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Teaching hearing impaired pupils in mainstream schools: perceived challenges and possibilities in three English classes

Att undervisa elever med hörselnedsättning i inkluderande skolor: upplevda hinder och möjligheter i tre engelska klasser

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Abstract

This work examines the situation of hearing impaired students in Swedish mainstream upper-secondary schools, with special focus on English classes. According to the Swedish Curriculum all students should be offered an equivalent education, based on participation and community within the public school system. Although students with a disability have the same right to receive a satisfactory education it is not yet clear how this will be achieved with students with a hearing impairment. The authors, through semi-structured interview, ask three teachers and two pupils about how they perceive their situation when teaching, respectively learning English. The qualitative study shows the difficulties in the integration process of the hearing impaired students, in particular the obstacles these students face when socializing with their peers and the shortage of sufficient assistive devices, as well as pedagogical and didactic support.

Key words: special needs, hearing impairment, mainstream schools, inclusive teaching.
Preface

The authors have worked together all along the study process. As to the theoretical part, each author has individually read the literature and successively reported the data and discussed it. We have equally contributed to the data collection, the revision of the results and the analysis.

We would like to thank the teachers, the itinerant special teacher of the deaf and the students that have collaborated with us in the course of our research. We also want to thank our tutor, Bodil Svensson for her support and guidance through the research process.
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1 Introduction

One of the main objectives for the Swedish school is to establish a school for everyone, “en skola för alla” (a school for everyone). All students, irrespective of sex, place of residence, social and economic situation, or other circumstances are offered an equivalent education, based on participation and community, within the public school system (Lpo94, 3). In the Curriculum it is stated clearly that no one “should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief other than belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment” (10). Therefore, the school has a special responsibility for those students who, for various reasons, have difficulties in reaching and achieving the goals and the objectives of their education due to functional impairment.

A group that presents more difficulties in the process of integration in school is the group of the hearing impaired students. The deaf and the hearing impaired people in Sweden have been largely excluded from various activities of society including schools and are therefore perceived as a “different” group (Ross, 2008). Students with a disability have the same right to receive a satisfactory education but it is not yet clear how this will be achieved with students with a hearing impairment.

Only in 2009 the Swedish parliament approved a law stating that “public institutions have a particular responsibility for protecting and promoting Swedish Sign Language” (Bergman & Engberg, 2010).

According to Schönström (2010), the late recognition of sign language as a language with a status equivalent to a minority language, as well as the marginalization of people with a hearing impairment, has caused a delay in the research on the education of hearing impaired people so far. Studies have also shown that the skills that pupils with a hearing loss learn in school do not seem to be as deeply rooted as those of hearing students (Gellerstedt, 2006). Pupils with a hearing impairment generally do not achieve as high grades as hearing students or have the same wide vocabulary, mostly because their problem is not fully understood and consequently not properly dealt with (Wennergren, 2007). According to the Swedish Federation for
Disabled People (henceforth HRF), only twenty per cent of hearing impaired students achieve the objectives of the core subjects in the ninth grade and merely ten to fifteen per cent of students with hearing impairment continue to study at university while the percentage of hearing pupils is 45 per cent (Leijnse, 2009).

It is therefore important that schools are well prepared and have a deep understanding of the problems caused by hearing impairment in order to provide an equal school education, as stated in the Curriculum, both for pupils with hearing impairment as well as for students without this disability.

We are aware of the fact that every subject in school presents particular differences in the teaching and learning process. But since very little has been written about the difficulties encountered by hearing impaired pupils when learning English and since English will be one of our teaching subjects, we have decided to put the focus of our study on the situation for hearing impaired students when learning English in upper secondary schools.

1.1 Aim and research questions

In our work we intend to find out how teachers perceive the situation for hearing impaired pupils and at the same time we would like to observe how teachers and schools deal with this “diversity” within mainstream English classes.

In order to be able to reach our goal the main questions that we will try to answer are:

1) What challenges and possibilities do English teachers perceive when teaching hearing impaired students in mainstream schools?

2) How do hearing impaired students experience English lessons in mainstream classes?
2 General background

2.1 The school situation for hearing impaired pupils in Sweden

In Sweden there are over one million people with varying degrees of hearing loss of whom a third uses hearing aids. In school there is an estimated number of 4000 children and adolescent, between six and twenty years, who have a hearing impairment, use hearing aids or have a Cochlea Implant (CI) (a surgically implanted electronic device). To these figures there has to be added an unrecorded number of cases (HRF, 2006).

