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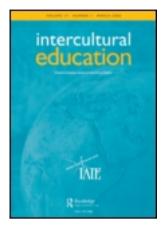
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# Literacy education, reading engagement, and library use in multilingual classes

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## Literacy education, reading engagement, and library use in multilingual classes

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The topic of this paper is literacy education and reading engagement in multilingual classes. What facilitates reading engagement in the language of instruction in multilingual classes? In this paper, we analyze reading engagement in a literature-based literacy program in Norway (2007–2011). The design was a research and development project in which teachers, researchers, and librarians collaborated within literacy education. We present pedagogical interventions within the project and analyze subsequent reading engagement among the students, based on a survey. The survey documented that the overwhelming majority of students were engaged readers two years into the project, measured by the students' amount and frequency of voluntary reading, their attitudes towards reading and library use. The findings indicate that reading engagement in the language of instruction among both first- and second-language learners was facilitated by literature-based literacy education, nonsegregated educational provisions and use of library resources. The study shows that literature-based literacy education may reduce possible negative effects of low socioeconomic status and linguistic minority background on reading engagement in the language of instruction. This requires literacy education, which gives students extensive access to books, voluntary reading of fiction and facts and sharing of literacy events and library use.

**Keywords:** literacy education; reading engagement; library use; multilingual classes

#### Introduction

The topic of this paper is literacy education and reading engagement in multilingual classes. Why study reading engagement? Within educational research, there is a major focus on the teaching and learning of literacy skills, relations between reading and writing, between reading and cognitive development, and the impact of students' socioeconomic and sociocultural background on reading and educational achievement (Kempe, Eriksson-Gustavsson, and Samuelsson 2011; Kırmızı 2011; Nikolajeva 2010; Peercy 2011; Sood and Mistry 2011). A recurring theme is the systematic differences in reading achievement between students, depending on their socioeconomic and sociocultural background. This achievement gap is a challenge to both teachers and researchers (Hartas 2011; Hvistendahl and Roe 2004; Lindsay 2010; Stanovich 1986)

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The assumption underpinning this study is that development of reading engagement is crucial to the development of literacy (Krashen 2004). In this paper, we explore the following question: What facilitates reading engagement in the language of instruction in multilingual classes? How can teachers and schools successfully contribute to reading engagement? In multilingual classes, the level of proficiency in the language of instruction varies among first-language speakers as well as between first- and second-language speakers. This variation represents a challenge to literacy education. In this paper, we analyze a literature-based literacy program in the language of instruction and result in terms of reading engagement in three classes, where the vast majority of the students were multilingual.

In the latest PISA study, reading engagement is defined in terms of the students' voluntary reading and their attitudes towards reading (Roe 2008). In our study, we operationalize reading engagement in terms of frequency and quantity of the students' voluntary reading, students' attitudes towards reading, and their use of the public library for literacy purposes.

The multilingual school in this study is situated in a mid-size Norwegian city. The socioeconomic status of the families in the school area is low – it scores the lowest in the city in the areas of unemployment, the number of welfare recipients, and level of parents' education. About 75% of the students at the school were multilingual with an immigrant background from nonEuropean countries. Some were born in Norway, while others had immigrated at elementary school age. The children studied were in fourth grade during the school year 2008/2009, when the survey on reading engagement was conducted.

#### Theoretical framework

The PISA reports document achievement gaps between individual students that are related to gender and socioeconomic and ethnic background (Hvistendahl and Roe 2004; Kjærnsli et al. 2004; Kjærnsli and Roe 2010). A recent study by Bakken and Danielsen (2011) confirms the existence of such gaps in Norway. There is a significant effect of the number of books in the students' homes on their academic performance. Bakken (2004) states:

