. A situation definition is the way a setting or context is represented or defined<sup>57</sup> by the participants in the setting. When focusing on the concept of situation definition, it is important to recognize that though the adult and the child are functioning in the same situation, they may often understand or define the context in various ways. In Chapter seven we saw an example of this when Paul in particular needed some time to understand what was expected of him in the special situation. Thus, in a classroom, a pupil may not understand the task, the object or what is expected, appropriate behavior in the same way as the teacher does. In fact I see this as a characteristic trait of the socio-cultural setting of school. The teacher often has another definition of the task, the object and event than the pupils have. In one sense the teacher and the pupil are in the same situation because the same concrete objects and events are available to both. In another sense they are not in the same situation because they do not define the setting in the same way. When interlocutors approach a setting with various situation definitions, it may at first be difficult to see how they could carry on with the interaction. According to Wertsch (1984), it is when dealing with this problem that the concept of intersubjectivity occurs.

Hence, intersubjectivity exists when the participants share a situation definition. It is important to remember, however, that intersubjectivity may exist on several levels. At one extreme it can consist of no more than agreement on the location of concrete objects in the activity setting. At the other extreme, nearly complete intersubjectivity exists when two interlocutors represent objects, tasks and events in identical ways. What characterizes the socio-cultural setting of a classroom is that the teacher and her pupils often negotiate an intersubjective situation definition. According to Wertsch (1984), it is essential to recognize the asymmetry in this type of negotiation. Within the socio-cultural setting of schools, there is a power difference between the teacher and the pupils, and most often it is the teacher who initiates, leads and encourages the children to participate in conversations or negotiations. There is also asymmetry due to the fact that the teacher and the pupils may define the task, the object or the setting in different ways. The teacher must be willing to understand and follow the child's understanding of the task, and she or he must be willing to accept a temporary situation definition before moving on to reach another level of intersubjectivity.

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<sup>57</sup> When using the term definition, Wertsch (1984) points out that the participants in a setting actively create a representation of the situation. They are not passive recipients of this representation.

To specify how the negotiation of an intersubjective situation definition occurs, Wertsch (1984) focuses on semiotic mediation. Intersubjectivity is often created through the use of language.<sup>58</sup> Even though quite different intramental situation definitions are involved in an activity setting, intersubjectivity can be established if appropriate forms of semiotic mediation are used in the communication. Particular ways of talking about objects, events and tasks in a setting determine the level at which intersubjectivity is to be established (Wertsch 1984, Stone 1993). Therefore, the fact that a teacher makes an utterance does not guarantee that intersubjectivity will be established. The utterance is only a bid in the negotiations. The child must respond appropriately or at least understand the utterance if an intersubjective situation definition is to occur. The same applies the other way round, the teacher has to understand the child's utterance. Consequently, it is argued that a recursive communicative process is required that enables the pupils to be active and committed participants. The activities in question should be organized so that the children can take part in the interactions. They should be arranged so that the pupils can listen to each other and give responses to each other's utterances. Finally, the teacher's reply to the pupils' utterances should also lead to their further contribution (Matusov 2000). In the stories from Ann's classroom presented in the two previous chapters we have seen how the activities were arranged to encourage the pupils to be active participants.

Rommetveit (1979) also focuses on the fact that any situation, event or object has many possible interpretations, and adds that what the participant in question experiences of what is going on is a "private" affair. However, these private experiences can be talked about and can thus become a shared social reality between the participants in the situation. Rommetveit (1979) maintains: "Communication aims at transcendence of the 'private' worlds of the participants. It sets up what we might call 'states of intersubjectivity'" (p.94). Because the teacher and the pupils often have different definitions of the situation, they may run into problems establishing and maintaining intersubjectivity. The teacher's challenge is to find a way to communicate with the child so that she or he can participate at least in a minimal way in the interpersonal relationship and can eventually come to define the setting in a new, culturally appropriate way (Wertsch 1984).

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<sup>58</sup> In Chapter seven we witnessed an exception to this statement. Here intersubjectivity was mainly created by means of other mediational means than just words.

## The Concepts of Value Judgment and Expressive Intonation

Above it was stated that particular ways of talking about objects, events or tasks in a setting set the level at which intersubjectivity can be established (Wertsch 1984, Stone 1993). Bakhtin's concepts of value judgment and expressive intonation provide us with further insight into this issue. However, these concepts have to be regarded in light of Bakhtin's ideas on meaning, a term that was touched upon in Chapter two.

In Chapter two we saw that every utterance generates a response in the other receiving interlocutor. We also saw that the initial utterance already anticipates an active response in the listener and is consequently shaped to take this into account. It is also important to remember that the utterance in question is not the first word in any real sense. According to Bakhtin its form is molded not only by future responses, but also as an answer to all relevant previous utterances. It is this interactive, dialogic nature of discourse that accounts for the constant generation of meaning. Therefore, any meaning is dialogic in nature. Meaning is realized only in the process of active and responsive understanding. It does not reside inside the word itself or inside the speaker; it is produced or realized only in the specific utterance of a communicative event (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a). When Bakhtin discusses this issue, he insists upon the necessity of considering language not as words in a dictionary, but as the actualized meaning of the words used in a specific utterance. Therefore, we cannot say that meaning belongs to the word itself. Meaning belongs to a word in its position between participants in a communicative interaction: "The verbal discourse itself, taken in isolation as a purely linguistic phenomenon, cannot, of course, be true or false, daring or diffident" (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c, p.162). This is where Bakhtin insists that meaning is molded by value judgments.

In Chapter two I already touched upon this issue, when I found that Bakhtin's dialogic perspective implies that nothing can be perceived except in terms of the perspective of something else. Any utterance therefore has some dialogic relation to value. Before moving on it is important to remember that individual value judgment has its origin in intermental processes:

*They have entered the flesh and blood of all representatives of the group; they organize behavior and actions; they have merged, as it were, with the objects and phenomena to which they correspond, and for that reason they are in no need of special verbal formulation (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c, p.165).*

Bakhtin claimed that all the phenomena that surround us are merged with value judgments. Consequently, each utterance produced in living speech is said or written in conjunction with

a specific evaluative accent. Therefore, there is no such thing as a word without an evaluative accent:

*Any word used in actual speech possesses not only theme and meaning in the referential, or content, sense of these words, but also value judgment: i.e., said or written in conjunction with a specific evaluative accent ("evaluative accent" italics in original). There is no such thing as a word without evaluative accent (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a, p.36).*

Thus, every utterance from Ann, those presented in Chapter four and five concerning her past experiences and current class, and those presented in Chapters six and seven, have evaluative accents, for example, her emphasis on the pupils' parents when talking about her collaborators in Chapter five, her accentuation on active and committed children in Chapter six and her emphasis on smooth and flexible transitions in Chapter seven. Bakhtin even claims that evaluation determines whether a particular meaning may enter the purview of the speaker or the listener. Furthermore, evaluation is crucial to changes of meaning. A change in meaning is essentially always a re-evaluation (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a).

Finally, Bakhtin maintains that value judgment is expressed in intonation, and that intonation is the most distinct expression of social evaluation. In most cases intonation is determined by the immediate situation and often by its most momentary circumstances. Bakhtin also claims that in living speech intonation often has a meaning quite independent of the semantic composition of speech. As human beings we have a habit of stating our feelings by expressing meaningful intonation for some words. The words could be an interjection or an adverb. Bakhtin claims that almost everybody has a favorite interjection or adverb she or he uses for the purely intonational resolution of situations and moods that occur in various situations we encounter in life. According to Bakhtin, examples of such favorite words could be "so-so", "yes-yes", "now-now" and "well-well". Of course, any such favorite word may be pronounced in an enormous variety of intonations, depending upon the situation in question (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a).

Genuine, living intonation moves the discourse beyond the border of the verbal. Or to put it another way, intonation always lies on the border of the verbal and the nonverbal, the said and the unsaid.<sup>59</sup> In intonation, discourse comes directly into account with life, and it is by

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<sup>59</sup> In this connection, Bakhtin's concept of extraverbal context is interesting. Bakhtin repeatedly claims that any verbal discourse arises out of a particular situation in real life and maintains a close connection with that situation. Communication between participants is therefore directly informed by the particular context itself and cannot be divorced from it. Bakhtin argues that if we are to make sense of concrete verbal utterances, we have to analyze the extraverbal context connected to the utterance in question. He also contends that the extraverbal context of an utterance comprises three factors: First, the common spatial purview of the participants, second, the



means of intonation that the speaker comes into contact with the listener or listeners. Therefore, intonation has a “social nature”. It is especially sensitive to all the vibrations in the social atmosphere surrounding the speaker:

*Given an atmosphere of sympathy, the intonation could freely undergo deployment and differentiation within the range of the major tone. But if there were no such firmly dependable ‘choral support’ the intonation would have gone in a different direction and taken on different tones. (...) When a person anticipates the disagreement of his interlocutor or, at any rate, is uncertain or doubtful of his agreement, he intones his words differently. (...) A creatively productive, assured, and rich intonation is possible only on the basis of presupposed ‘choral support’ (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c, p.166).*

What is important to note here is the term choral support. Bakhtin claims that intonation requires the choral support of the surrounding persons. It is only in an atmosphere of sympathy that free intonation is possible. However, intonation has to agree with the values of the particular social setting, and I would add, agree with the particular activity genre<sup>60</sup> of the setting. Therefore, Bakhtin claims that intonation not only expresses some kind of mental state of the speaker, it has also embedded in it an active relation to the external word, the particular social context. Therefore, when a person intones a word she or he assumes an active social position with respect to certain specific values. Therefore, a speaker’s intonation of a word or an utterance is not only directed towards the listener. According to Bakhtin, the intonation is oriented in two directions, towards the listener and the object of the utterance. He claims that it is this double orientation that determines all aspects of intonation and makes it understandable. Bakhtin’s emphasis on the social nature of intonation becomes very clear when he talks about this double orientation. Thus, any utterance said aloud or written down for intelligible communication is the expression and product of the social interaction of the speaker, the listener and the topic of the speech (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c).

### ***Ann’s Practice***

In the introduction to this chapter I said that during a school day there are innumerable intermental situations where the teacher can see the children and open for communication and interactions with them. Ann’s focus on this is evident everywhere in the daily classroom activities. For example, we see this during the morning ritual when Ann asks if anyone has

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interlocutors’ common experience and understanding of the situation and third, their common evaluation of the situation. The utterance directly depends upon these three factors, the jointly seen, the jointly known and the unanimously evaluated. Even if these factors are never explicitly stated, they are all assumed in the utterance. Therefore, the utterance as a meaningful whole comprises two parts: The part that is realized in words and the assumed part (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c).

<sup>60</sup> The concept of activity genre was introduced in Chapter six.

something they wish to tell and share with the rest of the class. This initiative always leads to someone telling about something, and Ann and sometimes also the other children engage in dialogues about this particular experience. We also see this in the teaching and assisted learning periods where she wants the pupils to be active and committed participants. She wants them to engage in conversations on the topic in question. In Chapter six we have already seen an example of this, something that also will be seen in this chapter. During work periods where the pupils most often work individually, Ann constantly walks around to assist and scaffold the pupils in their work. In my analysis of the data material I find no exception to this kind of practice. She never sits down to do some work of her own. There always appear to be pupils who need her, and all the time she is there to assist. During the children's lunch she also regularly walks around to talk with individual pupils or she sits down with a group to talk with them while they are eating. In my analysis of the data material I also find that she takes time to interact with individual children during transitions. This happens in particular when the pupils enter the classroom in the morning or after breaks. All these findings occur in my observation notes and in the video recordings (see Appendix 3A p.208-210 and 3B p.211-212). They also occur in the interviews (see Appendix 3C p.213) where Ann is insistent on the idea that children need to be seen.

Below I will first present some of Ann's reflections on the issue and follow this with a story from the classroom which I analyze in light of the theoretical concepts presented above. The story is from a teaching and assisted learning period. As will be seen, the subject matter is mathematics and the focus is on the number eighteen. Once again we can see that Ann does not just stand in front of the children and inform or transmit to them some kind of knowledge concerning the particular number. On the contrary, she opens for dialogues and interactions with the children so that they can communicate their thoughts on the topic in question and be committed participants in the interaction. This particular story was chosen as it illustrates Ann's general practice of seeing the children.

### Ann's Reflections on Seeing Children

Above I have stated that Ann's concern with seeing the children is a constant companion during her daily classroom activities, but it is also present when she reflects on her own teaching practice, for example when she reflects on being a mentor for student teachers, where she claims: "The most important thing is that the student teachers are able to communicate with the children, that they are able to get in touch with them" (int 102400, p.25).

Her concern on this issue also appears when she reflects on the English teacher who has the class one lesson a week. According to Ann, this teacher has major problems dealing with the class. She is well prepared for the lessons, but Ann finds that her classroom management problems are due to the interactions between the teacher and the children:

*It's something about their communication. I don't think she has good contact with the children. I really don't think so. She gets so angry, and the children feel insecure and then they become extremely unruly (int 102400, p.18).*

When talking about the pupils' parents she states how important it is that they should also see their children. She even says: "If a child isn't seen at home, I think that child will have a difficult life. You have to see the child" (int 011201, p.21). Her concern about seeing the individual child also emerges when she talks about the importance of supporting the children in their individual thinking and reflection:

*Their individual reflections are important. I think it's important to support them in their reflections. Well, you know, I say to them "Do you think in this way? How exciting!" Well, something like what they think and how they think (int 102400, p.4). I think it's important that we talk about how we are thinking, and show each other that we may think differently (int 100300, p.8).*

In her interactions with the children Ann finds that they have different thoughts and experiences, various needs, various strengths and weaknesses. According to Ann, she tries to pay attention to this fact when she gives the pupils tasks to work on, and her way of doing this is to give them open tasks<sup>61</sup> that they can work on in different ways. She says:

*I think it's important to show them that tasks can be worked on in different ways. Everybody is working within the same theme, but they need various tasks. This is differentiated education. It's a way for me to deal with adapted education. It's a way for me to deal with the variations between them. Therefore the tasks have to be open for various solutions (int 100300, p.7).*

For Ann it also appears to be important to let the pupils be aware of the variations between them. She wants them to see and tolerate and accept the different ways of working on a task:

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<sup>61</sup> Ann says: "I think I became especially aware of this way of thinking and working when I worked in Tina's class. The pupils were working within the same theme, but they worked on the theme in various ways. Some of them answered questions, others had filling-in exercises. Some of them created their own texts and others could draw, for example. Well, I think it was then I really experienced how useful it is to see the differences and to highlight the variety among them, and to do something with it" (int 011201, p.3).

*I think it's important to show them that we can do things in various ways, and always when we write or draw I try to show them variations. You know, I show them that he works with the task in this way and she does it in another way. They are always so interested in seeing what the others have done (int 100300, p.7).*

In the beginning of the school year Ann first felt that John could manage to work on open tasks. She did not know him very well to begin with and she thought he would be able to choose how to deal with such tasks. However, it was not long before Ann experienced that he was not able to choose how to approach an open task on his own. If he was to do anything at all during work periods Ann rather had to give him closed tasks. She says:

*I have experienced that John cannot manage to work on open tasks. He does not manage all the choices. It's so hard for him. It's much better when I give him tasks that have only one solution. If I give him open tasks I have to help him choose (int 100300, p.12-13).*

Ann's concern with seeing John is not only connected to how he does his school work. She says: "He's new here. This is his third school and he needs my attention. He really does. He needs me to see him" (100300, p.21). This shows that seeing the whole child appears to be Ann's general attitude in her dealings with her pupils. This attitude has already been discussed in Chapter five when Paul was focused on. We saw that Ann even seems to think that her seeing him is a prerequisite for him to behave in an appropriate manner. She says: "When I see him and have time for him, well, then I think he calms down and is able to behave in a more appropriate way" (int 112200, p.6). She also says:

*What works for him is to give him my attention. That's good for him, I think (int 102300, p.13). He's a kid who needs to be seen. It's important for him that I see him and that I care (int 112200, p.8). The best I can do for him is to talk with him, show him that I see him and that I care. (int 112200, p.24). It's important that he knows that I see him. If I'm able to see him I can stay ahead of things, you know (int 112200, p.27).*

Contrary to John, Paul manages to work on open tasks:

*For Paul, open tasks are at the best. When he gets tasks like that he really enjoys himself. He flourishes, because he's so creative. He really enjoys expressing himself through tasks where he can use his creativity (int 011201, p.1-2).*

Having this holistic attitude to seeing the children can be very demanding and sometimes one might be tempted to ease up on the attention a bit. In one of the interviews when reflecting upon Paul, Ann touches upon this issue:

*I just have to have a positive relationship with him. Otherwise it won't work. You have to be very conscious about this. When it comes to Paul, I cannot get into a vicious circle. I cannot allow myself to fall into that trap. I feel when I start to withdraw from him, when I start to care less, then I know I have to do something (int 011701, p.16).*

She also says:

*Of course, pupils like John and Paul need more space, and perhaps I see them more than I see the other kids. Well, when all is said and done, perhaps that's why they manage school. They have to be seen positively and they have to get my support (int 102400, p.10).<sup>62</sup>*

Below I will tell a story from a teaching and assisted learning period in the class circle. It is called the “number-eighteen” story. It was videotaped on Thursday, 23 November and later fixed in the text presented below. As with the stories presented in the two previous chapters this particular story has also happened once and will never happen in exactly the same way again. However, even if the story itself is unique, it illustrates Ann’s general practice when it comes to seeing children through interactions, dialogues and communication.

### The “Number-Eighteen” Story

It is the first teaching unit this particular Thursday in November. After the morning ritual, the subsequent teaching and assisted learning period and a work period where the pupils worked on copy-book writing focusing on the letter *l*, Ann asks the pupils to come back to the class circle. During this transition she plays guitar while the pupils finish their work and then enter the class circle. When all the pupils are at their regular places in the circle, they sing a song<sup>63</sup> and then a new teaching and assisted learning period starts. As already stated, the subject matter is mathematics:

(1) Ann: *(Sits at her place in the class circle, looks at the children, smiles and says:) I wonder if someone could tell me what eighteen is? What could eighteen be? Who can tell me? (Says in a teasing way:) Perhaps it's too difficult?*

Many of the pupils raise their hands.