Although our research concentrates entirely on pupils with a hearing impairment that study in mainstream classes we believe that it is also important to have a general idea of the differences between special classes/schools and mainstream classes/schools. In his doctoral thesis, Odelius (2010) reports that in Sweden 84% of the hearing impaired pupils attend regular classes, 16% go to special classes within mainstream schools or in special schools for the deaf. There are eight schools with special classes for the hearing impaired and nine schools for the deaf (HRF, 2007). Wennergren (2007) points out that what mainly differentiates the three types of schools is the teaching language. In the schools for the deaf teachers use the sign language, in the special classes they teach in Swedish while the sign language is considered as second language. In regular classes Swedish is the only teaching language. Another important difference is that in mainstream classes pupils are much more numerous than in special classes, where the number of pupils is rarely more than seven/eight. Furthermore, both the schools for the deaf and the special classes are acoustically treated as well as provided with various types of aids for the deaf, such as microphones and audio induction loops. Many special classes for the hearing impaired in Sweden are inside mainstream schools. In special classes some activities are shared with hearing pupils and the teachers are all specialized in teaching children with a hearing
impairment. In these classes, the students’ degree of hearing loss can vary from mild to profound (Odelius, 2010).

Most of the children attending special classes have an average hearing loss over 60 dB (decibel). A hearing threshold of 25 dB or less is considered normal hearing. In general, these classes have fewer students – on average seven/eight – compared to regular classes, are acoustically treated and have hearing aids that are regularly controlled (Wennergren, 2007).

The severity of hearing impairment is measured in decibel of hearing loss and is ranked as mild, between 26 and 40dB HL, moderate, between 41 and 55 dB HL, severe, moderately severe, between 55 and 70 dB HL, severe, between 70 and 91, profound, 91dB HL or greater. In regular classes most of the hearing impaired pupils have an average hearing loss between 30-50 dB, which means that students have difficulties in hearing. With this hearing loss students have difficulties in understanding people talking in a noisy background as well as in hearing group discussions. Hearing aids are often prescribed even though many pupils do not use them.

In mainstream schools, teachers and children receive external support by special education teachers of the deaf. In Sweden special education has a central role in providing support to the hearing impaired students as well as to their teachers and parents. These teachers are employed by the local council and work with hearing impaired pupils in primary, secondary, private and special schools. Their main function is to ensure that pupils with a hearing impairment receive equal education opportunities, succeed in their studies and achieve the goals set up by their syllabus. They also inform and counsel teachers and relatives about the pupil’s disability in order to improve the knowledge and understanding of what having a hearing impairment means. Furthermore, these special teachers are of central importance to the students as reference persons for technical and psychological support.

An article published the 9th of September 2009 in the newspaper Sydsvenska Dagbladet, refers to the fact that in the nearest future in the most populated region in Sweden, Skåne, there will be only ten specially educated teachers able to teach children with a hearing impairment. According to Karin Johnsson, project leader at the National Agency for Specialpedagogiska Skolmyndigeten (Special Needs Education and Schools) the number of special teachers for the deaf active in Swedish schools has not increased in the last decades. One out of three councils cannot offer any help to the
children since there are not enough special teachers for the deaf to hearing impaired pupils. Karin Johnsson is afraid that if the specialized teachers of the deaf disappear the problems experienced by the hearing impaired student in mainstream schools will be easily forgotten. A pupil’s hearing impairment is not always obvious and easy to discover. If nobody informs the teachers about this kind of problem they will have a hard time in understanding how to deal with this disability (Leijnse, 2009).

2.2 What it means to be hearing impaired

According to the Svensk Teknisk Audiologisk Förening (Swedish Technical Audiology Association) little has been done in the last few years to improve our knowledge about hearing impaired people’s education prospects, about the different types of support they are entitled to and get and, maybe most important of all, about how the pupils themselves perceive their school attendance (STAF, 2010). In order to understand the situation of the hearing impaired pupils in school, we believe that it is important to first understand how pupils with these difficulties can experience school and how they experience their “diversity”.

Hearing impaired students want to be like their hearing classmates and they often feel uncomfortable when too much attention is drawn to their hearing problems. Many of them prefer not to speak about their difficulties. All this has, of course, social consequences. They often do not to take part in classroom activities, pretending not to be interested. For the reasons mentioned above, it is crucial not to make them feel different in the classroom in order to make the pupils feel accepted for what they are (Andersson, 1995).

Even a minor unidentified hearing loss may affect the learning process and result in some form of learning difficulty in school. Class work, for example, may suffer if students with a hearing impairment are expending extra energy trying to listen to the teacher, taking notes, and processing what is being heard all at once. The hearing problems of these pupils often go undetected because often teachers believe that their poor grades in school are caused by a lack of concentration or interest while more probably hearing impaired students simply do not understand what other people say (Gellerstedt, 2006).
It is difficult to determine what problems a hard of hearing pupil has by just looking at an audiogram. Even if it is relevant to know if the pupil has a slight, moderate or severe hearing loss and to be informed about his disability it is equally important to observe how a person with hearing loss understands speech in different environments with background noise. Barbara Stenross (1999), for instance, studied during a period of four years a self-help-group for people with a hearing impairment in the United States, Self Help for Hard of Hearing people. Through this study and by numerous interviews with members of the organization, she developed a better insight into what it can mean to live with a hearing loss. In her book she describes how people with a hearing loss perceive their situation and difficulties in communicating with others, how a certain noise in a conversation can lead to large gaps and misunderstandings in communication.