Students with relatively few books at home have, in the ten-year period [1992–2002], shown a weakened level of school achievement, while those students who grew up with many books at home performed even better than that category of students did ten years ago. In 1992, the difference was 27 percentage points with regard to educational achievements, between those who had fewer than 20 books at home and those who had more than 500. In 2002, the difference was 35 percentage points. (Bakken 2004, 84–85, our translation)

For children who have few books at home, it is especially important that schools provide rich access to books. In general, there is a positive correlation between students' socioeconomic status and their attitudes to reading and reading engagement (Roe 2008). However, there is one promising exception. Students from homes with low socioeconomic status who are engaged, and voluntary readers in their spare time perform better than students with higher socioeconomic status but less reading engagement in their spare time:

The most interesting finding is perhaps that students from low socio-economic backgrounds, but with high levels of reading engagement, on average, score better

than students from medium or high socio-economic backgrounds with less reading engagement. This calls for cautious optimism, because it is, in fact, possible for the school to affect the students' attitudes towards reading, whereas schools cannot affect the students' socio-economic background. (Roe 2008, 43, our translation)

- Although schools cannot affect a student's socioeconomic background, they can provide access to literature and opportunity for voluntary reading. The PISA study indicates that this can be particularly beneficial for students with few books at home. A literature-based literacy education program is a case in point. A single textbook on any specific school subject is rarely suited to the multiple interests, levels of proficiency in the language of instruction, and diverse needs of children in socially and culturally complex classrooms. Literature-based programs in literacy education provide students with access to fiction and multiple literary genres at different levels of complexity. In such programs, pedagogical work is organized in relation to the students' reading and the students:
- are allowed time in class for voluntary reading;
- visit the public library to access literature;
- dramatize what they read;
- may also visit the theater or watch movies related to their reading;
- talk and write about what they are reading and share this with each other;
- paint, draw, and listen to literature read by teachers and librarians; and
- get the opportunity to meet authors through writers' visits (Alleklev and Lindvall 2003).

An important pedagogical principle in literature-based literacy education is that all the participating students are given equal access to reading materials that they find interesting. Equally important is that they share literary experiences with each other (Gambrell 1996). The development of literacy is a form of social practice (Barton 2007; Street 1997, 2003). In new literacy studies (Barton 2007; Street 1997, 2003), it is emphasized that literacy activities are embedded. The activities are entrenched in particular social interactions, they are shared experiences and, furthermore, they are fixed to, or take part in forming the agents' identity:

... literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that is, it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being. It is also embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context ... (Street 2003, 77–8)

People develop a passion for reading in contexts where reading is social, enjoyable, and meaningful to the reader (Barton 2007; Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic 2000; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000). This, in combination with individual choice of books and book-sharing pedagogical activities, facilitates student reading. In this context, the access to library resources can make a difference.

Reading engagement is analyzed from various angles in research on literacy education. The common theoretical assumption is that children's exposure to books they find interesting, and reading books of their own choice, facilitates and enhances reading engagement (Alleklev 2003; Axelsson 2000; Dressman 1997;

Elley 1991; Gambrell 1996; Morrow et al. 1997; Pihl 2012; Roe 2011). Studies indicate that increasing the amount and breadth of children's reading contributes to an intrinsic desire to read. Specifically, creating classroom cultures that foster reading and the sharing of books enhances reading engagement (Gambrell 1996; Roe 2008). According to Gambrell (1996), the motivation to read is, in turn, connected to six research-based factors. These factors involve access to books and a variety of literacy practices:

- (1) the teacher is an explicit reading model;
- (2) the classroom is a book-rich environment;
- (3) there are good opportunities for choosing literature;
- (4) there are opportunities to interact socially with each other;
- (5) there are opportunities to become familiar with a wide range of books; and
- (6) there are appropriate reading-related incentives (Gambrell 1996).