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<sup>62</sup> In the introductory chapter we saw that Ann also felt it could be dangerous to focus too much on John and Paul, as this would limit the time left to see the other pupils. In the quotation cited above, she focuses on the importance of seeing them. The two apparently inconsistent reflections illustrate one of the dilemmas of being a teacher. There is no ready-made, fixed answer when it comes to the question of how to deal with children with special needs. On the contrary, this is a challenge that has to be lived with and dealt with every day in the ordinary classroom activities.

<sup>63</sup> This particular song is a winter song. All the pupils at the school are going to learn the song. They will be singing it when they have an assembly in the gym the following week.

- (2) Ann: *(Looks at one of the boys, "Kim" and says:) Kim?*  
 (3) Kim: *One plus one plus one plus one plus one plus one... (continues up to eighteen).*  
 (4) Ann: *Yes, that's eighteen. Yes! But it is too much to write on the board. Could eighteen be anything else? (While saying this she looks at the children. Several of them have raised their hands. Then she nods towards a girl, "Julie" and says:) Julie?*  
 (5) Julie: *Sixteen plus two.*  
 (6) Ann: *Yes! Sixteen plus two, Julie says. (As Ann says this, she moves towards the board and writes "16+2". Then she looks at the children again and says:) Could eighteen be anything else? "Jan"?*  
 (7) Jan: *Eighteen minus zero.*  
 (8) Ann: *Eighteen minus zero, is that right? (While she asks this question, she writes "18-0" on the board.)*  
 (9) The pupils: *Yes!*  
 (10) Ann: *(Looks at a girl, "Linda" who has raised her hand and asks:) Linda, what's eighteen for you?*  
 (11) Linda: *Nineteen minus one.*  
 (12) Ann: *Nineteen minus one. Yes! Could you write it on the board, please?*

Linda gets up, goes to the board and writes "19-1". At the same time Ann leaves her ordinary place in the class circle and sits down between two pupils so she can see what is written on the board.

- (13) Ann: *(Nods towards a boy, "Roger" who raises his hand and says:) Roger?*  
 (14) Roger: *Five plus five plus eight.*  
 (15) Ann: *Five plus five plus eight. Yes! Could you write it on the board, please? It isn't that much to write, five plus five plus eight. (Addresses a boy, "Stian" and asks:) Stian, do you agree, five plus five plus eight is eighteen?*  
 (16) Stian: *Yes.*

Rogers goes to the board and starts to write.

- (17) Ann: *Good! (Looks at a girl, "Karin" and says:) Karin?*  
 (18) Karin: *Nine plus eight...*  
 (19) Ann: *Nine plus... (She turns her attention to Roger who has stopped his writing on the board, says to him:) Just continue writing, Roger.*  
 (20) Karin: *No, I mean ten plus eight.*  
 (21) Ann: *Yes! Ten plus eight. Yes!*

Karin goes to the board to write "10+8".

- (22) Ann: *(Smiles to a girl, "Camilla" and says:) What about you, Camilla? What do you think eighteen could be?*  
 (23) Camilla: *Nine plus nine.*  
 (24) Ann: *Nine plus nine. Yes! Could you write it on the board, please?*

Camilla goes to the board to write "9+9".

- (25) Ann: *(Looks at Paul who raises his hand. Smiles towards him and says:) Paul?*  
 (26) Paul: *Eighteen plus zero.*

(27) Ann: Good! Could you write it on the board, please?

Paul gets up and goes to the board to write “18+0”. Many children raise their hands to answer Ann’s initial question. After offering their individual suggestions they write them on the board.

(28) Ann: (Looks at John who raises his hand, smiles at him and says:) John?

(29) John: Thirty minus twelve.

(30) Ann: (She looks at him, then at the other children, asks:) Do you agree with John? Is thirty minus twelve eighteen?

Some of the pupils do not answer her question while others say “yes.”

(31) Ann: Could you all think it through? Thirty minus twelve, is that eighteen?

Some of the pupils say “yes” and others say “no”.

(32) Ann: (Smiles towards them, says:) Some of you say “yes” and others say “no”. (Looks at a girl, “Andrea” nods to her and says:) Let’s hear what Andrea thinks.

(33) Andrea: Thirty minus ten and twenty minus two.

(34) Ann: Did you hear what Andrea said? (Looks at Andrea again and says:) Thirty minus ten, what number do you get then?

(35) Andrea: Twenty.

(36) Ann: Yes! And then minus two, what number is that?

(37) Andrea: Eighteen.

(38) Ann: Yes! (Then she looks at John. They smile at each other and Ann says:) Could you please write it on the board?

John hurries to the board, and starts to write his suggestion.

(39) Ann: Those of you who haven’t written anything yet, who wants to make a suggestion?

(Looks at one of the boys, “Henrik” and says:) Henrik?

(40) Henrik: Twenty minus two.

(41) Ann: Twenty minus two. Yes!

Henrik moves to the board to write “20-2”.

(42) Magne: Seventeen plus one.

(43) Ann: Seventeen plus one. Great! (While Magne moves to the board, Ann looks at one of the girls, “Berit” and asks:) Would you like to say something, Berit?

(44) Berit: No.

(45) Ann: (Looks at a boy, “Helge” who raises his hand:) Helge?

(46) Helge: Forty minus twenty-two.

(47) Ann: Listen to that one! Forty minus twenty-two. How did you get that?

(48) Helge: (Explains in a low voice.)

(49) Ann: (Repeats what he said:) Forty and then minus ten. What number is that?

(50) Helge: Thirty.

- (51) Ann: *And then minus ten once more, which number did you get then?*  
 (52) Helge: *Twenty.*  
 (53) Ann: *And then minus two, and...*  
 (54) Helge: *Eighteen.*  
 (55) Ann: *Yes! Good! Could you write it on the board please?*

Helge gets up and goes to the board. In the meantime Camilla raises her hand.

- (56) Ann: *Camilla, I think you've already written on the board?*  
 (57) Camilla: *Yes, but I don't want to write. (She hurries to say:) Twenty-nine minus eleven.*  
 (58) Ann: *Wow, now I really have to think. That's difficult. How did you get that? Did you count or what?*  
 (59) Camilla: *No.*  
 (60) Ann: *No? Didn't you? (She looks at the children and asks:) Twenty-nine minus eleven, is that eighteen?*  
 (61) The pupils: *Yes!*  
 (62) Camilla: *(Starts to explain in a very low voice...)*  
 (63) Ann: *(Repeats her explanation:) Ok, so twenty-nine and then minus ten. Then you come to nineteen, and then minus one, and then it's eighteen.*

The pupils offer increasingly advanced suggestions.

- (64) Ann: *Some of you are really giving difficult suggestions. I am impressed! Well, now we're going to move on in our books. You can work until you come to the stop mark. Ok! Good! Now you can return to your desks.*

The pupils leave the class circle, go to their regular group places and start to work in their books (vid 112300). The conversation about the number eighteen lasted for 6 minutes and 45 seconds.

### *Intersubjectivity in the "Number-Eighteen" Story*

According to Wertsch (1984), intersubjectivity occurs when the interlocutors define a task, an object or a setting in the same way. Thus, the situation-definition concept is crucial when intersubjectivity is to be examined. In the "number-eighteen" story both Ann and her pupils appear to share a common definition of the situation in question. They obviously have a joint understanding of what is expected as appropriate behavior in the situation, or to put it another way, they have a common understanding of the activity genre of the particular setting. Thus, when Ann asks them to do so, the children enter the class circle, sit down at their regular places and are active and committed participants in the subsequent interaction. What is interesting to note is that the particular definition of the situation is never explicitly spelled out. They do not talk about or negotiate the activity genre in advance. It seems as if they have a tacitly common understanding of it. In Chapter seven I touched upon this issue when presenting Rommetveit's (1974, 1979) concept of prolepsis, which we remember refers to



what is tacitly taken for granted in any particular interaction. According to this, intersubjectivity is not only something that is achieved through a process of interaction, it must also in some sense unreflectively be taken for granted to be achieved. This expands the focus on the “sharedness” of the participants to include both future expectations and past experiences of the participants in a joint activity.

In Chapter six I maintained that we cannot know how the pupils have internalized this particular genre. However, what we do know is that they have encountered similar typical situations in numerous intermental processes. Thus through a process of internalization the particular activity genre has become part of the child’s intramental functioning (Vygotsky 1978). In my opinion it is important that the teacher and the pupils should have a common situation definition for any typical situation in schools. A joint situation definition of the activity genre of teaching and assisted learning periods is crucial if participants are to turn their focus to the topic of the lesson more effortlessly, rather than focus on how to behave in the situation. This is an issue I will return to in the discussion.

Ann’s initial question (1) in the “number-eighteen” story leads to a response from Kim (3) who says that eighteen is one plus one, plus one, up to eighteen. The number could of course be written this way, and it is important to note that she confirms Kim’s answer (4). It is, after all, correct. She and the boy have an intersubjective understanding of the task. Thereafter, in the same utterance (4) Ann states that Kim’s proposal is too much to write on the board. Obviously she wants the number eighteen to be written in a shorter way that does not take so much time to write on the board. Her response (4) shows that she has another perspective on the task than Kim has. In the subsequent interactions between Ann and the children it appears as if the pupils have the same definition of the task as Ann has, perhaps because the pupils witnessed the interaction between their teacher and Kim. Whatever the case, the children suggest other ways of writing the number eighteen and these are shorter, which makes it easier to write them on the board. This joint intersubjective situation definition of the task lasts throughout the entire interaction. The kind of intersubjectivity that is developed in this situation could be described as tertiary intersubjectivity (Matusov 2000) because it is developed by means of a dialogue.

There is, however, an asymmetry in the interaction between Ann and the pupils, something that is a characteristic trait of the socio-cultural setting of schools. Ann is the leader of the interaction. She is the more capable other (Vygotsky 1978) who initiates and assists the pupils during the interaction. She is the one who states that the suggestions should not be too long (4), she is the one who asks individual pupils to answer (2, 4, 6, 10, 13, 15, 17, 22, 25, 28, 32,

39, 43, 45) and to go to the board to write their suggestions (12, 15, 19, 24, 27, 38, 55). By encouraging the pupils in the way she does, she assists them towards increasingly understanding the number: Eighteen is not just a numeral. It is a number that could be talked about in various ways. Through a process of interactions the pupils experience that Ann's initial question has many alternative answers (3, 5, 7, 11, 14, 20, 23, 26, 29, 40, 42, 46, 57), that there is no exclusive, single, fixed answer. It seems reasonable to assume that the pupils did not have this understanding of this particular number when the interaction started, rather this developed during the close to seven-minute-long interaction. It developed through a conversation that could be described as an internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin 1981, 1986)<sup>64</sup>.

Above it was claimed that particular ways of talking about a task set the level at which intersubjectivity is to be established (Wertsch 1984, Stone 1993). An utterance from a teacher does not guarantee that intersubjectivity will be established. Ann's initial utterance (1) is therefore a bid in the negotiations. In this particular story we witness that the children immediately start to offer answers to her question and they continue to do so throughout the interaction. They have obviously understood Ann's initial question, therefore they answer in an appropriate way. The teacher, in turn, responds to the children's utterances, and thus one could say that there is a recursive communicative process (Matusov 2000) that takes place in Ann's classroom during this particular Thursday morning in November, a recursive communicative process where the children offer various answers to Ann's initial question (1). These answers or "private" experiences are talked about and as thus they become a shared social reality between the participants in the setting (Rommetveit 1979), something that would not have happened if the pupils had not been given the opportunity to express their ideas, reflections and thoughts in the intermental setting of the teaching and assisted learning period. Therefore, we could follow Wertsch's (1984) line of thought and claim that semiotic mediation is crucial when an intersubjective situation definition is to be developed.

In the interactions between Ann and the individual children, where the pupils are asked to make explicit their own thoughts of what the number eighteen could be, there are several examples of intersubjectivity between Ann and individual children, several examples where we can witness that she and the child have an intersubjective definition of the task. We can see this in the interaction between her and Julie (4,5,6), in the interaction with Jan (6-9),

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<sup>64</sup> What is important to note is that the class has worked with other numbers in similar ways. For example, in my data material I find that they worked with the number eleven in almost the same way as they did with the number eighteen (obs 101600, vid 101600).

Linda (10,11,12), Roger (13-16), Karin (17-21), Camilla (22,23,24), Paul (25,26,27) John and Andrea (28-38), Henrik (39,40,41), Magne (42,43), Berit (43,44), Helge (45-55) and Camilla (56-63). Important to note is that all these interactions take place in a supportive and safe atmosphere. Ann looks at the children, she smiles at them and she encourages them to reflect and to answer. The children, in turn, answer her question and then Ann confirms their utterances both with a verbal statement and also in the way she asks them to write their answer on the board. I suggest that the intersubjective situation definition is actualized in part because of this supportive and encouraging atmosphere. In my opinion, these observations are crucial and I will return to them both in the next section and in the discussion section of this chapter.

Before closing this section I want to take a closer look at one of the interactions occurring in the story. Rather early in the conversation John raises his hand to suggest what the number of eighteen could be. Ann observes his initiative and encourages him to answer (28). The boy then offers a rather sophisticated answer, eighteen could be thirty minus twelve (29). Instead of giving him a spontaneous response, Ann addresses herself to the other children. She asks them if they agree with John (30) and to think through his suggestion (31). Then Ann asks Andrea (32) what she thinks. Through the subsequent interaction between Ann and the girl (33-38) we witness how Andrea reflects on the task. During this interaction Ann also asks the other pupils to listen to what Andrea says (34). What is crucial to note here is that John's suggestion is confirmed by one of his classmates, and it is also confirmed by his teacher who finally smiles at him and asks him to write his answer on the board (38). John then smiles back to Ann and hurries to the board to write his answer. Here we can see that what is going on between Ann and John does not only involve the two of them. On the contrary, in this particular interaction we witness how Ann asks Andrea to explain what she thinks of the proposal, and when she does so, we can see that John, Andrea and Ann have a joint intersubjective understanding of the task. John's answer is correct. Even if Ann is focused on individual children, this particular interaction shows how she, in an elegant way, involves not only Andrea and John but also the whole class in the topic. Needless to say, this is a huge challenge for all teachers; how to support and assist both the individual child and the whole class towards increasing intersubjectivity.

#### *Value Judgment and Expressive Intonation in the "Number-Eighteen" Story*

According to Bakhtin, a meaning is incorporated in every utterance produced in any particular event in real life. Which meaning is incorporated in Ann's utterances? To offer an answer to

this question I follow Bakhtin's reasoning and claim that any meaning is dialogic in nature. Ann's utterances are dialogic in the way that several voices emerge through them. These are the voices from previous teaching experiences of how to work with the topic and eight-year-old children. In addition to these voices from the past, her utterances also incorporate the voice of the national curriculum<sup>65</sup> and the voices of her current context, including her pupils. To grasp the actual meaning of Ann's utterances one has to take these voices into consideration. Therefore, various meanings are incorporated in her utterances. What I wish to focus on here is first that Ann obviously wants the children to be active in their own learning processes and second, that she emphasizes interactions during these processes. As will be seen in the analysis below, these two issues are highly interrelated.

Ann does not want the pupils to be passive recipients of some knowledge that she has transferred to them. Instead she thinks it is important that they are active and committed interlocutors. This attitude of Ann that was presented in Chapter six has a clear evaluative aspect. She believes deeply that children learn by being active participants, something that influences the way she deals with the task in the "number-eighteen" story. She wants them to reflect on the number eighteen, she wants each child to tell the whole class what they think and how they think and she finally wants them to write their suggestions on the board.

Instead of initiating the interaction in the way she does, the teacher could have used the authoritative word (Bakhtin 1981, 1986). She could have told the pupils the answers to her own initial question. She could have written the various suggestions on the board. But she does not do that. She has another value judgment or evaluation of the situation and therefore she encourages the pupils to think and reflect upon the topic themselves. To use Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) words again, she encourages them by initiating an internally persuasive discourse. Through the stories presented in the two previous chapters we have seen that this practice is a constant trait of Ann's teaching. Through an internally persuasive discourse the children participate in the conversation and offer increasingly advanced proposals for what the number eighteen could be. They obviously come to experience that the number could be talked about and understood in various ways. An important question here is could this have happened if Ann, the teacher, had had other value judgments of the situation? Could the same have happened if she had transmitted the various answers to her own initial question directly to her pupils?

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<sup>65</sup> Here it is stated that one of the goals of the subject matter of mathematic is that the "pupils shall be stimulated to use their imagination, their resources and their knowledge to find solution methods and alternatives through exploratory, probing and problem-solving activities" (C-97, p.158).

Ann's value judgments are seen in the way she interacts with the class as a whole, and with individual children. In this particular story we can see that Ann approaches the class with a friendly, warm attitude. She does so from the very beginning. Her initial utterance (1) is asked in a teasing way while she looks at the pupils and smiles at them. This friendly and supportive attitude lasts throughout the entire interaction, and it becomes especially clear when looking at some of the interactions with individual children. For example, we can sense it when looking at the interaction between Ann, John and Andrea (28-38), and it also becomes clear when we examine the interaction between Ann and Berit. Ann (43) asks if Berit would like to offer a suggestion. Berit (44) does not want to do so. In this particular situation Ann does not push the girl to answer, rather she appears to respect her decision. The girl's choice is accepted and respected, hence the interaction illustrates Ann's willingness to comprehend and follow the child's understanding of the situation. We have seen that Bakhtin emphasizes the environment in which any particular utterance occurs. He claims that it is only in an atmosphere of sympathy and what he calls choral support that the participants feel free to express what they want (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c). In my opinion the "number-eighteen" story can be characterized in these terms. It appears as if all the participants feel free to express their thoughts in a safe and supportive environment and within the framework of the particular activity genre of the lesson. I will return to this issue in the discussion part of this chapter.

Bakhtin says that nothing can be perceived unless it is set up against the perspective of something else (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a). For obvious reasons one could therefore reflect upon what would have happened if Ann had had other value judgments on the interactions between her and the children. What would have happened if she had not seen the children, had not listened to them, had not respected or responded to their utterances? Ann's value judgments presented so far are never stated out loud in the interaction between her and the pupils. Usually teachers do not tell their pupils of their value judgments. Ann's values are rather present as an underpinning of the entire conversation. From the interviews, we have seen that Ann is reflective on and conscious of her own teaching practice. She reflects upon her own values, and for Paul she even states that she cannot fall into the trap of a vicious circle; she has to be keenly aware of the danger of withdrawing from him (int 011701). In my opinion these findings are crucial. It is important that teachers both individually and together with their colleagues reflect upon their own value judgments on how to interact with children. This is a topic I will return to in the discussion section of the chapter.