A person with hearing impairments may have more difficulties when communicating in larger groups: they understand certain words but have difficulties in understanding others. Some sounds are harder to perceive, like consonants th, f, s. Missed consonants can lead to missed words and thus lack of understanding of the context. Consequently, a lack of understanding can lead to a lower self-esteem and to all the consequences that low self-esteem brings, because as Wennergren (2006) points out, communication affects our identity and self-image. Often hard of hearing people try to fill in the gaps by guessing the context, but not always they guess right. Furthermore, Brunnberg (2003) notices that people with a hearing impairment (but that are not deaf) do not feel any sense of belonging, neither with deaf nor with hearing people since they are in between these two poles. As a consequence, this can increase, yet again, their social and linguistic insecurity.

In conclusion, we can state that hearing is probably the most important sense in order to maintain a living relationship with the outside world, not just through language but above all by the perception of all the sounds around us (Andersson, 1995). For these reasons, it is vital for a pupil with a hearing impairment to develop other kinds of communication such as e-mail, SMS, web camera, which can help them in communication with others (Wennergren, 2007).
2.2.1 Inclusion or exclusion?

Education systems have changed drastically in the last few years as educating pupils with different kinds of disabilities has become a goal of major importance in many countries. This objective has brought the trend of including pupils with special needs in mainstream classes. Keeping children with disabilities in regular education settings instead of referring them to special schools is better described with the term “inclusion”. According to Rafferty, Boettcher and Griffith (2001), inclusion refers to the process of educating children with disabilities in the regular education classrooms of their neighbourhood schools, the schools they would attend if they did not have disabilities, and providing them with the necessary services and support. Parallel to the developments towards the process of including pupils with disabilities into regular schools the terminology to portray these pupils has changed. In the last few decades the focus shifted away from the pupils’ disabilities to the special needs the pupil has in his/her education (De Boer & Minnaert, 2009).

Inclusion is a concept that can be related to many different aspects and involves several dilemmas (Nilholm & Alm, 2010). The fact that children with disabilities attend mainstream classes is a necessary but insufficient measure. In order to talk about inclusion, certain values are central, for example, the positive valuation of pupils’ “differences” and that they thrive in school. A positive attitude to difference, however, seems to be still hard to achieve. (Emanuelsson, 2004).

Several researchers suggest that there is a risk that inclusion only involves moving specific educational practices into the classroom (McLeskey and Waldron, 2007). Some authors even question whether progress is being achieved towards making education more inclusive and warn about the risk that inclusion comes to mean nothing more than moving children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Williamsson et al, 2006). In a report from 2007 the Hörselskadades Riksförbund (Swedish Association for the Hard of Hearing) observes that inclusion in mainstream schools often means adapting to a school intended for hearing people, e.g. a school with big classes, unsuitable acoustic environment and limited access to technical and pedagogical support (Hrf, 2007). The consequences for the hearing impaired pupils can be a strong sense of isolation in and outside the classroom (Nilholm & Alm, 2010).
3 Previous research and Theory

3.1 Previous Research

One of the first studies regarding the situation for students with hearing impairments in the Swedish school was conducted by Nordén, Tvingstedt and Äng (1990) between 1979 and 1980. In this research it appeared that most of the classrooms were not suited for pupils with a hearing impairment. As a consequence, these pupils were often more tired than hearing pupils since they had to make a greater effort in order to understand teachers and classmates. From this study it also appeared that hearing impaired pupils were also affected in their social life since they used their free time to do homework, in order to balance what they had missed during the lessons in school. But the most important point in this study was that many of the students with hearing impairments in regular classes reported that they did not feel integrated in their class (Nordén et al., 1990).

Another important and similar study was conducted in the early 1990s by Anna-Lena Tvingstedt. This study was more referred to the social situation of students with hearing impairments attending regular classes. As in the previously mentioned study, Tvingstedt noticed how pupils with a hearing loss, especially teenagers, generally felt left out during lessons and social activities in school. Most of the students in mainstream secondary schools had no friends and felt isolated. It also has to be remembered that in this study it was stressed that students who decided not to use hearing aids had a better social life than students who used aids.

Another significant conducted by Antonson in 1998. The study investigated the possibilities of being successful at school for students with a hearing impairment. According to Antonson, “success” in school depends on the support students with a hearing loss receive but also on the student’s (and parents”) persistence in making requirements regarding technical equipment and a good acoustic environment (1998).
In more recent years an important contribution was made by Lotta Coniavitis Gellerstedt (2006) who studied how students with hearing problems experienced the differences between regular and special schools. The report showed that students who went to mainstream schools experienced more difficulties than students who went to special schools. Many of them mainly experienced problems understanding classmates and teachers, and handling stress and fatigue.