Empirical studies of literature-based literacy programs (also called 'book flooding programmes') indicate that students' reading of fiction in the language of instruction, the reading of books to students, and the pedagogical integration of reading, writing, and book-sharing activities contribute towards increased motivation for reading and the incidental learning of language and content. Research presented by Elley (1991), Morrow et al. (1997), Axelsson (2000), and Alleklev and Lindvall (2003), for instance, has shown a positive correlation between the reading of fiction in school subjects, students' literacy performance, and content learning. These studies from different parts of the world show that the mentioned reading activities enhance reading engagement and literacy development. This also pertains to students from linguistic minority backgrounds who read fiction and other books that interest them in the language of instruction (Alleklev and Lindvall 2003; Axelsson 2000; Elley 1991, 1992; Morrow et al. 1997).

The approach in the literature-based literacy project presented here addresses several of the factors that are held to facilitate reading engagement, including library use.

#### Project design and method

The research and development project involved a team of educational researchers, a teacher team at two different multilingual schools and public librarians who collaborated within literacy education for four years (Pihl 2011). One of the participating schools had 75% multilingual students, while the other school had only 11%. Here, we report results from the school with the majority of multilingual students. At the school, the principal, six teachers, one assistant, two bilingual teaching assistants, one school librarian, and one public librarian participated in the project. A branch of the public library was located in the vicinity of the school, and the main public library was situated in the city center. When the research project started, the school had approximately 600 children and almost 80 staff members (Espevoll 2009). Eighty-four children were followed in three participating classes from grade three through to grade six. The children were in fourth grade in the school year 2008/2009, the main year under discussion in this paper. Teachers and librarians collaborated to provide the classes with literature in terms of fiction and facts related to thematic topics in Norwegian, social science and visual arts. Teachers and librarians

worked with the fiction in multiple pedagogical ways in which the sharing of literary experiences was central (Axelsson 2000; Barton 2007). The librarian from the public library introduced new literature to the children and teachers.

A literature-based literacy program was developed during four years (2007–2011) (Pihl 2009, 2011; van der Kooij and Pihl 2009). The aim was to provide literacy education based on student reading of fiction in school subjects. This was implemented in terms of nonsegregated educational provisions. All pupils were included in the literature-based literacy program regardless of individual proficiency in the language of instruction, special educational needs, or linguistic minority background. The pedagogical interventions stimulated the students' voluntary reading at school, at home, and at the public library. Extensive use of the public library within literacy education was an important pedagogical intervention within the project. Students' individual choice of books was central.

The researchers proposed interprofessional collaboration between teachers and librarians, and use of library resources in order to realize the aims (Bueie and Pihl 2009; Pihl 2009; van der Kooij and Pihl 2009). Interprofessional collaboration was developed in network meetings and steering group meetings, which worked as 'change laboratories,' based on the principles outlined by Engeström in his theory of expansive learning (Engeström 1987; Engeström and Sannino 2010; Pihl 2011) Researchers conducted participant observation, interviewed teachers, and librarians within the project, monitored student reading and conducted the electronic survey in June of 2009.

The effect of collaboration between researchers, teachers, and librarians was that the teachers incorporated reading and work with fiction into the school subjects, and, together with the librarians, they selected books suitable for the specific classes and integrated the use of the public library and library resources into their pedagogical work. Literature-based literacy education was organized into four multidisciplinary topics during 2008 and 2009. Within these topics, the children were provided with books in the classrooms, with a total of 227 books rotating between the three classes. The teachers in two of the classes took the children to the public library seven times during the spring semester in 2009, whereas the third class visited the public library once on an organized trip. As part of the library visits, the librarian read and presented new, high-quality books to the visiting student groups.