According to Bakhtin, value judgments are expressed in intonation, and as we have seen he also claims that in living speech, intonation often has a meaning quite independent of the semantic composition of speech (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a). It is interesting to look at Ann's first utterance bearing this in mind. Ann has a friendly attitude when she asks the question. She even teases the children as she says "Perhaps it's too difficult" (1) to answer the question. According to Bakhtin it is not the words themselves, but the pronunciation or intonation of them that establishes a link between the speaker and listener. What would have happened if she had approached the class or individual children with a strict and serious attitude? Would the children have been active and committed participants then, and would Ann then have gained insight into their reflections on the topic? Bakhtin claims, moreover, that as human beings we have a habit of expressing meaningful intonation in some words. Such words could be an interjection or an adverb. In the story presented in this chapter, Ann's favorite interjection appears to be "Yes!" When Ann confirms the individual children's utterances she often uses this word (4, 6, 12, 15, 21, 24, 36, 38, 41, 55). In the particular setting of the "number-eighteen" story this word is pronounced in an intonation that confirms and acknowledges the children's utterances.<sup>66</sup> Therefore one could use Bakhtin's terms and say that the intonation has a "social nature". It does not only depend upon the speaker and her or his value judgments, it also takes into consideration the topic of the conversation and the addressees, the eight-year-old children participating in the setting.

### ***Discussion***

In this chapter the focus has been on interpersonal relationships, on how Ann sees the children through dialogues and conversations with them. We have seen how the teacher reflects upon the topic, and through the "number-eighteen" story we have witnessed her practice. We have also seen that the concept of intersubjectivity gives us valuable insight into what happens in the presented story. First, Ann and the pupils appear to have a joint intersubjective understanding of the activity genre of the setting. Even if it is never talked about, all the participants obviously know how to behave in the setting. Second, through conversation, dialogues and negotiations the participants also appear to achieve an increasingly intersubjective understanding of the number eighteen. During this interpersonal process Ann focuses both on individual children and on the class as a whole. We have also witnessed Ann's value judgments with respect to seeing or interacting with the children.

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<sup>66</sup> Ann also confirms individual children's utterances by saying "Good!" (17, 27, 55) or "Great!" (43) or "Listen to that one!" (47).

The particular teaching and assisted learning period presented in this chapter lasts six minutes and forty-five seconds. This is a relatively short period of time and is in keeping with Ann's utterance in Chapter six where she claimed: "It's best to keep the activities short" (int 102500, p.5). She has obviously experienced that eight-year-old pupils cannot be focused on one activity for a long period of time, and here we see that she makes allowances for this. We have also seen that the participants appear to have a common understanding of the particular activity genre of the setting so that they are free to turn their focus on to the task rather than being occupied with how to behave in the setting. Over the years I have been in innumerable classrooms, and sometimes I have observed that even if the teacher organizes time to deal with a subject matter or a topic, it has been difficult to carry it out. With my current perspective I think the reason for this lies in the fact that the pupils in these particular classrooms had not internalized the activity genre in question, hence they were unruly and unfocused, something that is not the case in the "number-eighteen" story. As the participants, including John and Paul, manage the appropriate activity genre, they have *space* to negotiate the task.

The space could be characterized in terms of a choral supportive atmosphere (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994c) in which both the teacher and the pupils are committed participants. The teacher contributes in the way that she looks at the children, smiles at them, addresses them, listens to what they say, confirms their answers and even initiates the pupils' confirmation of each other's answers. The children in turn, listen to her, to their classmates, offer suggestions and appear to keep their focus on the task throughout the entire teaching and assisted learning period. This analysis is especially interesting when we bear in mind the idea that particular ways of talking set the level at which intersubjectivity is to be established (Wertsch 1984, Stone 1993). The space could also be described as a potential room characterized in terms of relaxedness, voluntariness, commitment and concentration (Weidemann 1999). The pupils are relaxed because they manage the activity genre in question. They are not uncertain when it comes to the question of how to behave in the situation; rather they appear to be quite secure. Closely connected to relaxedness is the notion of voluntariness. The pupils are free to choose whether they will make a suggestion or not. They are not forced to propose an answer. What is interesting to note is that relaxedness and voluntariness appear to stimulate the pupils' commitment and concentration. They are active participants and appear to be focused on the task throughout the entire interaction. From what has been stated so far, the space we witness in the "number-eighteen" story is not some kind of static or "dead" condition. On the contrary, it appears to give rise to a living learning

process and as thus it gives opportunities and possibilities for new experiences and knowledge building (Nadig 2003). There are at least two questions that emerge from the analysis. First, how can teachers create space for learning and experiences in their classrooms, and second, how should they deal with this space. I suggest that further investigation into these questions could be extremely useful.

In Chapter one, we saw that the idea of adapted education is fundamental within the ideology of an inclusive school. Every child has the right to individually adapted education. What is essential to recognize here is that if teachers are to realize this ideology, they cannot just know the class as a whole, they must also be aware of each individual child. They need to know the child and what her or his weak and strong points are. In the story presented in this chapter, we see that Ann uses dialogue and interaction to gain insight into how individual children come to experience the number eighteen. To use her own words, she gains insight into “what they think and how they think” (int 100300, p.8). This is valuable information and I claim that it is impossible for teachers to realize the ideology of an adapted education if they do not see the individual child, because if they do not see the child they will not know the child and her or his particular needs. Once again we have to keep in mind that within the framework of socio-cultural theory, seeing the child is not a one-way process in which the teacher is the only active party. On the contrary, this is a mutual relationship between the teacher and the children, an interpersonal relationship characterized by interactions, communication and dialogues. When Ann sees the individual child in the way she does, the heterogeneity within the class becomes obvious. Some of the pupils offer simple answers and others more sophisticated suggestions. Ann has to take these differences into consideration.

Studies show that if the teacher does not see the individual child, then the child might not be given appropriate tasks to work on (Fottland 2003, Matre 2003). Therefore, if the teacher is to master the provision of an adapted education for all pupils, she or he has to know the child. Bearing this in mind, seeing and knowing the child is a prerequisite for adapted education. However, seeing the child and experiencing her or his particular needs is not enough. It is just as important that the teacher knows the subject matter in question and how to deal with it. In other words, the teacher must know both the child and the subject matter (Ball & Cohen 1999), she or he must have a theory of the task or the problem and how it may be dealt with, and a theory of the performance characteristics of the pupil in question (Wood et al. 1976). When the teacher both knows her pupils, and how to deal with the subject matter, she can place demands on them, something that is necessary for their further development (Telhaug



2002). Or to put it in Vygotsky's (1978) words, she can assist them further in their zones of proximal development.

We have already focused on some of Ann's value judgments that can be seen in her utterances, and I would also like to add in her total way of being in the "number-eighteen" story. First, we obtained insight into her value judgment concerning how children learn. As stated above, Ann believes that children learn by being active and reflective participants. Second, we acquired insight into her value judgments on how to interact with the children. It is interesting to note that these values are in accordance with the national curriculum (C-97). Here it is stated that "the education must open for a sense of wonder and pupils must be allowed to be curious and probing" (p.73), it is further stated that the teacher should approach the pupils "on their own premises" (p.21).

Questions concerning individual value judgments may be difficult to discuss. These may be a tentative topic of conversation. I argue, however, that the issue of value judgment is important and cannot be ignored because values are implicit in our utterances (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a, 1994c) and actions. One could say that they lay the foundation for our total mode of behavior. When looking at classroom practice several topics concerning value judgments could be interesting, for example, what kind of value judgment is the underpinning of the particular teacher's teaching, her or his way of interacting with the children, the children's parents, her or his colleagues and the subject matter in question? Furthermore, I maintain that it is important that a teacher in an inclusive school system investigate individual value judgments when dealing with children with special needs because value judgments are implicit in words and actions.

Ann is a teacher who reflects upon her own value judgments. Above we have seen that she maintains that it is important to be aware of having a positive relationship to Paul. She claims she cannot allow herself to withdraw from him (int 011201). Perhaps we are all not so keenly aware of our value judgments, therefore a narrative like this could help us reflect on this issue. The narrative study in this chapter helps us see how important this issue is, and we may see therefore our own and other's value judgments more clearly. When they are clear to us we will be more able to reflect upon them, to agree or disagree, to continue our work in the same way or try to change.

## **Chapter 9**

### **“They Need Common, Pleasant Experiences”**

In the previous chapter our attention was focused on the interpersonal relationship between Ann and the pupils in her class. We looked at Ann’s reflections on the importance of seeing the children, and through the “number-eighteen” story we saw how she deals with this issue in her daily classroom activities. Closely connected to Ann’s emphasis on seeing the children is her belief that the pupils should have pleasant experiences when at school.

In this study, when highlighting how Ann deals with inclusive teaching, the main focus has been on John and Paul. However, Ann is working at a school and in a class where many of the children live in difficult and complicated domestic situations. She wishes to make allowances for this. Not only does this yield short-term gains in the form of happy and satisfied children, she also believes that it is important in the long term that children have good memories to recall from their period at school, that this will be important for them later in life. In the interviews, Ann returns to this viewpoint often, and her utterance “They need common, pleasant experiences” (int 101600, p.5) must be considered within this context.

Within a Bakhtinian perspective, Ann’s statement is multivoiced. It incorporates past, present and future voices. It embodies present voices because the utterance is stated when Ann talks about her current pupils in a particular socio-cultural context. It incorporates future voices because she believes that pleasant school experiences will benefit their future lives, and past voices because the utterance is anchored in her previous experiences. Again and again we return to this fundamental element of socio-cultural theory, that life experiences and background are key ingredients that make us the people we are today. However, it is not enough to just voice the attitude that children need common, pleasant experiences. The teacher also has to try to realize her ideas and visions in her daily classroom practice. This chapter focuses on Ann’s reflections and actions concerning the topic of facilitating for common, pleasant experiences.

#### ***Theoretical Framework***

In Chapter two I stated that we find four approaches to Vygotsky’s theory, cultural-historical activity theory (Leontèv 1981, Wertsch 1981, Davydov 1999, Engeström 1987, 1999), situated learning approaches (Lave & Wenger 1991), distributed-cognition approaches (Hutchins 1993, Cole & Engeström 1993) and socio-cultural theory (Wertsch 1985, 1991,

1998). In my analysis of Ann's current practice up to this point, my overall theoretical framework has been socio-cultural theory. In this penultimate chapter, where I am interested in her inclusive teaching practice, I will turn my focus to cultural-historical activity theory. Another commonly accepted name for cultural-historical activity theory is simply activity theory (Engeström & Miettinen 1999, Postholm 2003). In this text I will use both terms. The reason for choosing cultural-historical activity theory is that it is particularly useful when analyzing the empirical data on how Ann deals with the challenge of giving<sup>67</sup> the children in her class common, pleasant experiences. Below I will first present *cultural-historical activity theory* (Leontèv 1981, Wertsch 1981) and then I will introduce the *activity system* (Engeström 1987, 1999).

### Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

As human beings we are biological creatures with limited capabilities. We can, however, transcend these limitations by using tools or artefacts that are developed within the particular historical and cultural environment surrounding the individual in question (Säljö 2001). We have seen that in Vygotsky's opinion, the capacity of humans to reflect, learn and act depends to a large degree on mastering cultural tools. Vygotsky's ideas on tools were presented in Chapter two when introducing the concept of mediation. We saw that Vygotsky distinguished between psychological tools or "signs" and technical tools. He claimed that a technical tool is a means of a person's external activity and is directed towards the external world. A psychological tool, on the other hand, is a means of mentally influencing behaviour. It is a means of internal activity directed towards the mastery of humans themselves. Even if Vygotsky recognized the importance of both these two types of tools in human development, in his own research he was most interested in psychological tools. However, in Stalinist Soviet Union, paying too much attention to the individual and her or his mental processes was politically risky. It is because of this that A.N. Leontèv, one of Vygotsky's first students, started to focus on the concept of activity.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Choosing an appropriate term may sometimes be a challenge. When using the verb "give" here it is crucial to state that it does not imply a one-way process where the teacher is the only active part, giving or transferring something to the children. On the contrary, it is important to keep in mind that it involves a mutual relationship in which both the teacher and the pupils are active participants.

<sup>68</sup> In Chapter two, when presenting Vygotsky's theory we saw that historical analysis played an important role in his approach. Therefore, to understand cultural-historical activity theory, I found it necessary to give this brief and rather superficial summary of its origin. Researchers (Wertsch 1981, Kouzilin 1990) have commented on the theory's origin, but for the purpose of this study I do not find it necessary to delve further into this issue.

With this concept Leontèv was able to downplay the individual and focus instead on the relationship between the individual and her or his surroundings. The idea of activity includes both the individual and her or his culturally defined environment, and therefore we can say that the concept itself breaks down the distinction between the external world and the world of internal phenomena. Leontèv (1981) says:

*If we remove human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist and would have no structure. With all its varied forms, the human individual's activity is a system in the system of social relations. It does not exist without these relations (p.47).*

From what has been stated so far, we can see that the concept of activity implies both the individual and her or his cultural and historical context, and as such it overcomes and transcends the dualism between the individual subject and the objective societal circumstances (Engeström & Miettinen 1999). Vygotsky never undertook a complete analysis of the concept of activity. Rather than digging into it as a theoretical construct, he conducted empirical investigations and developed other aspects of his theoretical approach that presupposed the notion of activity as one of the fundamental blocks (Wertsch 1981). However, as will be seen, several points in Vygotsky's theoretical framework are included in what has come to be called cultural-historical activity theory.

To understand human beings we must examine their day-to-day activities as they appear in given historical, social and cultural contexts. This was Leontèv's starting point when he developed cultural-historical activity theory where activity, needless to say, is the key concept. The notion of activity focuses on the indissoluble relationship between external and internal activity. According to this theory, an individual changes and develops through practical activities and through day-to-day experiences. All human activity originates from social interaction in a given cultural and historical context, and as we have seen in Chapter two, relations on this intermental plane form the basis of the individual's inner mental functions, which in turn form the basis for the individual's higher mental processes (Vygotsky 1978). We have seen that the Vygotskian tradition constantly stresses that mental functions are first carried out intermentally and then intramentally. Higher mental functions can only be developed through social interaction with others, through intermental processes that are later expressed as individual intramental functioning. When this happens, the process loses some of its original external form and is transformed into intramental functions (Vygotsky 1981b).

Vygotsky was interested in the developmental process, in how the individual moves from the external sphere to an internal sphere of activity. In Chapter two we have already seen that

the process of internalization involves more than simply copying an external process internally. Rather, when a process is internalized it may become even more powerful than the original external process (Wertsch 1981). Therefore, the process of internalization does not mean that an individual is a passive recipient of external stimuli. On the contrary, this is an active process involving people as active agents in their own development. However, activities that have been internalized have come about due to external interactions and can thus not be distinguished from them. This close connection between external activities and internal activities makes it possible for researchers to use and focus on an external activity to obtain insight into people's internal mental functions (Leontèv 1981). According to the activity theory, when our aim is to ascertain how a teacher handles the task of giving the children pleasant, common experiences at school, we must start with events in the classroom to gain insight into the teacher's own reflections and understanding. Such events occur in a given historical, social and cultural context. An activity does not exist without these frames.

The concept of externalization is also crucial as, according to Leontèv (1981), both internalization and externalization are processes that constantly operate during human activity. Internalization is related to reproduction of the culture in question, while externalization means processes that create new mediational means or new ways of using them:

*In the transition these processes often undergo specific transformations – they are generalized, verbalized, abbreviated; most importantly, they can be developed further. This last factor allows them to exceed the limitations of external activity (Leontèv 1981, p.55).*

The idea that human mental processes stem from social interactions in the external world and that the underlying concepts of internalization and externalization necessarily imply a genetic or developmental approach to research is, as we have seen, one of the major themes in Vygotsky's work.

Hence, we see that activity is the key concept within cultural-historical activity theory. It is also used as a level of analysis, together with two other analytical levels, actions and operations (Leontèv 1981). According to activity theory, you have to focus on activity, and in a classroom many different activities will be taking place at the same time. What distinguishes one activity from another is its object. It is always an activity's object that gives it a specific direction. However, what drives the object is the underlying motive. An activity's motive can also be described as images of the foreseen result (Davydov 1999), and the object in question can be either material or ideal (Engeström 1999).

The object-related motive has an energizing function as it leads to actions, the second level of analysis. Actions are necessary if a particular activity is to be realized, and a process is called action if it focuses on a conscious goal. Within one and the same activity a number of different targeted actions may be required. An activity is realized through many conscious or goal-directed actions, all pointing towards the activity's object. Ann wants the children to have nice memories to recall from their period at school and therefore she wants to provide them with common, pleasant experiences. The challenge for the teacher is to realize this vision in her practice. Individuals initiate goal-directed actions, and thus it may appear as if they are activated on the intramental level. However, it is again important to bear in mind that actions stem from social interactions in a given cultural-historical context (Engeström 1999). As will be seen later in this chapter, Ann organizes and arranges many targeted actions in order to realize the object. Focusing exclusively on the level of actions highlights goal attainment, but makes it difficult to analyze the socio-cultural and motivational basis of goal formation (Engeström 1999). It is therefore important to keep in mind that activity is the superior level of the analysis.

According to Leontèv (1981), the level of action has an intentional aspect, what must be done in order to reach the goal, and also has an operational aspect, how can it be done. The notion of operation is thus the final level of analysis. It focuses on the operations needed to complete the action. Therefore, the operational aspect is not defined by the goal itself, but by the circumstances under which it is carried out. With these concepts of activity, action and operation Leontèv (1981) has developed a three-level model of activity. As we have seen, the uppermost level of activity is driven by an object-related motive. The middle level of action is driven by a goal, and the last level of operation is driven by the conditions and tools of action at hand (Engeström & Miettinen 1999). According to Wertsch (1981), the identification of these three levels of analysis is one of Leontèv's most important original contributions to the cultural-historical activity theory.

