INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING International Conference

The Role of Texts as Resources for Learning in Science

Anna Lyngfelt

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Abstract

The aim of this presentation is to investigate the role of texts as resources for learning in science. When it comes to students' perception of science texts, this may be looked upon as the result of teaching. However, it could be the other way round, that students' perception of science texts could serve as a starting-point for the development of science teaching. Here terms and conceptions in science could be considered to be connected to word knowledge, while reading comprehension could be related to domain knowledge; it is well known that there is a relationship between word knowledge and reading comprehension (Tannenbaum, Torgesen & Wagner, 2006; Nassaji, 2004). However, since cognitive research dominates linguistic research there is a need for research about the nature of the interrelation between knowledge in vocabulary and text comprehension, that is socially and contextually oriented. In fact, there is a variety of reasons for focusing texts within science education at school: the growing amount of learners in the classrooms that do not have the majority language as their mother tongue, but still are expected to read science texts in and outside school, and the interest in reasoning about questions having to do with sustainability, giving science education societal dimensions. Therefore, a study will be presented consisting of 79 students in four multilingual school classes, having read a science text about sustainability. Mixed methods have been used, quantitative research for a vocabulary test and qualitative for a reading comprehension test, to be able to analyze the perception of the science text and relate it to the teaching praxis in the specific classrooms in which the tests took place. The results show that a considerable amount of the students is good at vocabulary related to the text content, but poor when it comes to text comprehension – many of them have great difficulties in relating to the major points of the text content. The results of the study also show that there is a correlation between classroom teaching and the perception of the text used in the vocabulary and text comprehension test.

Keywords: *Science teaching, multilingualism, text comprehension;*