Schönström (2010) also remarks that the majority of pupils going to mainstream schools are disadvantaged because they attend schools that cannot offer them the right environment for their type of disability. On the other hand Wennergren (2006) underlines that a special education, being too individualized, can in a way threaten the process to social integration.

From these studies we have noticed that in many schools there was an insufficient understanding of the problems related to a hearing impairment. This lack of knowledge can be summarised in the following way:

a) Poor understanding of the social consequences that hearing impaired pupils encounter.

b) Inadequate acoustic in the classrooms making it harder for the pupils to understand and communicate with teachers and classmates.

3.2 Theory

A disability in and of itself is not a tragedy. It is only an occasion to provoke a tragedy

(Vygotsky quoted in Vygodskaya, 1999, p. 330)

The problems investigated in this research are not always easy to delimit since they can involve many other related problems. Studies on “diversity”, in our case “diversity” provoked by a hearing impairment, the different ways of perceiving and dealing with “diversity”, have been object of many discussions and studies.

For these reasons, we believe it is important to carefully select our theoretical tools in order to better succeed in our analysis. The theoretical basis that we assume, which we believe are relevant to our subject, is the notion of dialogue as intended by Bakhtin in his work The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M.
Bakhtin (1981). In this work Bakhtin describes dialogue as the place where all individuals’ voices are heard. According to Bakhtin, all the different voices in a dialogue give the opportunity for a variety of reactions, frictions and differences. To put it in Dysthe’s words, the dialogue is formed by many voices where everyone brings his/her own sociocultural background and where all these differences between voices and backgrounds give room to a potential material in education (1993). For these reasons, we believe that the notion of dialogue has to be taken from a more sociocultural perspective as it is summarized in this passage from Dysthe’s work Writing and Talking to Learn (1993): “A dialogue is, as I see it, a necessity, not only for the learning of subject matter, but as a model of how to function as a human being in a democratic society” (quoted in Wennergren, 2007, p. 6).

The importance of functioning as a “human being in a democratic society” is also mentioned in the Curriculum. According to the Curriculum, in fact, one of the aims of the school is to teach pupils democratic values, to make them able to exchange views, and show empathy and tolerance (Lgr11, p. 9). However, this is only possible if all the pupils, including hearing impaired pupils, are able to participate in the dialogue and in the discussion. Dialogue and communication are central in the pedagogical development for both hearing and hearing impaired students.

Often failure of dialogue and communication are ascribed to the pupils and in their biological disability of not hearing or not hearing well. However, in her work Dialog Kompetens i Skolans Vardag (2007) Wennergren argues that this failure frequently lies in the lack of proper environmental instruments where all pupils can “develop different ways of participating in a dialogue” and where they can feel “involved, heard and respected” (5). In order to achieve an environment where these requirements are met and in order to achieve a satisfactory dialogue that includes hearing impaired students, Wennergren lists four requirements:

1) an arranged sound environment
2) possibilities of visual support
3) conversation rules
4) a comfortable environment

(Wennergren, 2007: 94)
The importance of dialogue and communication in school is also pointed out in many of Vygotsky's works. According to Vygotsky, in fact, language is a resource for communicating with other people, and therefore language is a resource for thinking and learning. However, if one of the conditions listed above is missing, it becomes hard, and sometimes impossible, for hearing impaired pupils to understand the used “language” and consequently they feel left out. In other words, if language is, as Vygotsky puts it, a resource for thinking, thinking is not possible if the spoken language is not understood or communicated. In relation to the disabilities that can influence dialogue and communication Vygotsky says:

Every disability, whether it is blindness, deafness, or mental retardation, not only destroys the child’s ability to respond to the physical world, but also influences his relationships with people. A disability is a kind of “social dislocation” brought about by relationship of the child to his environment. And although the disability itself (blindness, deafness) is a biological fact, the educator is confronted not so much by biological facts as by their social consequences. Therefore, the education of such child comes down to straightening out these social dislocations. The goal of the teacher is to help the child to live in this world, and to create compensations for his or her physical shortcoming... so that the disruption of social relationships is repaired in another way.

(quoted in Vygodskaya, 1999, p. 331)

In relation to the teaching of a language, in our study English, we believe that the notions of dialogue and communication, as explained above, are significantly important. That is also why we believe that this approach is the best because it gives us the possibility of a deeper analysis including both social and teaching/learning perspectives.
4 Method

4.1 Method

The field on which we have decided to work is related to individual perceptions and in a way to social structures. Therefore, we believe that the best tool that we can use in order to succeed in our research is the qualitative method, which allows us to understand what happens in class in terms of socialization and pedagogical choices. According to Backman (2008), a qualitative approach studies how individuals perceive and interpret their reality. The process, more than the result, characterizes a qualitative perspective.