### The Activity System

Wertsch (1981) has identified six major features in cultural-historical activity theory. First, he focuses on Leontèv's (1981) above-mentioned three levels of analysis as a major feature. The second feature is the emphasis on goal or goal-directed actions and the third on mediation. The fourth feature focuses on developmental explanation, the fifth on the social aspects of activity and the sixth feature is the process of internalization. Even if these features have not been discussed in this order, they have all been touched upon in the presentation above. Based

on Leontèv's theory, Engeström (1987, 1999) has developed a graphic account of this theory, called the activity system.

The elements of the activity system comprise subject, mediating artefacts, including material tools as well as signs and symbols, object leading to an outcome, rules, community and division of labour. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, the activity system is visualized as a triangle, and within this triangle we find several triadic relations.

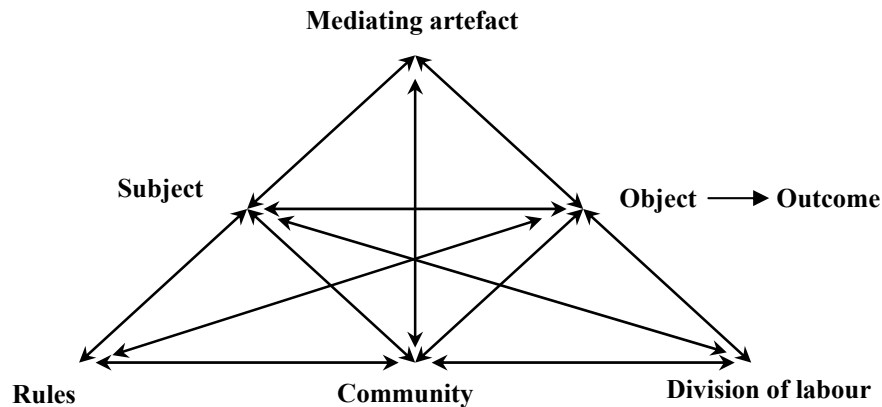


Figure 2: The Activity System

Mediated actions are integrated in the upper triangle because the activity's object leads to various goal-directed actions. Mediating tools or artefacts function as intermediary aids that the subject chooses to use when trying to attain the goals for the action in question. The problem with this representation is that it does not fully explicate the social and collective nature of actions. It does not fully depict the individual's actions as events in a social system. Therefore, the figure must be expanded to show the close connection between the acting subject and her or his context (Engeström 1999). The actions exist only in relation to the context that is visualized by the three triangles at the bottom of the activity system. The context that comprises the factors "rules", "community" and "division of labour" lays the premises for and also puts any restrictions on the subject's goal-directed actions within a particular socio-cultural setting (Postholm 2003).

Rules include norms and conventions that direct the actions or, to put it in another way, rules refer to explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system (Cole 1996). Community refers to all people sharing the same goals. Division of labour means that the goal-directed actions are distributed among and conducted by people belonging to the community. By looking at the division of labour it is also possible to focus on both collective and individual actions. To use Bakhtin's (1986) words, one could therefore say that the

activity system has multiple voices. When people divide work between them, their individual results do not satisfy their needs. Rather their needs are satisfied by the portion of the product of their aggregate activity that they gain in social relations during the working process (Postholm 2003).

Consequently, mutual relations are found between all the components in the activity system. They do not exist in isolation from one another rather they are constantly being constructed, renewed and transformed as outcome and cause of human life (Cole 1996). The cultural mediating artefacts, including material tools and signs and symbols, function as the connection between the subject and the activity's object. In this way, the mediating artefacts connect the individual and her or his surroundings. The artefacts are used by the members of the community, at the same time as the community members change and develop them to reach the changing goals for their activity. Thus the artefacts affect the acting members of the community at the same time as the community members transform them and in that way have influence on the artefacts they have at their disposal (Postholm 2003).

The activity system can be used to describe and analyze a present situation but past and future dimensions are also implicit in it. Every element in the activity system has its roots in the past (Engeström 1999) because every element has a history. For example, mediating tools or artefacts have been developed and modified in historical and in particular socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, one aspect especially has obvious future dimensions; that is the goal aspect, the constantly striving towards the activity's object. Therefore developmental processes are highly implicit in the activity system, and the link to Vygotsky's theory of genetic development is obvious.

### ***Ann's Practice***

Ann's concern about giving the children common, pleasant experiences can be observed immediately when entering her classroom. In Chapter five we have already seen that the pupils' desks are placed together to make four groups. One of the reasons for organizing the class into groups appears to be the belief that they will enjoy sitting together with other children and that this will benefit their social development (see Chapter five, p.75). Furthermore, under the description of Ann's classroom in Chapter five we also saw that on the door leading out to the hall there were drawings and notes<sup>69</sup> with ideas on what the

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<sup>69</sup> The notes list; play football, play with Pokemon, hopscotch, play tag, red light/green light, cops and robbers, trade cards, play hide-and-seeK, skip rope, hacky sack, Gameboy, ring around the posy, climb trees, softball, swing, wall climb (obsnot 083100).



children can play during the breaks. Apparently Ann does not want her pupils to be lonely. Rather she wants them to have a nice time with their classmates. The class circle that has a central location in the classroom may also be regarded in the perspective of giving the children common, pleasant experiences. In Chapter five we have already seen that Ann uses the class circle regularly throughout the school day. It is used for greetings in the morning and goodbyes in the afternoon, for teaching, for sharing of information, for discourse and dialogues. All the stories presented in the three previous chapters are from the class circle, and all of these can also be looked upon as common, pleasant experiences for the children.

There are also other signs in Ann's teaching practice of her emphasis on this issue. For example, several times during a school day Ann and the children sing songs. She says: "Singing brings people together. It gives a sense of togetherness, a belonging." (int 101900, p.13). Moreover, when the children eat their lunch Ann turns off the lights and candles glow on the groups' tables. She wants them to have a pleasant time when eating together. As a part of the end-of-the-day ritual, she gathers the children in the class circle and reads a book. She says. "They really enjoy it, all of them. They're so focused when I read that book" (int 100300, p.16). Finally, the class has had weekly excursions since the children were in first grade. One autumn day in first grade when the class was walking in the woods, the children found Sambi.

Ann and the preschool teacher then working in the class had agreed to buy a teddy bear, take it into the woods and hide it to let the children find it. When the teachers and the children went for a walk in the woods and arrived at their resting place, Ann started talking about how much fun it would be if they found a bear in the woods. "Obviously they would never find a bear in the woods, but wouldn't it be nice if they did?" The children started to play, and suddenly one of the boys found the teddy bear. Sambi is obviously a tool intended to create common, pleasant experiences for the children. In this chapter I will therefore tell a story in which the teddy bear is involved, and analyze it in light of the theory presented above. This particular story is developed and created from the data material and this creation differs from the stories presented in the three previous chapters.<sup>70</sup> The main reason for telling this particular story is that it serves as an illustration of how Ann deals with the issue of giving the children common, pleasant experiences. Furthermore, as with the stories presented in the three

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<sup>70</sup> Initially I proceeded as in Chapters six, seven and eight: I analyzed the video recordings in order to find an event that could illustrate how Ann realizes her vision of giving the pupils nice shared experiences. I found an event in which the teddy bear is involved (vid 112200) and fixed it in a text. I called it the "Sambi-goes-into-hibernation" story. However, after some reconsideration I realized that the story did not capture the whole Sambi activity, therefore I created the "teddy bear" story from various sources in my data material.

previous chapters, I think it is a nice story, and as such it feels good to fix it in a text. Before telling the story I will present Ann's reflections upon the topic of giving the children common, pleasant experiences at school.

### Ann's Reflections on Giving the Children Common, Pleasant Experiences

Above we have seen that Ann's concern that the children have pleasant, shared experiences appears throughout her teaching practice and daily activities. The issue also appears when she reflects upon her own actions in the classroom. In Chapter five we saw that Valley school is located in a district that has the most child-welfare measures. This involves cases where child care is taken over by the public authorities and other assistance measures initiated by the child-welfare services. When talking about why she is focused on giving the children common, pleasant experiences, Ann touches upon this:

*There's something about this area here, I feel that I encounter so many really poor conditions for children. They get so little inspiration and stimulus here (int 101600, p.4-5). I feel it's very limited, and it really scares me. Therefore I think their experiences at school are even more important (int 101900, p.9). I feel that I have an obligation to provide them with positive experiences. I really think they need common, pleasant experiences (int 101600, p.4-5).*

Ann thinks it is important that the children enjoy being at school and feel comfortable and safe. According to Ann, feeling comfortable and safe are prerequisites for being able to learn:

*Shared, good experiences mean a lot, because then I think the children will feel safe, and will enjoy being at school (int 112200, p.3). In my opinion, if they feel safe and if they enjoy themselves, then it will be easier for them to focus on their school work. Then they are able to concentrate on what they are supposed to learn while at school. If they don't feel comfortable, then it is difficult for them to focus. They will not be committed to their work. They will rather be listless. Well, that's what I think (int 112200, p.4-5).*

Two months after John had attended Ann's class, she said: "One of the greatest challenges when it comes to him is friendship" (int 102400, p.15). According to Ann this had also been a problem at his previous school. Ann seems to think that giving the children pleasant experiences together may help each child make friends in class. During the data collection period John appeared to have had positive development in this area, and when talking about him in one of the last interviews Ann said:

*He has become so nice to the other kids. Earlier he could drive a saint to distraction. He doesn't do that anymore. And he doesn't say any nasty words anymore. Now he plays with the other kids (int 011701, p.2).*

In Chapter five we saw that Paul has a complicated and difficult domestic situation, and bearing this in mind, Ann thinks it is very important that he feels good about his time at school:

*It's so important that he feels comfortable. It's very important that he enjoys attending school, and that he feels safe here. If not, if he does not enjoy school and feel comfortable here, then I think it will be very difficult (int 112900, p.10). Common, pleasant experiences mean a lot to Paul. I can see that he likes them. I can feel it. I really don't know how much he gets of that sort of thing at home (int 112200, p.5).*

Ann finds that Paul behaves in another way when he feels comfortable at school. She says:

*His body calms down in a way. I can feel that he's relaxed. When he feels relaxed he walks through the room in another way. You can just see it all over him, he's much calmer. He addresses himself to me in a friendly way. Well, if he hadn't felt comfortable, I think he would have been lying on the floor (int 112200, p.5-6).*

According to Ann, giving the children common, pleasant experiences prevents conflicts, or to put in a more positive way, creates a good class environment:

*All the things we do together, well I think that these things tie us together in a way, that all of us feel good when we are together. It creates a good atmosphere, a nice class environment (int 112200, p.9). I feel that the atmosphere in class is nice. There are so few conflicts among the children (int 112900, p.19). Well, there may be a conflict now and then, during breaks, you know, but they're not very serious. They're easy to handle (int 011701, p.11).*

When reflecting upon the issue of giving the children common, pleasant experiences she also says:

*Giving the children nice experiences has always been important to me. Yes, it has. It really has. It creates a sense of belonging, a sense of community. Besides, well I think it's good for me too. I would feel like a bad teacher if I couldn't give my pupils some nice experiences (int 101900, p.9).*

Below I will tell the story that illustrates Ann's practice of giving the children common, pleasant experiences. As stated above, Sambu is highly involved in this story, and it is therefore called the "teddy-bear" story. The story is based upon Sambu's book (doc 4), interviews (int 101900, 112200), video recordings (vid 112000) and observation notes (obs 083100, 100300, 101600).

## The “Teddy-Bear” Story

As we saw, the children found Sambi when they were in first grade on an autumn day walking in the woods.<sup>71</sup> Sambi still means a lot to the children, even now when they are eight years old and in third grade. The teddy bear stays at school during the weekends and holidays, but on weekdays the children take him home in turn. When Sambi returns, he has written what he has experienced in a book. These experiences are shared with Ann and the children every morning when the class is gathered in the class circle. As a part of the morning ritual Ann reads from Sambi’s book. She says:

*I think the kids need a morning ritual and an end of the day ritual. They need regularity and rituals. They need traditions. It’s good for them. It’s something about rhythm, I think. And regularities, like some kind of pillars in their lives. It’s important that we have such pillars in school. Rituals and regularity give them some frames in life (int 112200, p.13-14).*

Now third graders, some of the children have started to write in the book themselves. However, the most common practice is still that the pupils’ parents write in the book. When Sambi was taken home by John on 21 September, his stepmother wrote the following text in the book:

*Hello everybody. I’ve been to John’s home. After dinner we did homework. When the homework was finished, John and I went out to play with his little brothers. We played football and cops and robbers. It was exciting. Now we have had supper and I have listened to John reading a book. It was cosy. We are tired now and we want to go to bed. Love from Sambi (doc 4).*

When Paul was new in Ann’s class and took Sambi home for the first time, the book was not returned to school. After a few days Ann called Paul’s father and asked him if he could help Paul find the book, write in it and return it to school. Paul's father did as Ann asked and ever since he has written in Sambi’s book. On 6 September this text was written in the book:

*Hello everybody. I went to Paul’s home. I was out playing with Per, Peter and Tom. That was fun. Afterwards we ate dinner. We were tired. We ate rissoles, and the rest of the evening I just relaxed. I was a bit tired. Love from Sambi (doc 4).*

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<sup>71</sup> According to my own experiences from the Norwegian lower primary school, having a toy like a teddy bear in the classroom is not unusual. However, prior to this class Ann has never had such a toy in her classroom. Her youngest son’s class had a teddy bear, and Ann observed how much he enjoyed the toy and especially how he liked to take the teddy bear home. Ann says: “They had a teddy bear in my youngest son's class, and I thought it was so nice when he brought the teddy bear home with him. And we had to, the whole family had to behave properly, yeah, I saw how much it meant to him. And so I thought I would try this too” (int 101900, p.14).

Sambi has been given clothes, he is carrying a small pack on his back, and has even got a hole in one ear. This happened on 16 October when he went to “Roar’s” house. When he came back to school, Roar’s mother had written the following text in the book:

*Hello everybody in 3A. Today I went home with Roar, and then I could play with his rabbit again. It has grown a lot since the last time I saw it. I was together with the rabbit while Roar was at the swimming pool. I wanted to go to the swimming pool with him, but his mother told me that I couldn't. When I waited for Roar I played with the rabbit. Now Roar is home again and we are having supper. Soon we are going to bed and then we'll read a book. By the way, can you see that something special has happened to me? I've got a hole in my ear. It didn't hurt much. Love from Sambi (doc 4).*

Roar is not the only child in class who has a pet. “Maria”, one of the other pupils, wrote the following text in Sambi’s book when she brought him home on 17 October:

*Hello everybody. Yesterday I went home with Maria. I played with Milla. Milla is Maria's mouse. She is so nice. Maria has three animals. She has a bird and she has a fish and she has a mouse. After dinner we went out to play. Now we're going to bed because it's bedtime. Love from Sambi (doc 4).*

Ann thinks that the texts that are written in Sambi’s book are important, especially because they allow the pupils to become acquainted with each other and each other's every-day life, something she considers to be crucial. She says:

*One of the most important things about Sambi is probably that we get to know each other better. We come a little bit into each other's lives, we hear about younger brothers and sisters, what they eat for dinner and things they do. We get a little insight into each other's daily lives (int 112200, p.11).*

When talking about the teddy bear Ann also focuses on the importance of children’s play:

*You know, that having a teddy bear in the classroom, the teddy bear has become a little fixture that they can play with. Yeah, Sambi is quite simply a good, old-fashioned teddy bear that they can play with. Their playing with it has a value all of its own, I believe (int 112200, p.10-11).*

Sambi’s birthday is celebrated in the traditional manner with cake and games, and all the children make him a birthday card. In November he goes into hibernation. The class then holds a ceremony, placing Sambi in a cardboard box, covering him with a blanket and singing a song they have written for him. In March Sambi comes out of hibernation. Ann believes this break is important not only to avoid “using up” Sambi, making him boring, but also so that the children will look forward to meeting him again. According to Ann, there is a mutual understanding between her and the children that this is just a game. They play that Sambi goes into hibernation and that he really eats blueberries when going with them on class hikes in the

woods. So far none of the children have said that this is not possible. However, Ann believes it is just a question of time before the Sambi game ends. She says: “Well, they are eight years old now, so I wonder how much longer they will keep on playing with Sambi” (int 101900, p.16).

### *Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and the “Teddy-Bear” Story*

We have seen that the activity theory enables us to focus on the relationship between the individual and her or his surroundings. To understand human beings we must therefore examine their day-to-day activities as they appear and are mediated in given historical, social and cultural contexts (Leontèv 1981). It is interesting to analyze the teddy-bear activity in light of these fundamental ideas of activity theory. What can the activity tell us about Ann’s intramental functioning, and what can it tell us about the socio-cultural context in question? When focusing on the individual, Ann, we can see that the teddy-bear activity appears to reflect several aspects of her intramental functioning. First, it reflects her belief that it is important that children should enjoy school; that they should have nice, positive memories to recall later in life. Ann is, in other words, concerned about the welfare of her pupils, and as thus one could say that the Sambi activity reflects her caring attitude (Noddings 1984). Second, it also reflects her concern about parental involvement. The parents become involved in the activity because they are expected to cooperate with their child in writing in Sambi’s book, at least they are expected to do so as long as the children are not able to write themselves. Earlier in this text we also witnessed Ann’s belief in the importance of parental involvement. In Chapter five she claimed that her pupils’ parents should be her most important collaboration partners, and in Chapter eight she claimed it was crucial that the parents should see their child. Third, the teddy-bear activity also reflects her attitude to Valley school’s environment. Valley school is located in a district where there are “really poor conditions for children” (int 101600, p.4). This perspective leads us to the fourth aspect of what the activity reflects; how Ann looks upon herself as a teacher. As a teacher in this particular area she feels she has an “obligation to provide them with positive experiences” (int 101600, p.5). We have also seen that she claims she would have considered herself a bad teacher if she had not provided her pupils with pleasant experiences (int 101900).

The fifth and final aspect reflects on how Ann uses the teddy bear to help the children learn something about real bears. Real bears eat blueberries and real bears go into hibernation during winter. In this way I suggest that the teddy-bear activity also mirrors Ann’s focus on her pupils’ academically learning, a focus that has also been reflected in the three previous

chapters.<sup>72</sup> What is obvious is that all these various aspects of Ann's intramental functioning are intertwined with the external environment. In Sunside District many of the children are living in complicated domestic situations, a situation well reflected in Valley school and in Ann's class. Ann is aware of and focused on this and wants to make allowances for it in her daily classroom practice. The teddy-bear activity has to be analyzed within this context, and as such it reflects both intramental and intermental processes.