The analysis is based on documentation of the quantity of the students' reading and a survey to the students in June 2009. Altogether, 66 of the 84 fourth graders in the project school completed the survey, representing a 79% response rate. Reading engagement was analyzed in terms of frequency and correlation analysis of reading enjoyment, voluntary reading, and use of the public library for literacy purposes. Based on ethical considerations, we did not conduct a pretest of reading engagement among the students in the three classes when the project started in 2007. According to the teachers, the students had not been engaged in extensive voluntary reading or visits to the library at school. This had not been prioritized by the teachers in literacy education before the research and development project started. We considered it unethical to ask the students to answer a survey in which all questions concerned student reading and library use. The survey was conducted after two years of research interventions and pedagogical work within the literaturebased education and library use within the book-flooding program. In the following, we present core research interventions and pedagogical measures in the literacy program, and the results in terms of reading engagement and library use.

#### Research interventions and non-segregated literacy education

Van der Kooij and Pihl (2009) identified two discourses that coexisted in the school in the initial phase of the research project: a 'resource discourse' and a 'deficiency discourse.' With the former, the staff regarded multilingualism as a resource for the student, the school, and society, and had high goals of integration, equality, and democratic participation for all the children. The deficiency discourse, however, involved a focus on what the minority children 'lacked' when they came to school. The staff looked for new ways to compensate for what they characterized as 'holes' in their everyday knowledge, conceptual understanding, and vocabulary that the minority children brought to school.

In the initial phase, the presence of the deficiency discourse was a challenge to the implementation of educational provisions requiring the inclusion of all students. The aim of the project was that literature-based education, and, in particular, extensive use of library resources, should involve all students, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction. Extending both the quality and the quantity of the use of the local branch of the public library, with its free access to qualified librarians and a wide selection of books, was a key method in the project for including all students in literacy education.

Several studies show that segregated teaching of minority children seldom has positive educational or social effects (Amrein and Berliner 2002; Bakken and Danielsen 2011; Nordahl, Kostøl, and Mausethagen 2009). Segregated teaching is also counterproductive when attempting to attain the school's goals of social equality and inclusion. In line with the deficiency discourse, however, the teachers first decided that only 'low achievers' should visit the public library on a regular basis during school hours. Use of library resources was regarded as a compensatory measure, which should only be provided to the 'needy.' At the time, the teachers were not convinced by the research findings presented in favor of nonsegregated educational measures. Thus, at the start of school in August 2008, the teachers organized library visits only for a small, select group of pupils from minority backgrounds – the second-language learners with literacy performance in the language of instruction at a critically low level. This amounted to segregated education.

After some weeks, however, the teachers stopped segregating the children into high- and low-achiever groups when visiting the library. Several factors contributed to the changes in teacher practice. The teachers seemed to be influenced by the dissemination of research that substantiated the impact of nonsegregated teaching on student learning and motivation. Furthermore, research presented about the positive outcomes of voluntary reading, along with the children's eagerness to read within the actual literature-based literacy program, contributed to changes in the teachers' practices (Pihl 2011).

#### Literature-based literacy education, library use, and reading engagement

The researchers monitored the reading of all 84 students in the fourth grade. The students', teachers' and researchers' careful documentation of the student reading throughout the school year showed that the students read a total of 123,000 pages during this year, yielding an average of 1464 pages per student. This means that, on average, each of these 84 students, most of whom were second-language learners

from low socioeconomic backgrounds, had read the equivalent of 15 books of almost 100 pages each in the language of instruction during one school year.

Bakken (2004) showed that the number of books in a student's home significantly affects his or her academic performance. In our electronic survey, students answered the question 'How many books do you own?' The median value of the responses was 18. Although the question only pertained to the books owned by the students themselves, it is fair to assume that the number gives an indication of the number of books in the family. For a comparison, we administered the survey at other project school in a middle-class area with only 11% multilingual students. The median value of books owned by the students at that school were  $40 \ (N=50)$ . A typical student at that school owned more than twice as many books as the typical student at the school with a majority of multilingual students.