Unlike the traditional research method, where a hypothesis is formulated and has to be proved, the qualitative method starts collecting data that will be later related to theories or hypothesis. The study often begins with vague and diffuse questions that become more and more precise in the course of the investigation. For these reasons, it is preferable to use the so called case study in order to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. A case study can have different purposes: to describe, to explain or to investigate a phenomenon (Backman, 2008). Therefore during our interviews we asked questions that had a qualitative approach. According to Kvale (1997) qualitative interviews are effective tools to investigate people’s experiences and behaviours. In addition, he describes a qualitative interview as a conversation with both a purpose and structure. Our qualitative interviews have been semi-structured with a series of previously prepared questions, leaving, however, room to other questions in relation to the informants’ answers. This allows the interviewer to be open and flexible in front of unexpected perspectives and suggestions from the informant. We followed a structure in our interviews but at the same time we were open for new issues that appeared from the informants’ answers. Qualitative interviews in fact give us the possibility to interact with the reference person with so called open questions that give more freedom to the interviewed person to speak about his/her
impressions and feelings (Bryman, 2005). The purpose of our interviews was to get our questions illuminated from many different directions. For these reasons, we believed that it was best to interview both teachers of pupils with a hearing loss as well as pupils with a hearing impairment. With this in mind, we hoped that comparing their interpretations of reality would lead us to a deeper comprehension of the problems taken in consideration.

Before we started the actual interviews we informed the interviewees about privacy and secrecy. Since the interviews regarded a rather sensitive subject we tried from the beginning to set a relaxed atmosphere and this was especially done with the interviews with the pupils. The interviews lasted about 50-60 minutes and they were always conducted privately.

4.1.1 Data collecting and procedure

Finding people willing to be interviewed was the first main problem that we encountered in our data collecting. It was hard to find hearing impaired students in the local upper-secondary schools. First, we contacted the *Specialpedagogiska Skolmyndigheten* (National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools) where they advised us to contact the Council of the city where we intended to conduct our interviews. At the Council’s Department for Education we were given the telephone number and mail-addresses of the Special Education Itinerant Teachers for the Deaf. The very helpful special teacher gave us a list of possible English teachers and hearing impaired students that were interested to participate. We did not know how many pupils and teachers would agree to be interviewed, but we thought that three teachers and three pupils would be sufficient for a qualitative research (Kvale, 1997). We sent a mail to all the teachers where we explained the purpose of our study and our policy concerning the information gathered during the interview. After several mails and telephone calls we could finally meet most of the expected people to be interviewed. Since the majority of the pupils were minors we had to ask their parents for permission to interview their children. All the interviews were recorded.
4.1.2 Presentation of the interviewed teachers

All the interviewed teachers and pupils have been given fictional names in order to protect their privacy. All the interviewed teachers teach in different schools as well as the pupils study in different schools. Therefore, for each of the three schools in our study we have interviewed a teacher and a pupil. The interpretation of the data is of course subjective.

**Göran**
Göran is a teacher who has been teaching English between five to ten years. During his career as a teacher he has had two pupils with hearing impairment: one, Markus, wearing hearing aid, the other, Niklas, not wearing any assistive listening device.

**Sven**
Sven is a young teacher, with less than five years of teaching experience. He teaches English and has never taught hearing impaired pupils previously. His hearing impaired student is a sixteen-year-old girl, Leila, coming from a mainstream school. She does not wear hearing aids.

**Eva**
Eva is an energetic teacher and she is the oldest of the three interviewed teachers. She has been teaching English at Emma’s school for one and a half year. Emma is her first pupil with a hearing impairment.

4.1.3 Presentation of the interviewed pupils

**Markus**
Markus is sixteen, and has just started upper secondary school. He comes from a mainstream school. He wears hearing aids.
Emma
Emma is 16 years old and comes from a special school for the deaf. She has a severe hearing loss and has always been wearing a hearing aid. She uses a wireless aid consisting in a receiver and an earpiece, while the teacher speaks into a microphone. This system is called FM system and according to Emma it cost the school about 100,000 SEK.

Leila
We were supposed to interview Leila as well but at the last moment she changed her mind and refused to be interviewed. Sven told us that she was nervous at the idea of the meeting and would have preferred to be interviewed with him.

4.2 Ethics
When we contacted the teachers and the students, and before we started the interviews, we informed them about the purpose of the study and that the participation was free. We also informed them that all data gathered and all their given information would be anonymous. We have tried as well to reduce to the minimum the information about our informants so to avoid the risk of being identified. In taking in consideration these aspects when proceeding with our interviews we have intended to respect the principles present in the code of ethics stating that:

“The security, anonymity and privacy of research subjects and informants should be respected rigorously, in both quantitative and qualitative research. The sources of personal information obtained by researchers should be kept confidential, unless the informants have asked or agreed to be cited. Should informants be easily identifiable, researchers should remind them explicitly of the consequences that may follow from the publication of the research data and outcomes.”