As stated above (see Footnote 71, p.162), it is not unusual to see a teddy bear or a similar toy being used in Norwegian lower primary classrooms. In this particular activity connected to the intention of giving the children common, pleasant experiences, both words and the toy itself are used. The toy in itself reflects that in our society giving children a teddy bear for comfort and play is common practice. As mentioned above, however, this is the first time Ann has used such a toy in her class. Even though she tells us that she has always had the idea in mind, she has not used a teddy bear as a mediational means earlier in her career. We have seen that she obtained the idea from her youngest son (see Footnote 71, p.162). She experienced that the teddy bear meant a lot to him, and therefore also to the whole family when it was brought home. This intermental experience appears to be the underlying reason for choosing Sambu to be part of her current classroom environment, or to put it another way, to use Sambu as a mediating artefact to give the children common, pleasant experiences. Thus, one could say that Ann has copied the idea of having a toy in her class. She has done so due to experiences at the intermental level and as thus one could say that Ann reproduces culture because she uses a toy, something that other teachers have done before her. However, her way of using Sambu is not merely a copy of external processes. Even though she might have talked with other teachers on how to use such a tool, her way of doing it is of course unique to her; the idea of letting the children find the teddy bear in the woods, of using the teddy bear as part of the morning ritual, having a book to write in, celebrating his birthday and letting him go into hibernation. This way of employing the tool could be described as an externalization process (Leontèv 1981) where through her creativity (Engeström 1999) Ann has developed her own ways of employing the tool.

There are many activities going on at the same time in a classroom (Doyle 1977, 1986). What distinguishes one activity from another is its object that always gives the activity in question a specific direction. What drives the object is the activity's underlying motive, and

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<sup>72</sup> In Chapter six we witnessed her focus on pupils' academically learning when teaching water, floating and sinking. In Chapter seven we saw how she used the transition situation to teach the pupils about waxwings. In Chapter eight we saw her approach to her pupils learning mathematics.

the motive underlying the Sambu activity is that the children should have common, pleasant experiences and good memories to recall from their period at school. This is not a concrete but rather an ideal object (Engeström 1999). This particular motive is energizing as it leads to various actions. Just having Sambu in the classroom is not enough. If the teddy bear is to be a means of giving the children common, pleasant experiences, then various goal-directed actions are necessary. For example, when Sambu is out of hibernation, the children take him home in turn, and write in Sambu's book what he has experienced during the stay. Sambu is also part of the morning ritual. Here Ann reads what he has experienced the previous day and then he is handed over to another child. On Tuesdays he is with the class on its weekly excursion in the woods, and in November he goes into hibernation.

These are all goal-directed actions driven by the activity's object, giving the children pleasant shared experiences while at school. The goal underlying the action of taking Sambu home and writing in his book appears to be that the children should learn to know each other and each other's homes (int112200). The goal underlying the action of including Sambu in the morning ritual appears to be anchored in Ann's belief that rituals and regularities are good for the children (int 112200). The goal underlying the action of including Sambu in the weekly excursions appears to be Ann's belief that play is important (int 112200). Finally, all the actions are made possible because of concrete operations. For example, the operations connected to the action of using Sambu in the morning ritual are first that the child who took the teddy bear home the previous day brings him to school the next day. Second, when in the class circle, the child has to give Sambu to Ann. Ann then takes Sambu's book out of the backpack, reads from the book, initiates a conversation with the child and the other children about what had happened the previous day, and finally gives the teddy bear to a new child who will take him home and bring him back the next day. All the actions presented above could be analyzed in similar ways at the operational level. What becomes obvious in this analysis is that the activity, action and operation levels are intertwined. They are inextricably connected to each other. Thus, the action and operation levels would not have been present without the activity's object, and the activity's object can only be realized due to the action and operation levels.

### *The Activity System and the "Teddy-Bear" Story*

To grasp the totality of the Sambu activity, in this section I will focus on all the various elements in the activity system in relation to one another. If we first turn our focus to the upper triangle of the activity system presented in Figure 2 (p.157), I choose Ann to be the



subject of my analysis. She is my research subject in this study, and I am interested in her actions, thoughts and reflections concerning the challenge of realizing the ideology of inclusive teaching. This does not mean, however, that I regard her in isolation from and independent of the surroundings. In fact, that would be a contradiction when employing Vygotsky's theory as a framework of the study. When using the activity system as an analytical tool it is important to keep in mind that the social and collaborative nature (Engeström 1999) of her actions will be apparent later in the analysis when focusing on other elements of the system.

Above we have seen that the object concept is closely connected to the activity's underlying motive. The motive-related object underlying the teddy-bear activity is, as we have seen, that the children are to have common, pleasant experiences. We have seen that this feature of Ann's practice stems from intermental experiences, perhaps starting already when Ann was a young pupil herself. In Chapter four we saw that she has many fond memories from her first seven years of schooling at a primary school in a small town. She remembers that the curriculum was dealt with in many ways. She and her classmates did not only work traditionally and isolated from one another. They worked together in groups, made quizzes, produced a class paper in the afternoons, rehearsed plays, and they also had sessions just for fun where they performed for each other. All these recollections could be looked upon in terms of pleasant, shared experiences.

The mediating artefact is incorporated in the upper triangle of the activity system, where we focus on the tools Ann uses to facilitate common, pleasant experiences in her current class. As we have seen, human activity is always intertwined with various forms of tools (Säljö 2001). When using tools we could come to master situations that otherwise would have been difficult or impossible to deal with. Depending upon the situation in question, these tools could be material or technical, and they could be signs such as words (Vygotsky 1978). The most obvious tool in the "teddy-bear" story is of course the teddy bear itself. Sambu is a concrete material artefact used in various goal-directed actions en route to the activity's object. However, the teddy bear in itself does not work. An additional tool is necessary if the Sambu activity is to work in the intended way. This additional artefact appears to be the language or the words connected to the teddy-bear activity. It is not the material tool isolated and in itself or the language alone that works. Rather it is these two artefacts together that constitute a powerful mediational means. Both the toy and the words used in the teddy-bear

activity could be described as primary artefacts (Wartofsky 1979),<sup>73</sup> as both are used directly in the particular activity. I have now examined each of the three elements of the activity system's upper triangle and shown how they are connected. To look further into the connection between Ann and the social context I will first focus on Engeström's (1999) concept of rules.

We have seen that rules refer to norms and conventions that direct the actions within the activity system (Cole 1996, Engeström 1999). In the previous section, when analyzing the action level we saw that there are several goal-directed actions implicit in the activity: The goal underlying the action of taking Sambi home and writing in his book appears to be that the children should get to know each other and each other's homes better (int 112200). The goal underlying the action of including Sambi in the morning ritual appears to be anchored in Ann's belief that traditions, rituals and regularities are good for children (int 112200). Finally, the goal underlying the action of including Sambi in the weekly excursions appears to be Ann's belief that play is important (int 112200). These various goal-directed actions have their corresponding rules. For example, when focusing on the action of using Sambi in the morning ritual, I suggest the rules are that the child is to bring Sambi back to school the next day, that the child should give Ann the teddy bear when in the class circle, that Ann should read from Sambi's book, talk with the child in question and open for a conversation with the class as a whole, that Ann should give Sambi to a new child and so on.<sup>74</sup>

When analyzing my data material, I cannot find that any of the rules are explicitly stated. Ann and the children never talk about how to carry out the teddy-bear activity. Rather, there appears to be some kind of tacit agreement (Rommetveit 1974, 1979) between the participants as to what the rules are. The participants seem to have an intersubjective understanding of how to carry through the various actions or, to put it another way, it appears as if all the interlocutors, including John and Paul, have internalized the activity genre connected to the activity's various actions. All the participants seem to behave in accordance with the rules, and an interesting question could be what would have happened if some of the interlocutors had broken some of them. We have already seen what happened when Paul's father did not behave in accordance with one of the rules. When Paul took Sambi home for the first time, he

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<sup>73</sup> Wartofsky (1979) proposed a three-level hierarchy in his elaboration of the artefact concept (see Footnote 7, p.16).

<sup>74</sup> What is interesting to note when describing Engeström's (1999) concept of rules is that we can see the similarities with Leontèv's (1981) concept of operations. In the previous section we saw that the operational aspect focuses on how the action in question is carried out, how it is performed. The same could be said about the concept of rules.

forgot to bring the book back to school. Perhaps Paul did not ask his father to help him write in the book. What is important to note, however, is that when Ann called Paul's father and asked if he could help Paul, he has been able to do so later on as well. One could also reflect upon what would have happened if other rules were broken, for example, what would have happened if Ann had not paid attention to Sambi's book in the way she does, or what would have happened if a child had refused to take Sambi home and write in his book.

The concept of community refers to all people sharing the same goals, and the question is therefore, do Ann and the children share the same goals? Do they have an intersubjective understanding of the goals? It is important to note that Ann is the one who reflects upon the actions in terms of goals. According to my own experience as a teacher, it is not common practice that the teacher negotiates or discusses such goals with the children, and it is not common practice to make such goals explicit. A characteristic trait of the socio-cultural setting of schools is that there is a power difference between the teacher and the pupils (Wertsch 1991), something that I touched on often in this study. Even if Ann and the pupils are in the same community participating in the same actions, the teacher of course has another perspective on what is going on than the pupils have. She does not always explicitly state the goals underlying the various actions. Nor does she negotiate with the children upon the various goal-directed actions. The children are only eight years old and they do not have the same perspective on the goal-directed actions as their teacher has. In spite of these reflections, I suggest that the teacher and the pupils have some kind of tacit agreement on the issue because we can see that they all follow the rules and participate in an appropriate way.

Also important to note is that the pupils' parents participate because they help their children write in Sambi's book. When Ann reads from the book the children can hear what happened, for example, when the teddy bear went home with John. The other children hear that John has younger brothers and that he plays with them. We can hear what happened when the teddy bear went home with Paul, that he was out playing with Paul and his friends, and that the family had rissoles for dinner. They hear that Roar has a rabbit, that Roar went swimming and that Sambi got a hole in his ear when he was home with Roar. When Linda writes in Sambi's book we can hear that she has a mouse, a bird and a fish. All these things help the children get to know each other in a better way. When it comes to parental involvement, I do not know if Ann has ever talked with them about helping their children write in Sambi's book in terms of goal-directed action. Perhaps there is some kind of tacit agreement on this issue.

The last element of the activity system involves the division of labour (Engeström 1999), something which means that the goal-directed actions are divided among and conducted by people belonging to the community. We have already touched upon this issue in the analysis above. For example, the action of taking Sambu home and writing in his book requires Ann's, the children's and the parents' participation. In the story about what happened when Paul brought Sambu home for the first time we can see how vulnerable the whole action is if one of the participants in the community does not do her or his share of the work. In the morning ritual, both Ann and the pupils participate. Here most of the attention is on the child who has brought the teddy bear back to school, but the other children are also encouraged to participate by asking questions or commenting on what Sambu has experienced. In the weekly excursions Ann, the child-welfare educator and the children participate. However, during these excursions neither Ann nor the child-welfare educator has an active role with Sambu. Rather the children play with the teddy bear in a way that suits them.

Above I have used the activity system to analyze and describe the Sambu activity in Ann's current class. We have also seen that this particular activity has its roots in the past because voices from Ann's past are incorporated into it. These are, for example, the voice of her teacher when she was a young pupil herself, her classmates that she had a nice time together with and her own son who inspired her to have a teddy bear in class. At the same time the activity also incorporates future voices because the activity is looking to the future. Ann apparently believes that pleasant, shared experiences at school will be good for the children in their further lives. She thinks that this is good for all children, and in particular it will benefit pupils like John and Paul.

### ***Discussion***

The focus of this chapter has been on Ann's aim to give the children common, pleasant experiences. For Ann it appears to be important that the children enjoy life and experience that school is good, and that they are happy at school. This appears to be the vision and motive underlying the teddy-bear activity. We have seen that this activity involves many different actions and that the actions comprise a number of operations. The children take turns taking Sambu home with them, they write about Sambu's experiences at their home in the book, they bring Sambu back to school and so on. In this way the teacher's overarching motive is not just "well-intentioned" words, but is manifested in practical actions in the classroom, offering us insight into Ann's perspective on her educational practice. However, the Sambu activity does not only reflect Ann's intramental processes, it also tells something

about the intermental conditions surrounding the teacher and the pupils. The close connection between the internal and the external becomes particularly evident when analyzing the story in light of the activity system. Here we can clearly see that “the human’s individual activity is a system in the system of social relations” (Leontèv 1981, p.47).

When dealing with Sambu, Ann and the children appear to have the same understanding or definition of the situation. Both parties know, of course, that Sambu is an ordinary teddy bear. There is, however, a mutual understanding between Ann and the children that Sambu is “alive” and in this game they play, that he writes in his book, that he speaks to and with them in the class circle, that he really enjoys going with them on class hikes in the woods and so on. In this way there appears to be intersubjectivity between the teacher and her pupils. Ann is, however, uncertain how long this game with Sambu might last, how long it is possible to establish intersubjectivity through a teddy bear. The children are eight years old, and in all probability it is just a question of time before the Sambu game comes to an end.

According to Engeström (1999), the concept of time linked to actions is linear in the sense that it stretches towards a goal. When the goal has been reached, the action is over. On the day when the actions surrounding Sambu no longer serve their purpose, they will end. However, the aspect of time related to the activity, i.e. creating a good class environment by means of well-being and shared experiences, comes in cycles (Engeström 1999). What we have here are cycles or recurring periods which are repeated, and also expanded, becoming something more. Ann will probably continue to teach this class for a number of years, and she will always be motivated to create the conditions for giving the pupils pleasant, shared experiences. However, the actions required to accomplish this will vary in step with the development of the children. We have seen that she is concerned with this question as she says: “I wonder how much longer they will keep on playing with Sambu” (int 101900, p.16). This shows how Ann is sensitive to the addressees (Bakhtin 1986), her voice reflects their voices. When Sambu no longer serves the function, the teddy bear will become merely a toy in class. Thus, this and other actions are adapted to the children. Ann is sensitive in relation to their needs, focusing her practice on what she believes they need.

Embedded in the “teddy-bear” story are also the voices of the parents. The parents are included because they help their children write in Sambu’s book. Some parents may experience that it is hard to know how to help their child with her or his schoolwork. In the story presented in this chapter it is important to note that helping their children to write in Sambu’s book appears to be a manageable task for all the parents. Ann makes it possible for all of them to participate, and as such a connection between the school and the parents is

established. In this way one could say that Ann helps or assists a number of the parents who live such complicated lives that they have difficulties seeing their children and being there for them. It is not at all hard to legitimize this type of educational practice in Norwegian classrooms. School must consider the development of children holistically. The national curriculum lays down that: “The objective of the education must be to expand the children's (...) ability to understand and experience, to feel empathy and to participate” (C-97, p.15) and Valley school's' local curriculum (2000/01) states that the school should: “Give priority to the children's need for care development and learning” (see Appendix 5, p.214). In this way one could say that the voices of both the national and local curriculum are clearly present in Ann's classroom.

Noddings (1984) follows the same line of thinking when she argues that we cannot afford to limit our educational goals to academic rigor, competency and cognitive development. Rather we must also embrace moral responsibility to educate children in caring and love. According to Noddings (1984), caring means to be “charged with the protection, welfare, or maintenance of something or someone” (p.9). As with other concepts used in this study, such as intersubjectivity (Trevarten 1980, Wertsch 1984, Kozulin 1990, Rogoff 1990, Putney 1996), prolepsis (Rommetveit 1974, 1979) and the internally persuasive word (Bakhtin 1981), the concept of caring is connected to relationships and intermental processes. Noddings (1984) maintains that caring is located in the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for. This caring relationship is asymmetrical in that the one-caring is engrossed in the needs and well-being of the cared-for. Thus, the motivation in caring is directed toward the welfare, protection or enhancement of the cared-for. To the cared-for, the attitude and the actions of the one-caring are of great importance and as a result, “the cared-for glows, grows stronger, and feels not so much that he has been given something as that something has been added to him” (Noddings 1984, p.20). This is interesting when we look at John and Paul. If we look upon the “teddy-bear” story in terms of caring, what then is this “something” that it is added to them?

We have seen that the rules connected to the various actions are rather flexible. They are not to be understood in terms of the authoritative word (Bakhtin 1981). Rather they could be understood in light of the internally persuasive word (Bakhtin 1981) because they invite children's commitment and participation. Therefore, the Sambu activity with all its corresponding actions and operations could also be described in terms of an inclusive

activity,<sup>75</sup> because within the framework of flexible rules all the children are able to participate, and they are also focused in a positive way and on equal footing with the other children. For the individual child, therefore, the teddy-bear activity may imply a sense of belonging to the class community. We could imagine that this sense of belonging to the class community is particularly important for John. He is only eight years old. He has moved a lot and already attended two other schools prior to Valley school. In Chapter five we saw that he encountered problems establishing friendship at his previous school and that this problem continued when he started in Ann's class. Then, after a period of time in Ann's class, he was gradually able to play with his classmates and to do so in an appropriate way. Perhaps one of the reasons<sup>75</sup> behind this positive development could be his participation in various class activities.

Through the Sambu activity Ann offers the pupils pleasant, shared experiences in their present lives, and also good memories that they can recall in their future lives. This is important for all the children, and Ann claims it is particularly important for Paul. According to her (int112200), she does not think that the boy gets many moments of pleasant experiences at home. In Chapter five we saw that Paul lives in a difficult domestic situation. At the end of the data collection period the boy's father and his cohabitant moved apart. When she moved out she took her two children and the baby she and Paul's father had together with her. According to Ann, Paul was grieving deeply because of this. Due to such experiences in his domestic life, Ann appears to believe it is especially important that he enjoys being at school. According to her (int 112200) Paul calms down and behaves in a more appropriate way when he feels well at school.