What made the average student who owned only 18 books read 15 books with almost 100 pages each during one school year? The survey results and our observations indicate that the literature-based literacy program gave students access to interesting books and voluntary reading at school and at the library, and this facilitated reading engagement. The survey in 2009 documented that the overwhelming majority liked to read, and they read often in their free time: Altogether, 97% (64 out of 66) of the students reported that they enjoyed reading. When asked how often they read for pleasure, 88% reported that they read every day or several times a week because they wanted to. Only one student reported never reading for pleasure. Three quarters of the students liked to read for half an hour or more when they read for pleasure. These results show that two years into the project, the overwhelming majority of students in the project had a positive attitude towards reading. They engaged in voluntary reading in their spare time because they enjoyed it. This result is in positive contrast to findings in the late PISA study which documented that 34% of Norwegian students never read for pleasure (Hvistendahl and Roe 2009).

The survey also documented student use of the public library in their spare time. The students reported their use of the local branch of the public library, as well as their use of the main public library in the city center. In the survey, almost 90% of the students reported visiting the local public library branch at least once a week, and 68% of the students reported using this library several times a week or even daily. As noted earlier, teachers and the librarian organized seven visits to the local public library during this school year for each student in two of the classes, and one visit for each student in the third class. The remaining library visits reported by the students were visits they had made on their own. These students also used the main public library in the center of the city. Altogether, 60% of the students visited the main public library at least once a month. There was a small but statistically significant correlation between visiting the local branch and visiting the main public library: a student who visited the local branch often was also likely to have visited the main public library often (Pearson's r=0.362, correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)). The students' main activities at the public library were borrowing and reading books. Altogether, 95% of the students borrowed books and 64% read books at the public library. It is interesting that 50% of the students reported that they were with friends at the library. This indicates that the literacy practices the children engaged in at the library were social activities, which they shared with friends to a considerable extent.

We conclude that the students had become engaged readers in terms of reading enjoyment, voluntary reading, and use of the public library for literacy purposes.

According to the teachers, they did not practice literature-based literacy education or use the public library regularly before the research and development project started in 2007, and reading engagement in the language of instruction was generally low among the students. Against this background, we infer that the literature-based literacy program had made significant contributions to the reading engagement documented in the survey in 2009.

The overall high frequency of voluntary public library visits may well compensate for the relatively low numbers of books these students owned and the likely correspondingly low total number of books at home. The public library differs from the classroom in interesting ways. The library is a social place where people interact with each other and with the library resources available, which new literacy studies emphasizes as important for literacy activities such as reading. The public library is characterized as a 'liminal space' by Dressman (1997), a 'low-intensive' learning arena by Audunson (2005), and 'back-stage' by Rafste (2005), in contrast to the school, which is characterized as a 'high-intensive arena' (Audunson 2005) and 'front-stage' (Rafste 2005). The complementary qualities and resources of the public library may provide possibilities for a student to develop reading engagement according to his or her level of linguistic proficiency, interests, and pace, when the student uses the public library for his or her own needs.

The teachers and librarians play important roles as facilitators in a literature-based literacy education program. If the school and teachers acknowledge the potential contributions of librarians and the public library within literacy education, this may pave the way for interprofessional collaboration within literacy education. Pihl (2011) holds that in the present situation, in which discourses of accountability dominate the education sector, the mandate of the teaching profession is acutely ambivalent. Teaching is supposed to contribute to qualifications and democratic inclusion, but research indicates that education contributes towards the reproduction of social inequality. The reproduction of social inequality is mediated by high-stakes testing (Amrein and Berliner 2002; Pihl 2009; Wiley and Wright 2004). Against this background and the present state of multiplicity, the question of how teaching can qualify all pupils in the language of instruction and contribute to literacy, inclusion, and democratic citizenship is a pressing issue