(International Sociological Association, 2011)

In addition, we repeated a few times during the interviews (this especially to the students) that they were free to withdraw their participation whenever they wished or whenever they felt uncomfortable for any reason.
Especially during the interviews with the students we bore in mind Giota’s arguments in relations to the ethical considerations to reflect on when interviewing young people. According to Giota (2005), during these kinds of interviews, it is important to see young people as they actually are and trust their perspective in questions that are related to their world as young people. This is, in Giota’s view (2005), important and necessary in order to better understand young students’ perspectives and therefore being able to actually analyse their answers from a youth perspective.
5 Results

To make our report easier to analyse we have divided IT into two main sections. The first section is related to the interviews with teachers while the second is related to the interviews with the pupils. Each of the main sections is in turn structured into sub-sections.

**Interviews with teachers**

a) Support from the school and information  
b) Environmental instruments to facilitate dialogue and communication  
c) Teacher awareness in relation to pupils’ hearing impairment  
d) Social climate in the classroom  
e) Individual needs and teaching strategies to facilitate dialogue and communication  
f) Dialogue and policy documents  
g) Possible improvements

**Interviews with pupils**

a) Perceived difficulties  
b) Social climate in class  
c) Possible improvements

5.1 Interview with the teachers

a) **Support from the school and information**  
In our opinion, one of the most important things to do in order to have a better functioning dialogue with pupils with a hearing impairment is to be well prepared on the subject of hearing loss. Therefore, we believe that it is vital that schools give the
right support and information to their teachers in order to help them succeeding with a better communication with the pupils.

Göran says he has been informed by the itinerant special teacher for the deaf that he would have a hearing impaired student in his class. He has been handed different kinds of literature about hearing impaired students, such as technical information about hearing aids as well as literature about possible strategies to be used when teaching pupils with hearing problems. He has had meetings with other teachers in school to discuss about hearing impaired students. While he has been informed in time of the presence of Markus he was not informed at all about a student, Niklas, with a similar impairment who attended his class the previous year. In that case, the student himself told him about his problem.

Sven was informed of the presence of a hearing impaired pupil in his class only two weeks after he had started his classes. He explains that it normally takes more time to be informed when the students come as new students from another school. In addition, the headmaster usually informs first the mentor of the presence in the school of a student with special needs and since Sven does not have any mentorship he was not contacted by anybody. As Leila does not wear hearing aids it has not been easy for Sven to realise that she had a hearing impairment. Sven felt from the beginning that there was some kind of problem with Leila seeing that she often avoided his lessons and he started to suspect about her hearing problems because she was often silent during lessons. Finally, talking to another teacher he was informed about Leila’s impairment.

He explains that afterwards he understood that she did not dare to speak directly to him because she was afraid of his judgement: “I realised incidentally that she had hearing problems. She never told me. I think she was scared of me because I’m a very demanding teacher and she had very poor self-esteem.”

Sven adds that he has not received advice neither from the special teacher for the deaf, whom he has never met, nor from his colleagues or head master. Consequently, he has felt quite helpless and alone in this situation. Fortunately, his relationship with Leila has improved with the time and now he does not feel so frustrated: “…had it been another student, one of those students who say “I don’t care”, it would have been much harder. But in some ways, Leila is one of those easy-to-help students…”
Eva has been informed in time about Emma’s hearing impairment. In addition to this, she has often been contacted by the pupil’s mother, who is also hearing impaired as well as a special teacher for the deaf. Besides, Eva has attended a five credits course in special pedagogy and she seems to have a sincere interest for children with special needs.

b) Environmental instruments to facilitate dialogue and communication

Another issue that we believe to be significant for our study is the school and teachers’ awareness in relation to the importance of good acoustics in the classrooms. “The acoustics in this school are really bad,” is the first comment that we have from Göran when we ask him about acoustics in the classrooms. Göran claims that the classrooms have not the necessary adaptations/ assessments to improve the acoustics, a problem that has also been discussed with the headmaster but so far with no results in terms of actions. “It is a matter of money and costs,” Göran adds. In any case, according to Göran, acoustics do not seem to be a major problem in his case since he does not have many pupils in class, a number around ten to twelve, and it is therefore easier to control the background noise.

Even in the school where Sven teaches, the acoustics seem to be of insufficient quality but, to his knowledge, there is not any plan to improve them. However, he tries to overcome this problem by moving, when possible, to smaller classrooms. Thanks to discussions with his colleagues he is also aware of the importance of lowering the level of background noise but he has not received any clear indication or tangible example on how to proceed. Like Göran, Sven feels lucky to have few students in his English lessons, just fifteen, and therefore he believes that it is easier to have a better control of background noise.

In relation to acoustics, Eva cannot give us any information claiming that she has no knowledge about this matter. She says: “I don’t know anything about acoustics. I don’t know if they have checked it, but you can ask Emma about it.”