When we examined the "teddy-bear" story in this chapter we talked about it in terms of common, pleasant experiences. Vygotsky (1978), however, downplayed the role of pleasure in children's play. He claimed that pleasure cannot be regarded as a defining characteristic of play.<sup>76</sup> Instead he wanted to focus on the imaginary world that is within play. Through play, children enter into an "imaginary, illusory world", and "it is this world that is called play" (p.93). Therefore, Vygotsky regarded imagination to be the defining characteristic of play. In play a child creates an imaginary situation, something that distinguishes a child's playing

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<sup>75</sup> I will return to the concept of inclusive activity in the last chapter of this study.

<sup>76</sup> Vygotsky (1978) says: "First, many activities give the child much keener experiences of pleasure than play," and then he continues, "there are games in which the activity in itself is not pleasurable, for example games, predominantly at the preschool and school beginner age, that give pleasure only if the child finds the result interesting. Sporting games (not only athletic sports, but other games that can be won or lost) are very often accompanied by displeasure when the outcome is unfavorable to the child" (p.92).

from other forms of activities. These thoughts are useful when we examine the teddy-bear activity. We have seen that Ann and the children together create an imaginary, illusory world where Sambu, the teddy bear, is alive, and he talks, writes, eats and so on. What then does a child's behaviour in an imaginary situation mean? According to Vygotsky it means that a child has to behave in accordance with the rules of the particular play. He claims that: "The imaginary situation of any form of play already contains rules of behaviour", and that: "There is no such thing as play without rules" (Vygotsky 1978, p.94). Therefore, play creates demands on the child to act against her or his immediate impulse. This is especially interesting when reflecting on John and Paul. When participating in the teddy-bear activity they have to follow the rules. They have to behave in accordance with them rather than acting impulsively and spontaneously. Thus one could say that they learn to control themselves and their behaviour. According to Vygotsky (1978) a "child's greatest self-control occurs in play" (p.99) and therefore play is a "leading factor in development" (p.101).

The research subject in this study is Ann, and my aim has been to capture her voice, her reflections and her thoughts on her teaching practice. It is therefore important to note that when Ann talks about the Sambu activity, she states that "It has value in itself" (int 112200, p.11). On the one hand, this statement could be regarded as a contradiction of Vygotsky's ideas on play. On the other hand, I suggest that the two apparently different viewpoints supplement and reinforce each other. My point here could of course be a topic for extensive theoretical explanations and analysis. I will, however, not delve any further into this issue. I choose rather to end this chapter by maintaining that teachers must be aware of the importance of play and that they should organize their teaching practice in a way that provides opportunities for such activities.



**Part IV**  
**Discussion**

## **Chapter 10**

### **Summary and Final Reflections**

The research question of this study was how does a Norwegian primary school teacher deal with inclusive educational practice in her ordinary classroom activities, and from the basis of the study's theoretical framework, how has the teacher developed into the teacher she is today. Sixteen hundred years ago St. Augustin said "(...) there are three times, a presence of things past, a presence of things present, a presence of things future" (St. Augustin in Cahn, 1999, p.300). We exist here and now, in this very minute, this second, and while we are prisoners of the moment we also bring with us our past. What we have experienced and lived through earlier in life is always a part of our present. At the same time, while we exist here and now, we do not only bring with us the past, but also the future. The future is included because our acts in the present have a purpose. The past, the present and the future can therefore not be regarded as different realities in life to be considered separately and in isolation. Rather they are interwoven. Throughout this text we have seen that these thoughts are implicit in Bakhtin's (1986) theory on dialogue and Vygotsky's (1978) persistent arguments for studying a phenomenon in a process of movement. This developmental perspective implies having a dynamic perspective on research on social practice, thus studying what Ann does, how she acts and reflects, means studying this practice within a process of change and development in a given historical, cultural and social context. As we have seen, the study's narrative approach has enabled us to capture the developmental process: The biographical data has allowed us to gain insight into Ann's past experiences, and the data from her current classroom have enabled us to see how she deals with inclusive education in her present class. We have also seen that her present practice has a purpose, and hence points into the future.

In Chapter four we saw that there have been three prevailing curricula during Ann's career as a teacher. We also saw that throughout these years she has interacted with many people. She has been in continuous dialogues with the surrounding world, and many persons' voices "ventriloquate" through her narratives, including her own primary school teacher. This teacher's voice clearly emerges when Ann tells narratives from her first years at school: She remembers how happy she was and how much she enjoyed being at school. She remembers the sense of how much she loved being allowed to lie on the floor in the classroom, to draw something big and hang it on the wall afterwards. She remembers how much she enjoyed

making quizzes, working in groups, producing a class paper and so on. Following the socio-cultural perspective on development we may assume that some of the roots to Ann's educational practice can be found here.

When Ann was a young teacher fresh out of teachers' college and was assigned her own class at Valley school, it appears as if she modelled her approach after this memorable teacher. In Chapter four we saw that she once arranged an Indian party in the class and invited the principal to join, she also invited the children to her house and she joined the boys' basketball team on a trip to a tournament in Oslo. In the narratives from these years we also clearly hear the voice of the principal who joined the Indian party. Ann felt that the principal trusted her, supported her and encouraged her in her teaching. She also felt that the principal helped to give her self-confidence, to make her proud of being a teacher. Two other persons that Ann emphasizes in her narratives are Karen and Liv. Both were close collaboration partners, Karen a special educator during the "heavy-years" period, and Liv her closest collaboration partner during the years she taught in Tina's class, the "exciting-years" period. According to Ann's own narratives, these persons appear to have been important for her in her development as a teacher. Hence, one could say that her practice is populated or overpopulated with the intentions of other people (Gudmundsdottir 2001).

When looking at her current practice teaching her third grade class of twenty-two pupils, we find that there is no sharp distinction between her past experiences and current practice. Rather there appears to have been a continuous developmental process towards the teacher she is today. In this way one could say that her past experiences are reflected in her current practice. In accordance with the ideas in the current national curriculum, Ann obviously believes it is important that all the pupils should be able to participate in and manage the various settings and activities that occur during a school day. This trait of her current teaching practice was presented in Chapter six, which I titled "They have to participate in various activities". We have further seen that closely connected to this view is her emphasis on transitions between activities. She believes it is important that the children should manage transitions and appears to be aware of how to assist the children through these processes. This trait of her practice was presented in Chapter seven, "The transitions have to be smooth and flexible". In order to assist both the class and individual children, such as John and Paul, in the various settings and the transitions between them, Ann emphasizes the importance of seeing the children, a trait that was focused on in Chapter eight, "Kids need to be seen". Seeing the children implies a mutual relationship between Ann and the pupils, and closely connected to this trait of her teaching practice is her belief that the pupils should have pleasant

common experiences when at school. Ann believes that this is important both in a short-term and long-term perspective. The long-term perspective points into the future as she believes it will be good for the children to have pleasant, positive memories from their period at school. This trait of her current teaching practice is the topic of Chapter nine, “They need common, pleasant experiences”.

When looking at her present practice as illustrated in Chapters six, seven, eight and nine, I found some common, general characteristics. These characteristics could be described in terms of *membership*, *mastery*, *togetherness*, *involvement* and *learning*. The first characteristic, membership, implies that all the pupils in Ann’s class are members of the class and natural parts of the class environment. In this study we have seen that neither John nor Paul is at any time excluded or segregated from the class, not even when Ann has an additional adult in the class. In Chapter five we saw that she was accompanied by a child-welfare educator seven hours a week. All of these seven hours were spent with the class as a whole, with none being used for the segregation of individual pupils. Furthermore, in Figure 1 (p.73) we saw that the class circle is frequently used in Ann’s class. When in the class circle the entire class is sitting together with their teacher and all the participants are focused on the same topic or subject matter. No one is excluded from the class circle setting. Also important to note is that none of the pupils have their regular desks separate from a group, rather all the desks are organized into groups. However, just being members of the class is not enough. The children should also master the membership, something that leads to the second characteristic; mastery.

The mastery characteristic may be illuminated by examining the activity genre, the concept that was developed and introduced in Chapter six. Here we saw that the concept includes both speech communication and overall behaviour corresponding to various typical situations that occur during a school-day. In the narratives from Ann’s practice presented in this study, we gain insight into some of these recurring typical settings: In Chapters six and eight, the pupils participate in teaching and assisted learning periods, in Chapter seven in a transition situation and in Chapter nine, when telling about the teddy-bear activity, the morning ritual is touched upon. All these typical situations require their own corresponding activity genre. However, even if these activity genres are different, what they have in common is that they are both firm and flexible. For example, when participating in a teaching and assisted learning period in the class circle, the pupils should be at their places, they should focus on the task at hand, listen to the teacher and each other and contribute to the conversation according to their abilities and interests. However, within this firmness we have seen that the particular activity genre is

flexible. As long as it does not disturb or interrupt the topic or the other participants, the children can talk without raising their hands, they can be so eager that they leave their chair and interrupt another pupil, as long as the interruption has something to do with the topic. Firmness on the one hand and flexibility on the other are apparent in all the narratives from Ann's current practice. However, being members of the class and mastering this membership is not sufficient. Obviously the children should also have a sense of togetherness, which is the third characteristic.

The togetherness characteristic could be described in terms of pleasant, common experiences. As stated above, Ann believes it is important that the children should have pleasant, common experiences when at school. She believes that this is important both in the short and in the long-term perspective. Consequently, all the stories presented and analyzed in Chapters six, seven, eight and nine could be looked upon in these terms. Thus, in Chapter six, exploring, experiencing and talking about water and items that float or sink could be expressed in this way, as could the transition situation in Chapter seven. Here the togetherness was created by clapping a rhythm while at the same time repeating after Ann a text about waxwings. The story presented in Chapter eight could also be regarded in terms of pleasant, common experiences. Here the whole class together discusses and explores what the number eighteen could be, and finally, in Chapter nine we witnessed the pupils' togetherness in the teddy-bear activity. The third characteristic presented here naturally leads to the fourth: involvement.

The involvement characteristic can be illuminated in light of Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of the authoritative and internally persuasive word, as presented in Chapter seven. Here we saw that the concept of the authoritative word is based on the assumption that some utterances and their meanings are fixed and unchangeable. The internally persuasive word is presented as a contrast to the authoritative word as it awakens new and independent words and allows dialogic interanimation. In all the stories from Ann's current practice we see that she uses the internally persuasive word rather than the authoritative word. This is the case in the "float-and-sink" story, in the "birds-in-the-trees" story, in the "number-eighteen" story and in the "teddy-bear" story. By using the internally persuasive word Ann encourages the children to be involved, to be active and committed participants in the on-going activities, and she does so by commenting on their utterances, asking them questions, and by facilitating for experiences and exploration. Involvement looked upon in this way corresponds to Haug's (2003) notion of democratization. Democratization means that all voices should be heard in a classroom discourse, all the pupils should have the opportunity to comment upon and influence matters

concerning their own education. The children in Ann's class are only eight years old and they do not directly comment upon their own education. However, they influence their own learning by being active, committed and involved participants in the on-going activities. The concept of involvement leads us to the fifth and final characteristic of Ann's practice; learning.

Learning here involves both social and academic skills. When looking at the narratives from Ann's current practice in light of the children's social learning, one could point to several issues. First and foremost, the children appear to learn how to be pupils. They learn how to behave according to the various typical situations that occur during a school day, they learn the right activity genres. Within this overarching perspective one could also imagine that they learn how to communicate and be together with their teacher and classmates. It has been claimed that the social parts of inclusion have received greater attention in the Norwegian debate than subject achievement and learning results (Haug 2004). The study of Ann and her teaching practice as presented in this text might be regarded and interpreted in this way, perhaps because when it comes to subject matter, the children's learning is not particularly accentuated in the narratives. However, I claim that Ann's focus on the pupils' academic learning pervades all the chapters describing her current practice. Thus, in Chapter six, when experiencing and exploring items that float or sink we can imagine that the pupils learn something about this topic. In Chapter seven when observing and talking about waxwings, we can assume that the children learn something about these particular birds. In Chapter eight, when having a dialogue about the number eighteen, we may assume that they learn something about this number, and by participating in the teddy-bear activity as described in Chapter nine, we may assume that they learn something about real bears. Needless to say, an inclusive school is not only about pupils participating in class, being accepted and taken care of, they should experience academic learning as well.

To summarize, we have seen that all the characteristics just presented are apparent in the stories from Ann's current teaching practice. When looking at the "number-eighteen" story, for example, all the pupils, including John and Paul, are members of the activity, and they all appear to master the activity genre in question. They are together with their classmates in the class circle and they participate in what could be described as a pleasant, common experience when it comes to exploring what the number-eighteen could be. The pupils are involved in the exploration or the discussion and by being so they learn and benefit both socially and academically. The other narratives from Ann's current practice could be analyzed in a similar way. Important to notice is that the characteristics presented here are not to be regarded as if

they were discrete and separate from each other. Rather it is crucial that they should be looked upon in connection with one another and as interwoven. It is their connectedness that gives them impact, and I claim that due to this intertwinement all the stories from Ann's current practice could be described as *inclusive activities*. They are inclusive activities in terms of membership, mastery, togetherness, involvement and learning. What becomes obvious is that inclusive activities do not imply a fixed and static condition, something that can be attained once and for all. On the contrary, inclusive activities can only be understood in terms of a continuous developmental process, something that is on the move, rather than as a destination (Booth, Nes & Strømstad 2003), or some kind of vision to be reached for (Emanuelsson 1995).

What then, could participation in inclusive activities mean for children like John and Paul? When reflecting on this question it is important to state that we do not of course have any all-encompassing "answer". Neither John nor Paul is interviewed, they are only observed in the ordinary classroom activities when together with their teacher and classmates. What these observations show is that neither of the boys is at any time excluded from the class. Rather they are natural members of the class environment. Even if they are not aware of it themselves, one could imagine that this membership creates a sense of belonging. In all probability this is important for both boys, and in particular for John who although only eight years old has already attended two other schools prior to Valley school. Furthermore, the firm and flexible style of the different activity genres gives them opportunities to manage the various settings they participate in. They are not focused on in any negative way because they manage the activity genre in question. One could imagine that this may lead to a sense of self-control and mastery. Together with their classmates they participate in various, pleasant common activities. One could, as Ann does, imagine that these happy and joyful experiences will benefit the boys both in the short-term and in the long-term perspective. In the short-term perspective it is important that they should enjoy being at school and in the long term that they later in life should have something pleasant and positive to recall from their period at school. Togetherness implies involvement and both John and Paul are naturally involved in the activities. As we have seen, they appear to be committed, interested and active participants. When taking part in the activities in this way we may assume that the boys learn both social and academic skills and that this for them implies a sense of holistic growth and development.

The research topic of this study has been concerned with how Ann deals with inclusive educational practice in her ordinary classroom activities and how she has developed into the

teacher she is today. As the study clearly shows, being a teacher has both practical and reflective dimensions (Shulman 1985, 1998). In the daily flow of classroom activities these two dimensions are of course interwoven. However, several researchers claim that it is what teachers think and believe that ultimately shapes the activities in the classroom (Hargeaves 1989/1993, Pijl & Meijer 1997, Lampert & Ball 1998), which corresponds to Bakhtin's thoughts on value judgments, as presented in Chapter eight (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a). An interesting question is, therefore, what are the thoughts underpinning Ann's inclusive actions? In the national curriculum it is said that: "The compulsory school shall be an inclusive community" (C-97, p.58). Even if this statement does not give any distinct definition of the inclusion concept, it states that inclusion is not merely connected to pupils with special needs. Rather it concerns all pupils, teachers and activities within school. Hence, inclusion has to be regarded as an overarching principle in the Norwegian compulsory school. Ann appears to have this view on inclusion. Even if this study has focused on how she deals with John and Paul, it has at the same time also shown how Ann approaches the class as a whole.

Furthermore, Ann's inclusive activities presented in Chapters six, seven, eight and nine illustrate that she is aware of and takes into consideration the individual children, the context and the relation between the individual and the surroundings in her teaching practice. The narrative presented in Chapter nine may serve as an example. Here it becomes particularly clear that Ann focuses on both the individual children and the context. Valley school is located in a part of town which Ann assesses to have poor early-development conditions for the children. Moreover, many of the children in her class have special needs due to difficult domestic situations. Ann appears to have had these considerations in mind when she decided to use a teddy bear as a tool for children's well-being at school. If we are to connect her practice to one of the three paradigmatic ways of looking at differences between children presented in the introductory chapter, I suggest Ann's approach to be within the "anthropological model" (OECD 1994). This point of view focuses on the individual characteristics, the system or environmental characteristics and the relation between them. Within this view, "problematic" children are not removed from the context because they do not fit in. Quite to the contrary, with the individual characteristics in mind, the context is organized and adapted so that all the children are able to participate and profit from being



included. This is not just a matter of physical location, but also social, cultural and academic inclusion, allowing the children to participate based on their abilities.<sup>77</sup>

As I see it, the story of Ann presented in this study may be regarded as a story of success. Ann is a teacher who masters the daunting task of inclusive education. She does not only have “good” or “correct” ideas about the topic, she also acts in accordance with these ideas. However, even if they are not particularly emphasized, we have also witnessed that she experiences some dilemmas in her daily practice. The study starts with an utterance from Ann. In the very beginning of the introductory chapter she says: “There’s a danger that I focus too much on John and Paul. I have to be aware of that. There are so many kids in this class who need me, and I feel I have an obligation to see them all” (int 101600, p.11). This utterance illustrates what I call the focus dilemma. There is of course a danger that teachers focus more on pupils with special needs than the other children in the class. Or perhaps the other way around, that teachers do not focus on those who have special needs because there are so many other children in the class who need the teacher’s attention. Closely connected to the focus dilemma is therefore the time dilemma. The teacher in question does not have time for those pupils who have special needs because there are so many pupils in class. Or the reverse, when the teacher uses time on the children with special needs, she or he does not have time for the other pupils in the class.