The changes in literacy teaching practices – the literature-based program and collaboration between the school and public – provided the students with access to literature and reading in a new and stimulating milieu. The sharing of literary experiences was central to the project. Teachers dealt with literacy education as a social phenomenon. Without this, those children in the multicultural school who had few books at home would have had limited opportunities to choose reading material that interested them. In the project, they had the opportunity to engage in voluntary reading at school and at home, in a nonsegregated literacy education. They read fiction as well as facts within certain subjects in the school curriculum. The library provided the classes with books in classroom libraries which appealed to the diverse interests of the multilingual students that reduced the use of standard textbooks and 'tracked reading.' The organized trips to the local branch of the public library assisted the children in using the public library for their own reading purposes, giving them access to literature and, we suggest, extensive opportunity to express and develop their reading engagement. The results indicate that this, in combination with individual choice of books and sharing of literary events in an inclusive pedagogical environment, is important for the development of minority and majority student literacy and reading engagement.

#### Conclusion

In this paper, we analyzed what facilitates reading engagement in the language of instruction in multilingual classes. We presented results from a literature-based literacy project in Norway (2007–2011), which showed promising results in terms of reading engagement in the language of instruction among both first- and second-language learners. The results indicate that the school can successfully generate reading engagement among second-language learners and students with low socioeconomic status. Literature-based literacy education based on collaboration between teachers and librarians had a positive effect on the development of reading engagement, measured in terms of attitudes to reading, frequency, and amount of voluntary reading and library use. The results give rise to cautious optimism that literature-based literacy education may reduce possible negative effects of low socioeconomic status and linguistic minority background on reading engagement in the language of instruction.

We suggest that nonsegregated, literature-based literacy education and use of library resources in literacy education contributed to the positive results in terms of reading engagement. Literature-based literacy education and library use facilitate intercultural education (Pihl 2012). This is partly due to the fact that the content is more diverse than when teaching and learning is based on standard textbooks and 'tracked reading.' Collaboration between teachers and librarians within literacy education may contribute to realization of the mandate of the teaching profession. Such collaboration has yielded promising results with regard to reading engagement among all students. However, research shows that teacher–librarian collaboration and library use is prioritized to a very limited extent within literacy education (Pihl 2012). Such collaboration may significantly improve the quality and results of literacy education.

In conclusion, our research documents a positive interrelationship between literature-based literacy education, student access to books in classrooms and libraries, voluntary reading of fiction and facts, and reading engagement in the language of instruction among first- and second-language learners. These findings are in line with previous and recent research on reading and literacy education, which also documents that reading engagement in turn, has a positive impact on reading achievement (Krashen 2004, 2012). In the present era of accountability, teachers are under increased pressure to 'teach to the test.' The research findings which show the positive results of voluntary reading and library use, provide important arguments in favor of literacy education which provides time and space for voluntary reading of fiction and facts and library use in school.

#### **Notes on contributors**

Ingebjørg Tonne is an associate professor in Norwegian didactics at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Education and International Studies, Department of Primary and Secondary Teacher Education. In her research, Tonne is engaged with linguistic contrasts in the classroom and literacy and language development of primary and secondary school students. She is furthermore interested in the correlation between pupils' reading and writing competences. She has a PhD degree in linguistics (2001), with a dissertation on aspectual contrasts between Norwegian, Spanish, and English. She is a coeditor of the book 'Språkdidaktikk' ('Language didactics') with Mette E. Nergård (2008) and

she has recently published articles about the use of poetry as a way to find, see, and use the linguistic potentials in multilingual classrooms.

Joron Pihl is a professor of Multicultural Education at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Education and International studies, Department of International Studies and Interpreting. Her research focus is teaching and learning in an intercultural and global context, with particular focus on teacher professionalism and teacher qualification and practice. In the book 'Etnisk mangfold i skolen. Det sakkyndige blikket' (2010), she studied professional competence and discretion in assessment of linguistic minority students, and ethnic discrimination in schools. The project 'Multiplicity, empowerment, citizenship' (2007–2011), led by her, was an intervention study of literacy education, library use and interprofessional collaboration. Her several publications explored the construction of collective memory and professional practice in relation to national minorities and immigrants, and racism as a social phenomenon.

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