During our research we have often read about the importance of disposing the class in a U shape in order to facilitate both hearing and hearing impaired pupils’ communication. However, neither Göran nor Sven or Eva have taken such an action in order to help their pupils during lessons. They all keep a more traditional class disposition seeming unaware of the difficulties that hearing impaired students might
encounter. Instead, they leave free choice to their pupils to sit where they feel most comfortable and where they believe they hear well. On this matter, for example, Göran says: “Markus sits in the middle so that he can hear both those behind and in front of him. I have not placed him in a special position. He can sit where he believes it is best for him.”

However, all the interviewed teachers state that they try to speak as distinctly and slowly as possible, never turning their back to their pupils, so that they can hear them better and read their lips when talking.

c) Teacher awareness in relation to pupils’ hearing impairment
In order to improve communication, we believe that it is important to be as aware as possible about the hearing problems that a pupil might have. During our interviews, however, it appears that the teachers do not have a clear comprehension of the hearing problems that their pupils have. They know of course that they have problems but they do not seem to be aware of the entity of the pupils hearing problems or if they have for instance problems to hear vowels, consonants or other sounds. Göran says that he has “no idea about how serious his (Markus) injury is. I have the papers though.” Then he adds: “All I know is that Markus uses hearing aids on both ears and that he hears a bit strange with aids but has not problems to understand…”

Similarly to Göran, Sven also seems unaware of how badly Leila hears. Nevertheless he has noticed that she cannot hear specific sounds, like tj/sh sounds. “I do not remember as a percentage how much she (Leila) misses but it is on both ears and she has really big problems when you pronounce tj / sh sounds and these sounds. She cannot distinguish among the different sounds,” Sven says. And finally Eva claims that she has “no idea but I’m often in contact with her (Emma’s) mother”

d) Social climate in the classroom
As we have discussed in the previous pages, a common tendency for hearing impaired pupils is to have problems in socialising. Therefore, we wanted to find out if this is also a problem that appears in our studied cases. On this matter Eva says that her pupil Emma has no problems at all in socialising since she is always with four other girls from the same class with whom she feels comfortable: “She has some friends, four girls with whom she will also have to write a project within the upcoming weeks. They are
always together, they work and talk together. I don’t see any problems at all in Emma’s socialisation.” According to Eva, Emma is a bit shy but she is quite firm in telling us that this is not due to her hearing impairment. We asked Eva about Emma’s general knowledge of youth culture, music, and cinema, since according to the literature that we have read during our research hearing impaired pupils can experience it in different ways if compared to hearing students causing a harder time in communicating these experiences. Eva, however, believes that although Emma experiences youth culture, music or cinema in a different way this is not because of her “disability”. Eva believes that “even if you have a handicap, it may be that you have different tastes in music for example. After all we are all unique individuals.”

Even Göran seems to be on the same line as Eva, telling us that Markus does not show any socialisation problems in class. He adds that many of Markus’ school friends ask him for help during lessons. This seems to be confirmed during our interview with Markus. However, when attention is shifted, it appears that both Markus’ and Emma’s social life in school is not comparable to the one of hearing students. Göran tells us about the time he took his class to a hockey match when he was surprised to see that Markus talked mostly, if not only, with him. Göran adds: “Markus is a loner but it’s hard to say whether it is because of his hearing problems or if it is related to something else.”

Further, Göran tells us that Markus prefers individual tasks rather than working in a group, but again he is not sure if this depends on his impairment. In addition, even Göran believes that it is better to avoid group discussions either in relation to Markus’ impairment or to the fact that Göran’s class is hard to control. For these reasons, he does not allow discussions in groups bigger than two members because he believes that “it easily becomes messy when they work in bigger groups. But when they sit in pairs it is easier to control what they do. Therefore, we don’t do much group work.”

With reference to Leila’s relations to her classmates Sven says that he is not aware if she has close friends. In a second time he recalls her telling him that she only has a friend, a friend with whom she often skips school and who has, according to Sven, a bad influence on Leila. As far as he can remember she goes out with few other girls after school but he is not sure if she does it because she likes them or because she
does not have anybody else to go out with. Sven also perceives that Leila feels uneasy in class, she speaks very rarely and she refuses to wear hearing aids.

All in all, it seems that all the pupils in this study seem to have different kinds of problems in socialising both in and outside school, a tendency that will be later confirmed in the interviews with the pupils.

e) Individual needs and teaching strategies to facilitate dialogue and communication

During the interviews Sven, Göran and Eva mentioned the significance of individual programs and individual strategies both for hearing impaired and hearing pupils. “Alla är olika” (everyone is different), says Eva, underlining the importance of an adapted teaching to every individual student as stated in the Curriculum. Eva, for example, describes her teaching methods as a “mix of everything,” relating to the fact that every pupil is different and special, and therefore she wants to give a bit of everything for all the different individuals in the class. Eva gives her pupils much responsibility and at the time the interview is taken, her pupils were working on a project on energy that they had chosen themselves. During the work on the mentioned project she helps every group as well as the individuals in every group. She calls it “entrepreneurial teaching,” since they have a task to fulfil, they work in teams, and at the same time they are responsible for their own individual work. Furthermore, they have to inform potential clients and the general public about their ideas on sustainable energy resources. According to Eva, this is a very effective method both for hearing and hearing impaired pupils like Emma.