In Chapter seven (p.116) we witnessed another dilemma. Here we saw that Ann once tried to “force” Paul to enter the class circle to participate in a teaching and assisted learning period. The other pupils were already at their places in the class circle and Paul was the only one left. Ann asked him to enter the class circle, but Paul resisted. Among other things, this episode illustrates the difference dilemma (Norwich 2000). Within a class characterized in terms of heterogeneity and diversity, should the teacher treat everybody the same way? Should the teacher put the same demands on all the children, or should the teacher treat them individually? The episode also illustrates the firmness and flexibility dilemma. Some of the

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<sup>77</sup> The concepts of cooperative, assimilating, fragmentary and formal integration (Schousboe 1989) may provide further insight into the discussion. Cooperative integration treats all the children as active agents and allows them to participate in the common environment on their own premises, and considers being different as a potential, not a threat. In contrast to cooperative integration, assimilating integration means that the individual child must shed or reduce her or his difference to become like the others. The child has the problem and the child is the problem. Fragmentary integration means that children with special needs are put in their regular class in some contexts and segregated at other times. Finally, we have formal integration, an approach that has no apparent goal other than putting all the pupils under the same roof. Here integration is only a matter of physical structural concern (Schousboe 1989). Compared to assimilating, fragmentary and formal integration, the positive aspects of cooperative integration are obvious, and the narratives from Ann’s current educational practice can be found within this approach.

pupils in the class might need more firmness and structure than the other pupils, while some will need more flexibility than others. What could a firm structure do to pupils who need a looser structure? And conversely, what would a rather loose or flexible style do to those who need firmness?

In Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary (2003), "dilemma" is described as "a necessary choice between equally undesirable alternatives" (p.358). According to this definition, dilemmas have no easy and straightforward solutions. Rather they have to be lived with and dealt with in the everyday teaching practice, something that was also touched upon in Chapter eight (see Footnote 62, p.139). Living and dealing with dilemmas is a part of the teaching profession. It is therefore crucial that teachers should recognize the various dilemmas that occur in their daily classroom practice. They should be aware of them and look upon them as dilemmas instead of being frustrated because they or others do not find the "right" solutions.

The intention behind this narrative study of Ann was not to obtain any fixed and everlasting answers or solutions when it comes to the challenge of realizing inclusion in Norwegian classrooms. Within the framework of socio-cultural theory, such an idea would of course be self-contradictory. Instead, the narrative of Ann, how she has developed over the years and her inclusive practice in her current classroom, is to be considered as a thinking tool or a cultural scaffold because it may initiate further reflections on the topic of inclusive practice. In this way the text about Ann may be considered as an "open work" where the meaning<sup>78</sup> is dependent upon those who read or hear about it. This was already touched upon in the introductory chapter where it was stated that one of the reasons for conducting this study was to develop a thinking tool for teachers. In accordance with the theoretical framework of the study, the individual reflections will depend upon the teacher who reads or hears about Ann, and this person's particular social, cultural and institutional setting. Therefore, there are innumerable ways in which this text can be interpreted and come to function as a thinking tool.

However, as a former teacher myself, I have some ideas on how all the narratives of Ann's inclusive practice may come to initiate further reflections for teachers who read this text. The "float-and-sink" story in Chapter six may, for example, lead to teachers' further thoughts

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<sup>78</sup> In Chapter two, when presenting Bakhtin's theory we saw that the principle of dialogicality is present in all his writings. Therefore when talking about the concept of meaning, he also claimed that meaning is dialogic in nature. He asserted that there is no ready-made meaning that is transferred or handed over from one to the other. Rather, meaning develops or takes form in the process of interactions. This means that a message is not transmitted from one to another, but rather constructed between the participants in the interaction process (Bakhtin 1986).

when it comes to the topic of teaching pupils how to behave in accordance with various school situations. Here, I would imagine that the concept of activity genre could be useful for further reflections and initiate new ways of thinking. Is the teacher in question aware of the various activity genres in her or his classroom? Or is the activity genre in question too unclear, too loose or too firm? The concept of activity genre may also be helpful when dealing with pupils with behavioural problems. This issue appears to be one of the greatest challenges within an inclusive school system (Dyson 2000, Flem & Keller 2000) and in all probability most of the teachers who read this text have pupils identified as having behavioural problems in their own classes. Perhaps these teachers may come to reflect on this challenge in other ways when looking at it in light of the activity genre concept.

The “birds-in-the-trees” story in Chapter seven may lead to further reflections when it comes to the issue of transition situations and how to deal with these. Perhaps the teacher who reads about Ann is not aware of how she or he deals with transition processes and has perhaps not reflected in terms of scaffolding devices. I can imagine that the story of how Ann deals with transitions may help other teachers to be more aware of and develop their own practice on this issue. The “number-eighteen” story presented and analyzed in Chapter eight may also initiate teachers’ reflections. In particular, these reflections could be connected to the topic of interaction between the teacher and the pupils, on how to encourage pupils’ participation and commitment, and they may also lead to further reflections and awareness when it comes to the major question concerning teaching and pupils’ learning. I can further imagine that the “teddy-bear” story in Chapter nine may initiate reflections on the issue of facilitating for pleasant, common experiences. Does the teacher who reads about Ann do the same in her or his class? What kinds of action does she or he initiate? What are the thoughts underlying the actions in question? What kind of mediated artefacts are used? How do the children respond to the actions? Are there any children who do not participate, and why not? In other words, teachers who read about the “teddy-bear” story could ask themselves many questions concerning their own practice, and use the activity theory and the activity system to analyze their practice when it comes to the issue of facilitating for pleasant, common experiences.

I can also imagine that the study of Ann may come to serve as a thinking tool for teachers when it comes to the topic of inclusion. As this text clearly shows, inclusive practice is a complex field of work. To deal with this challenge we have seen that the teacher takes both the pupils and the whole context into consideration when planning and carrying out her teaching. Teachers who read this text about Ann can see that inclusive practice depends upon the constant interaction between various factors. The teacher has to be aware of “who” is

participating, “what” is going to happen, “when” and “where” the activity is going to take place and “why” it is to happen (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). Furthermore, what this text about Ann also clearly shows is that the teacher herself is an important factor. Her reflections and actions are crucial if inclusive teaching is to be realized in classrooms. In this way the narrative of Ann can contribute to teachers’ further thoughts on their own practice and on the topic of inclusive education.

The topic of inclusive teaching is also a challenge for teacher educators (Booth, Nes & Strømstad 2003), and as we saw in the introductory chapter, another reason for conducting this study of Ann was that it may come to function as a tool within teacher education. There are mainly two reasons for this. First, people starting their teacher education have themselves been pupils for years. To become reflective thinkers, active and engaged in the creation of new understanding and insight in teaching, student teachers need to be aware of their already established thoughts and beliefs about teaching (Bird 1990, Richert 1991, Harrington 1995, Lampert & Ball 1998). Narrative studies are particularly useful for this purpose. As we have seen above, narrative studies initiate reflections because the narrative that is fixed in a text is considered an “open work” where the meaning is addressed to those who read it (Ricoeur 1981). Therefore, when using such texts in teacher education the idea is to problematize one’s own knowledge as well as the knowledge and practice of others. Being a student teacher could in this way be regarded in terms of being an inquirer (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999), one who asks questions, who reflects on one’s own thoughts and actions as well as on the actions and thoughts of others. The other reason for using narrative studies for teacher education concerns the relation between theory and practice that has been debated for years within teacher education (Dewey 1904/1965, Shulman 1985). While some argue for more formal knowledge and theory, others focus on the need for more practical knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999). As we have seen, within the narrative approach, experiences from practice in the form of empirical data and theory are mutually dependent. It is the constant interaction between theory and data that enables us to gain new insight and understanding in the field of study (Gudmundsdottir 2001). Therefore, instead of taking a position in the theory or practice discussion, narratives rather integrate these two aspects into a whole.<sup>79</sup>

A third reason for conducting this study was that it may contribute to developing new research questions, new research questions that will point further ahead and hopefully

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<sup>79</sup> These ideas also appear to be present in literature on case studies (Richert 1991, Grossman 1992, Harrington 1995) and action research (Gore & Zeichner 1991, Noffkre & Brennan 1991).

contribute to further development of inclusive practice in our schools. I have already pointed out some topics for further research. In Chapter seven I suggested that scaffolding devices, such as time and rhythm and songs, should be looked into further and in Chapter eight, where I found that when the children master the appropriate activity genre they have space to deal with the task or subject matter in question, I argued that this idea of space could be further investigated. I will not go into further detail on these topics, instead I want to suggest three other topics that emerged from this study.

The first topic has already been touched upon earlier in this chapter. When teaching in an inclusive school, teachers constantly encounter any number of challenges. Some of these may have rather easy and straightforward solutions. Others do not have any obvious solutions and are what I call dilemmas. In my opinion it is important that teachers should identify these two types of challenge. From my work as a teacher, a special-needs teacher and employee in the support services, I have experienced that teachers often ask for the “right” answers or solutions to both types of challenge described above. I think it could be useful if the research field could contribute to more awareness of this complexity; research on challenges, the kinds of problem, how teachers deal with them, where teachers get support, what kind of support they need and what kind of support they get. There are innumerable questions connected to this research topic and they also lead to my next suggestion for further inquiry.

The second topic for further research concerns factors outside the classroom. As this study has shown, Ann is an important factor when it comes to the question of realizing inclusive education in her classroom. However, as we saw in the introductory chapter, several studies have claimed that inclusive practice is also dependent on factors outside the classroom (Pijl & Meijer 1997, Porter 1997, Labon 1997). This has also become evident in this text. Even if the study has highlighted Ann, we have also witnessed that she does not operate with her class in isolation and independent from her surroundings. Rather various voices emerge through the study, and when it comes to her current practice, we hear the voice of the teacher in the parallel class, the voice of the principal, the voices of employees in the in-house support services and the central support services, and we hear the voices of the pupils’ parents. In my opinion digging more into the relationship between teachers and their collaboration partners could be useful to obtain further insight into the field of inclusive education.

The third suggestion for further inquiry has popped up in my mind several times during the research process. Now, as I have said, this study has had Ann as its main focus and it is her voice that most clearly emerges. However, if I had continued my research in her classroom I would also have liked to have gained insight into the pupils’ perspective. I would have liked

to obtain some more insight into their thoughts and reflections, how they experience being pupils in an inclusive school. How they experience it both from a social and academic perspective. With the parents' permission, permission from the municipal authorities and from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, I would like to have conversations with the pupils, observe them participating in various school activities, not only inside the classroom, but also during breaks and on excursions in the woods. I would like to observe their activities and listen to their conversations. I would like to collect some of their written texts. I would like to do all this to gain insight into their perspective on being a pupil in a school for everyone.

School has been a hot topic in the public and political debates for years. New governments and a string of ministers apparently want to expose and emphasize their particular profile in educational politics. This leaves teachers to deal with the many and shifting educational directives that emerge. However, in spite of all the new ideas, the overarching vision for the Norwegian compulsory school seems to be firmly and deeply rooted: There appears to be agreement across established party lines that we should have an inclusive school for all our children in this country. In my opinion it is therefore important that we continue narrative research on inclusive practice. This is so because information may be hard to comprehend and retain unless it is integrated into a narrative (Wertsch 1998). Narratives may then function like "cultural scaffolds" that help us to make sense and give the opportunity to "climb to higher ground mentally and intellectually" (Gudmundsdottir 2001, p.232).

The narrative of Ann is just one of many occurring in Norwegian classrooms on a daily basis. I think we need to bring as many of these as possible out into the open to allow teachers who are under the pressure of realizing the curriculum's visions to become visible through the narratives we retell about them, and thereby inspire their teacher colleagues into reflection and development of their own practice.

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1

### An Autobiographical Summary

I finished the first part of my teacher education in 1975 after two years at teachers college. I then obtained my first job at a lower secondary school where I was the teacher for a ninth grade class with twenty-eight pupils. As a novice teacher I experienced the class as rather demanding. The other teachers at the school were kind and friendly but I did not have any close collaboration with any of them. I worked very hard to manage the class and often felt quite lonely. Following this first year of my teacher career, I attended university for further studies and then I acquired a job at Valley School. During the first of my ten years at this school I worked with special-needs children. I was the teacher for a special-needs class of five pupils, all of the same age but with different needs. One of them had brain damage, two were diagnosed with AD/HD and the other two had major learning difficulties. After this year, I was given my own class of twenty-seven first grade pupils, and I was their teacher for six years. During all those years there was a close collaborative relationship between all us teachers in the parallel classes, and one of these teachers has been one of my best friends ever since. At the same time that I was teaching the class I continued working with children with special needs, and I also started studies within the field of special education. There were two main reasons for this. First, my own growing interest in the topic and second, the principal who supported and encouraged me to take further studies within this field.

When my class left Valley School to attend lower secondary school, I became a special-needs teacher for three years, working mostly with pupils who had reading and writing difficulties and pupils with problem behaviour. Most often I worked with these children outside the classroom in small group rooms. Then I left Valley school to start working at a combined school for grades one to nine. This school is located in the same part of town as Valley School. During my first year at this school I was an ordinary teacher with my own first grade class. However, there was a lack of special-needs teachers at this school, so the next year I was asked to work with special-needs children. At that point in time the view on how to organize special education had changed, and for the most part the teaching took place inside the classroom. Only in exceptional cases were pupils taken out of class. During these years I continued with my studies within special education, and when I completed them I became the special-education coordinator at the school. Later I started in a position in the district's support services and for a short period of time I was a special-education adviser at the district level. These were exciting and challenging years.

I was then asked to be the head of the support services in another district of the city. As with all the other districts' support services this was a combination of the pedagogical-psychological service and the child welfare service, with a number of professional groups represented, for example psychologists, social workers and special-needs teachers. During my period here all the employees were given comprehensive and systematic training within a solution-based approach to working with children with special needs and their families. Training was also given to special-needs teachers in day-care centres and schools. This approach is based on the ideas of Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer. The most dramatic event during these years was when a six-year-old girl was killed by some boys of the same age. Help and support to both the most affected families and the local community were organized by this particular support services, a huge challenge indeed.

During these years I was never far away from the thought of continuing with my special-education studies. I wanted to pursue a master's degree within this field, and in 1995, twenty years after I had fulfilled the first part of my teacher education, I started on my master's degree. At that point in time I was interested in many topics and various levels of the educational system. I was interested in the school level, the district level, the support services, the organization of special education, the relationship between special education and ordinary education, the cooperation between ordinary and special teachers, teachers' cooperation with parents and so on. However, after having attended lectures with Professor Sigrun Gudmundsdottir at the Department of Education at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, I became increasingly interested in classroom research. My master's thesis has therefore been conducted within the classroom-research tradition, and Sigrun Gudmundsdottir was my mentor. After completing this, I worked as a special-needs teacher at a primary school while also giving lectures at the university and teachers college. During these years, Sigrun continued to inspire and encourage me to continue my research on teachers and teachers' practice. Then, in the autumn of 2000 I was awarded a scholarship by the Norwegian Research Council to start my doctoral work. Together with Professor Annlaug Flem, Sigrun was my mentor until her untimely death in June 2003. Associate Professor Helg Fottland at the Faculty of Teacher Education and Deaf Studies, Sør-Trøndelag College University, then joined Annlaug Flem as my mentor for the last year of my doctoral work.

## Appendix 2 Ann's Reflections on the Research Process

### First contact

When you contacted me and presented your research topic, I was immediately interested. I also have to admit that I was flattered when you told me you were interested in observing and talking about my teaching and my classroom practice.

I do believe that I know something about teaching and learning. Otherwise I could not have been a teacher all these years. Actually, I have often reflected upon what really happens when things work well and why I choose to act in the ways I do. So how could I say no when you asked me to enter my classroom? Even though you told me that you wanted to observe me and my class for a long period of time and go into depth about everything I said and did, I decided to welcome you into my classroom. In fact I thought of it as something that could help me in my teaching. I thought that you could help me with my own reflections. Actually I felt safe from the very first moment you entered the classroom. I knew you were not there to criticize me or to point out any shortcomings. As a former teacher yourself you know what it is like to be a teacher.

### About having you in the classroom

I am used to having other people than pupils in my classroom. Now and then I have other teachers here and sometimes also student teachers. When you have been in my classroom I think you have been very professional during the observations. You were there, but I soon forgot you were. Perhaps it was good that you are so small! When I had time to observe you, you were always busy writing or looking around. The children really surprised me as well. They got used to you and your video camera very quickly. You being there with the video camera did not seem to affect them at all. In the beginning they were perhaps more quiet than usual, but then they seemed to forget that you were there. When you were there they behaved in the same way as they always do.



### About our conversations

I am not used to having that much focus on me. I felt that everything I said and did was important. When we talked about my past experiences, I became more aware of what has really meant something to me as a teacher. I have to admit it was painful to realize that some years and some children have almost dropped out of my memory. However, this part of my past was exciting and important to be more aware of. I still do not know why my past experiences are important for your research. Perhaps I will get some more insight into this later?

You have been very skilled in asking me questions about my current teaching and classroom practice. Only a person who has been a teacher herself can ask such questions, only a person who has had the full responsibility for a class herself. Therefore our conversations have been very useful to me. In fact they have been so relevant for my teaching that I have often made changes in my practice after a talk with you. Unfortunately, I never get such questions from, for example, employees in the support services.

The conversations with you have enabled me to reflect upon my own teaching. Sometimes when talking with you I have reflected on whether I really practise in accordance with my own ideology or not. Due to our pedagogical conversations I think I have become more conscious and more reflective when it comes to my own teaching practice. Our talks have also inspired me to do more of what I really think is important. I even think I have become a better teacher because of our conversations on teaching and education. Our talks have led to new reflections.

After the data collection period was finished we have had some conversations about your research report and how you intend to describe both my past experiences and my present class and context. We have also talked about the various themes that seem to emerge through your research and the analysis seems reasonable to me. I am, however, very anxious to see the final outcome of your research.

I wish you good luck in your continuing work.

## Appendix 3

### Overview of the Collected Data Material

#### Abbreviations:

Obs: observation notes. Vid: video recordings. Int: interview. Doc: documents. The numbers indicate the date, for example int 092800 means interview, September 28, 2000.

#### **A. Observation Notes**

- Obs 082400 First teaching unit: Start of the school day in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Friendship. Talking about and playing a friendship game. Transition to work period. Individual work on the theme. Transition to class circle and conversation on friendship before break.
- Obs 083100 First teaching unit. Start of the school day in the class circle. Following this all the school's pupils and teachers gather in the gym where the principal greets them and welcomes everybody to a new school year. Transition to the classroom and a gathering in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Friendship. Transition to work period where the pupils work on the theme. Gathering in the class circle where the pupils read what they have written about friendship. Before break Ann gives the pupils ice cream to celebrate that the school has been granted funds to buy new desks and chairs.
- Obs 100200 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Transition to work period and individual writing about the weekend. Transition to class circle and introduction to the theme of symmetry. Transition to work period and individual work on symmetric figures. Gathering in the class circle before break.
- Obs 100300 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Water and fish. Transition to work period where the pupils work in pairs dissecting fish. Gathering in the class circle before break.
- Obs 101100 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before transition to class circle. Conversation about the various seasons. Songs for each season. Transition to the music room together with the parallel class. Transition back to the classroom. End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 101600 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Compound words. Transition to work period and individual work on compound words. Gathering in the class circle before break.  
Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime and then transition to the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Mathematics and the number eleven. Transition to work period and individual work on mathematics. End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 101900 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Conversation about the pupils' groups. Theme of the lesson: Mathematics. Transition to work period and individual work on mathematics. Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime

before gathering in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Items that float or sink.

- Obs 102300 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before transition to class circle. Theme of the lesson: Mathematics. Creating arithmetic narratives. Transition to work period and individual work on the theme. End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 112000 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before transition to the class circle. A ceremony where Sambu, the class's teddy bear, goes into hibernation. Then Ann tells a Greek myth. Transition to work period where the pupils draw labyrinths. No gathering in the class circle before break.
- Obs 112200 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before transition to the class circle where Ann tells myths from Greece. Transition to work period where the pupils work individually on tasks connected to the myths. End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 112300 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. First theme of the lesson: copy-book writing, focusing on the letter *l*. Transition to work period and individual work on copy-book writing. Thereafter a new gathering in the class circle. Second theme of the lesson: Mathematics and the number eighteen. Transition to work period and individual work on mathematics. No gathering in the class circle before break.
- Obs 112700 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: copy-book writing focusing on the letter *h*. Transition to work period and individual work on copy-book writing. Transition to the class circle. Theme: Writing a letter. While in class circle the pupils write letters to the student teachers who had just been in their class for three weeks. Break.  
Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before gathering in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Dragons. Transition to work period where the pupils paint dragons. End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 011101 Last part of the first teaching unit. A portable shoe exhibition is in the classroom. Theme: Various shoes and their individual stories. Thereafter, individual work on drawing a shoe and writing something about the shoe. No gathering in the class circle before break.
- Obs 011201 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before transition to class circle. Theme of the lesson: Weather. The class writes a poem together about winter weather. Work period where Ann organizes the pupils into reading groups. The pupils read to each other in the group. Transition to the class circle. Ann presents the "Fun Book", a book with fun tasks. Transition to work period. Individual work on the "Fun Book." End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 011501 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Work period and individual writing from the weekend. Gathering in the class circle. "Detective game" before break. Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before transition to class circle. Theme of the lesson: The circular motion of water.

- Obs 011701 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before gathering in the class circle. Observations about the weather. Theme of the lesson: Repetition of experiments the class had done with water. Then introduction to the circular motion of water. Individual work on tasks connected to the theme. End of the day in the class circle.
- Obs 012201 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Weather. The pupils make a poem together about the wind. An unexpected situation: The children become preoccupied with a flock of birds outside. Continuing with the theme of the lesson after the unexpected occurrence.
- Obs 012401 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime before the pupils are asked to work on their "Fun Book". Gathering in the class circle where there is a conversation on how the pupils could write books. Individual work using writing books before end of the day in the class circle.

## **B. Video Recordings**

- Vid 100200 First teaching unit. Theme of the teaching and assisted-learning period: Symmetry.
- Vid 100300 First teaching unit. Theme of the teaching and assisted-learning period: Fish. Working in pairs dissecting fish.
- Vid 101600 First teaching unit. Theme of the teaching and assisted-learning period: Compound words.  
Teaching and assisted-learning period in the second teaching unit: Mathematics. Focus on the number eleven.
- Vid. 101900 First teaching unit. Class circle. Conversation about the groups.  
Class circle: The “Float-and-Sink” lesson.
- Vid 102300 Second teaching unit. Transition from lunch to gathering in the class circle. Teaching and assisted-learning period: Arithmetic narratives.
- Vid 112000 Second teaching unit. Transition from lunch to gathering in the class circle. Sambi, the class’s teddy bear, goes into hibernation. Ann tells a Greek legend. Work period where the pupils draw a labyrinth.
- Vid 112300 First teaching unit. From the first teaching and assisted-learning period: Copy-book writing. From the second teaching and assisted-learning period: Mathematics. The number eighteen.
- Vid 112700 First teaching unit. Theme of the day: copy-book writing. Focus on the letter h. Transition to the class circle. A new theme: Writing letters to student teachers. From the second teaching unit, transition from lunch period to class circle. Theme: Dragons.
- Vid 011101 First teaching unit. Conversation about the shoe exhibition.
- Vid 011201 Second teaching unit. Lunch. Playtime and transition to class circle. Reading groups. Introduction of the “Fun Book.”
- Vid 011501 First teaching unit. Then in the second teaching unit, transition from lunch to class circle. Theme of the lesson: The circular motion of water.
- Vid 011701 Second teaching unit. Transition from lunch and playtime to class circle. Theme of the lesson: Observations about the weather.
- Vid 012201 First teaching unit. Start of the day in the class circle. Theme of the lesson: Wind. The pupils write a poem together about wind. Unexpected situation: A large flock of birds are outside, and the pupils lose their focus on the theme. A transition situation occurs before the class continues to work on the topic of the lesson.

Vid 012401 Second teaching unit. Transition from lunch to class circle. Ann wants the pupils to write books. Introduction to this. Individual work on these books. End of the day in the class circle.

## **C. Interviews**

### **Biographical Interviews**

- Int 092800 A look at her life up to today. Focus on her being a pupil and a teacher. About experiences with her first class at Valley School.
- Int 101100 About experiences connected to her first and second class at Valley School.
- Int 101600 About experiences connected to her second and third class at Valley School.
- Int 101900 About experiences connected to her fourth class at Valley School.

### **Interviews Concerning Ann's Current Practice**

- Int 100300 About the class and the pupils. Resources. Collaboration partners. Then video interview in connection with the lesson where the pupils dissect fish.
- Int 102300 About structure and the organization of the school day. About a letter Ann sent to the parents/guardians about the pupils' groups. Then video interview about the lesson where Ann talks with the pupils about the groups.
- Int 102400 About the theme water. Content, activities, organization. Then video interview about the float-and-sink lesson.
- Int 112200 About Sambu, the class's teddy bear, and activities intended to create common, pleasant experiences for the pupils. About the lesson where Sambu goes into hibernation.
- Int 112900 About the structure and organization of various activities such as the start of the day in the class circle, the teaching and assisted-learning period, work periods, lunch and play time.
- Int 011201 About activities connected to the shoe exhibition. About collaboration partners such as the teacher in the parallel class, the principal, the central assistance service, the in-house service, the pupils' parents.
- Int 011701 About common, pleasant experiences and transitions. About activities connected to the theme of circular motion of water.
- Int 012401 About the ideology of an inclusive school. Ann's reflections concerning this vision and her thoughts on the realization of an inclusive school.

#### ***D. Documents***

- Doc 1            The class plan for the school year.
- Doc 2            The class weekly plans for the data collection period.
- Doc 3            Sambu's song.
- Doc 4            Sambu's book
- Doc 5            Ann's letters to the pupils' parents.
- Doc 6            Booklet. Valley School's ten-year anniversary.
- Doc 7            Valley School's local curriculum for the school year.
- Doc 8            Plan for Sunside District's central assistance service.
- Doc 9            Statistical documents concerning the town and its various districts.



## Appendix 4 The Content and Coding of Categories

### **A. *The Content of Categories***

#### **“They Need to Participate in Various Activities”**

The school day is divided into various activities. In Ann’s class these activities imply, for example, that the children participate in the class circle, in work periods, when having lunch together, during breaks and so on. It is important that all the children, including John and Paul, manage all these different settings. The topic of this category is thus based on this theme; various settings and their corresponding appropriate way of being. However, not all the settings are given equal focus as one particular setting, the teaching and assisted learning period is examined in detail. The teaching and assisted learning period takes place when Ann’s class is gathered in the class circle and all the participants are focused on a particular topic or subject matter. To illustrate how Ann deals with this setting, I present a story from a teaching and assisted learning period. The concepts of speech genre (Bakhtin 1986) and activity setting (Tharp & Gallimore 1988) are used to analyze and gain insight into this issue.

#### **“The Transitions Have to be Smooth and Flexible”**

In the first category the focus was on various activities that Ann maintains are important for pupils to manage. Moreover, when she focuses on the various activities she also sees reason to look at the transitions as it is just as important that the pupils master them as well. During a school day there are many transitions and most often these are foreseen and expected by the teacher. However, unpredictability is one of the hallmarks of classroom complexity. Therefore, unexpected transitions may also occur. Ann deals with both expected and unexpected transitions in a smooth and flexible way, something that is the topic of this category. This feature of Ann’s practice is illustrated by telling a story about how she deals with an unexpected transition. The notions of scaffolding (Wood et al. 1976), prolepsis (Rommetveit 1974, 1979) and Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of the authoritative word and the internally persuasive word are used to analyze and gain insight into this issue.

### **“Kids Need to be Seen”**

In the second category the focus was on transitions, where Ann maintains that it is important that the pupils master these situations. The role of the teacher is to help and support the children through transition processes. To assist both the class as a whole, and individual children such as John and Paul, the teacher has to see and know her pupils. Seeing the child is not a one-way process where the teacher is the only active part. Rather this involves a mutual relationship between the teacher and the pupils. Ann is very concerned about the issue of seeing and knowing the individual children in her class. The interpersonal relationship between Ann and her pupils is therefore the topic of this category. This feature of Ann’s practice is illustrated by telling a story from a teaching and assisted-learning period where the class is dealing with the number eighteen. The concepts of intersubjectivity (Wertsch 1984), value judgment and expressive intonation (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1994a, 1994c) are used to analyze and gain insight into this topic.

### **“They Need Common, Pleasant Experiences”**

In the third category the focus was on the interpersonal relationship between Ann and the pupils in her class. Ann appears to think that it is important that she should see and know the individual child. Closely connected to her emphasis on seeing the children is her belief that the pupils should have pleasant experiences when at school. Not only does this yield short-term gains in the form of happy and satisfied children, Ann also believes that it is important in the long term that the children have good memories to recall from their period at school. This feature of Ann’s practice can be seen in her daily classroom activities and when she reflects upon her teaching. It is illustrated by telling a story in which Sambu, the class’s teddy bear, is involved. Cultural-historical activity theory (Leontèv 1981, Wertsch 1981) and the activity-system (Engeström 1987, 1999) are used to gain insight into this feature of Ann’s practice.

## B. Coding of the Categories

Example from a transcribed interview 112900, p.2-3

Does not force or demand him. Deals with him in a soft way.	Ann: You know, it's very hard to guide Paul. To avoid negative focus on him, I allow him to a large degree to decide himself. I allow him to deal with his own things, and to attend the class circle when it suits him.	Chapter 7
	I allow him to finish his things before entering the class circle and so on. This is the way it works for him. That's the main thing, it works.	
	Torill: Yes?	
Sees Paul. Sees what works for him. Scaffolds him, gives him more time so that he can finish his work.	Ann: Yes, in a way it works with Paul. If he's allowed to work at his own tempo, then it works. Well he doesn't always finish his work exactly when I want him to (laughter), but if he gets some more time, he does. He works less than the others because he has problems focusing. He works in a slower way, but he does work.	Chapter 8
	Torill: Mmm	
Knows him, knows that he is skilled in subject matter.	Ann: Yes. And when it comes to subject matter, I regard him to be rather skilled. In a way I can be more relaxed because of that. Yes, he is skilled.	Chapter 8
	Torill: He is?	
Scaffolds him.	Ann: Yes, but he needs some more time...	Chapter 8
	Torill: Ok	
Deals with him in a soft and flexible way.	Ann: If I were to try to push him to do things faster, it wouldn't work. He would have countered my demands with defiance and resistance.	Chapter 7
Sees him, knows him, that he has a difficult situation.	Yes, he would. I try to give him some more time. I have to give him time because I know how hard it is for him. He has a difficult situation.	Chapter 8
	Torill: Mmm	
Paul should enjoy being at school. He should enjoy school work.	Ann: Yes, and as long as he enjoys school, and I see that he likes being at school. I think he enjoys the way we're working and what we're working on. When it comes to Paul, I think this is so crucial. It's very important to keep on working in this direction.	Chapter 9
Participating in various activities. Focuses on the class circle setting.	Earlier it was hard for him to attend the class circle. When he started in this class he was so unruly and unfocused. Then I just had to concentrate on the class circle, because it was important that he could manage this setting. Yes, I regarded that to be very important, and now, you can see that he deals with it. Yes, he does.	Chapter 6

## Appendix 5 Gaining Access

### **A. Letter to Municipal Authorities**

Torill Moen  
Department of Education, NTNU  
7491 Trondheim

Date

Municipality  
Address

#### **Application for permission to collect data in connection with a doctoral thesis**

In 1996 I sent an application to the municipality asking for permission to collect data in a classroom. This application was dated 22 January 1996. The focus of the study was how a teacher deals with special-needs children in her or his ordinary classroom activities. I received a positive response to my application, and the result of this work was published in 1997 entitled *“Det å send han Tom ut av klassen e ikkje nån løysning” En kasusstudie av inkluderende prosesser. (Sending Tom out of the classroom is no solution. A case study in inclusive processes).*

The research question is still exciting, interesting and as relevant as ever. I have therefore applied to the Norwegian Research Council for a doctoral scholarship to continue my research on the topic and I have been given the go ahead.

I have already decided on the teacher I will use in my study. I need to be together with her for a rather long period of time to collect data. Observations and video recordings from the classroom activities will be useful tools in the data-collection process. I will also have conversations with the teacher, focusing on her thoughts and reflections on the teaching practice.

All the data material will be treated confidentially and anonymously. I will change all the proper names, the name of the teacher and the pupils and the name of the school. It is important to add that I will not do this without the permission of the teacher in question, the pupils' parents and the school's principal.

Before I arrange further appointments, I am hereby applying to the municipality for permission to conduct my study and collect my data and use it in accordance with the above-stated aim.

I hope this application will be considered quickly and positively as I would like to commence the data collection as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely  
Torill Moen

## **B. Letter to Parents/Guardians**

To parents/guardians in 3A

This autumn I have agreed to cooperate with a doctoral-degree student from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). Her name is Torill Moen. She has been a teacher for many years and is now working on classroom research, in particular how teachers deal with inclusive education in their ordinary classroom activities. In other words, she wants to study me as a teacher and how I deal with the pupils in the class.

To carry out this study she will have to observe me and the class for a rather long period of time, perhaps three to four months.

During this period she will collect her data by means of observations, video recordings in the classroom and also through conversations with me. The two of us will look at the video recordings together, she will ask me questions and I will reflect upon my own teaching.

Torill Moen will then write a research report in which my teaching will be described. In this report, some of the dialogues between me and some of the children may be reproduced in writing. However, this will be totally confidential. All the proper names, the name of the school, the teacher and the pupils will be changed. When the report is finished, during the summer of 2004, the video recordings will be erased.

I find the project very interesting, but I cannot participate in it without your permission.

If you agree to let Torill Moen enter the classroom in order to collect data, please fill in the consent form and return it to me.

If anyone should require more information about the project, please contact me.

Kind regards from

***C. Consent to Allow Data Collection in the Class***

**Teacher:**

**Doctoral-degree student:** Torill Moen

**Purpose of the research:** See the enclosed information letter

I/we consent to the collection of data in my/our child’s class. We know that the data will be collected by means of observations, video recordings and conversations with the teacher.

I/we consent to the data being used as described in the information letter.

I/we know that participation in the project is voluntary. I/we know that the project cannot be carried out without my/our consent.

-----  
The child’s name

-----  
Place                                      Date                                      Parents’/guardians’ signature

***D. The Teacher's Consent to Participate in the Research Project***

I have agreed to collaborate with Torill Moen in her doctoral-degree study.

I know that this involves her observing my teaching and classroom activities, that she will be making video recordings and that the two of us will talk about these video recordings and also about my classroom practice. I agree that these conversations will be tape recorded and transcribed.

I am also aware that parts of the data material will be used as empirical data in the research report.

Valley School, date

Teacher's name

## Appendix 6 Interview Guides

### **A. Questions Regarding Biographical Data**

Some of the questions asked in the first biographical interview 092800.

Biographical data from childhood up to teacher training college:

1. Where did you attend primary school?
2. What do you remember about your teachers at primary school?
3. What about the other pupils?
4. Do you remember some activities that you enjoyed?
5. Do you remember some activities that you did not like?
6. With your current perspective, do you think there were any pupils with special needs in your class?
7. Do you remember the classroom? What did it look like?
8. Memories from lower secondary school, teachers, pupil activities and so on.
9. Memories from high school, teachers, pupils, activities and so on.
10. What did you like to play when you were a child?
11. When did you decide to become a teacher?
12. Would you still have chosen to become a teacher if you could start over again?
13. Could you give an overview of your teaching career, and schools and classes you have been teaching?

Biographical data after having started as a teacher at Valley School:

1. What do you remember from your first class?
2. Do you remember any particular pupils?
3. Did some of the pupils have special needs?
4. How did you deal with these children?
5. What about collaboration partners?
6. What about the pupils' parents?
7. Can you remember something about the principal?
8. What about colleagues?
9. What was important for you during these years?
10. Were there any particular occurrences that would come to influence your later career?



## ***B. Questions Regarding Ann's Current Practice***

Some of the questions asked on 102400 in connection with the “float-and-sink” lesson.

Reflections on the theme of water:

1. How long are you going to work on this theme?
2. What is the aim of the work on this theme?
3. Could you describe the various activities connected to the theme?

About the “float-and-sink” lesson:

1. Could you reflect upon the “float-and-sink” lesson?
2. How did you come to prepare the lesson in this way?
3. Have you done such an activity with the water theme before?
4. Could it have been carried out in another way?
5. What was positive about the lesson?
6. Anything negative?
7. How do you think the pupils experienced the lesson?
8. Could you reflect on the pupils' commitment?
9. What do you think the pupils will remember from the lesson?
10. What do you think they learned?
11. How does John fit into this kind of activity?
12. What about Paul?
13. Do you think student teachers could have carried out this particular activity?