Sven states that he uses a communicative approach moving around in the class and often talking to the students individually during lessons. He also tries to adapt the contents and the goals of the lesson to the group. However, when asked to give us a tangible example of this method it appears to us that, at least from this example and in our subjective interpretation, his method is far from communicative: “I usually take a text and write questions on the writing board, mostly related to who the characters are, what they do and so on. On other occasions I also ask more difficult questions like “what do you think…?” or “why do you think…?”

In any case, he is clearly aware of the communication problems that may occur and in order to facilitate Leila’s inclusion in the classroom, he tries to speak
slowly and distinctly. “I repeat things even ten times if I have to,” says Sven. He also has meetings with Leila every Friday where they discuss individual plans to achieve the goals set in the classroom. During these individualized lessons Sven and Leila go through grammar, because Leila has a poor general English knowledge and also because he wants to prepare her for the national test. In relation to the preparation to the national test Sven has suggested Leila to try to listen to films without subtitles and take notes of what she hears and understands.

The main difficulty appears to be Leila’s introvert personality. Leila, in fact, does not speak in the class, she is afraid of making mistakes and she also avoids eye-contact trying to make herself invisible. Additionally, Sven adds that Leila “has very low self-esteem and she never wants to talk in front of a large group. I try to listen to everyone and I try to encourage everyone but she never wants to speak.”

Hence, Sven adds that it is quite difficult for him to reach Leila and to understand what she needs to know since she does not want to show to the class that she has not understood. Other times, on the other hand, “she has a very friendly behaviour and I think it is because she wants to avoid that I ask her something. More or less she wants to say “I’m nice, so let me avoid having to talk’’”.

All in all, we understand that the teachers try to adapt teaching to the pupils’ special needs and differences. However, when focus is shifted it appears that the individualized instruction (individualisering) in relation to the Curriculum requirements is something nearly impossible to achieve according to the teachers. “We don’t have enough time” says Sven while Göran and Eva complain about the long time that has to be spent on paperwork, thus making it impossible to meet all pupils’ needs and special needs. This is also confirmed when all the interviewed teachers tell us in practical terms about their methods used in their teaching. Göran, for instance, reminds us about the difficulty of conducting individualized teaching in the class of unmotivated students where he teaches. He says: “I have absolutely no problems with Markus, on the contrary it is the other students I mostly have problems with.”

According to Göran, his students are not independent, they rarely take initiative and they need to be directed in their studies. Therefore, he believes that the only tool that he has and the best method that he can use in this kind of class is the “traditional” method (katederundervisning). He says that he usually stands in the middle speaking to the class. He writes everything on the blackboard and gives written
instructions to everybody. He tries to keep a very low level in his lessons because as soon as the teaching becomes more complex the students lose interest completely. Göran repeats the instructions many times to be sure that everybody has understood. He often uses overheads and texted videos. According to Sven, who also believes in this conventional type of teaching, this is the only way to teach in a class of poorly motivated students but it works as well when teaching hearing impaired students in such an environment.

Göran and Sven tell us about the difficulties that rise when trying to encourage group activities or having conversations in class. The answer to this problem is to avoid the communicative part addressing all the students preferring to divide the class into groups of two. Another answer is also to avoid multitask exercises where the students have to listen, watch the teacher and take notes.

During our interview it also appears that the teachers trust their intuition, often eye-contact, to understand if the pupils hear and understand. In addition, all the teachers claim to have told their hearing impaired students several times to tell them whenever they have problems in hearing them. Eva, for example says: “I have told Emma more than once: “Tell me whenever you have problems! If you don’t want to say it, kick me, do anything so that I understand your needs.

Finally, Sven points out that Leila has shown in a few occasions a scarce knowledge of English/American culture in comparison to her classmate: “Yes, I have noticed that when we have discussions about English/American culture she is even more invisible than usual.” He is however not sure about how he could help Leila on this problem.

Göran believes that in order to help Markus’ communication in a difficult class like the one in which he teaches, the traditional method is the best he can offer. He has not changed his teaching strategies in relation to Markus and in order to help Markus in communicating with his school friends. He states: “I have not changed anything since my lessons are very controlled and structured. They need easy tasks and good structure otherwise they lose concentration. I say for example, “read from page 3 to page 9, then do exercises number 1,2,3, etc.” It is the same structure all the time and they can work on their own.”

Göran thinks that well-structured lessons are appropriate both for Markus and for the rest of the class. Therefore, there is no need of individual plans in his
teaching. He writes instructions very easily and clearly and this allows Markus to participate to the lesson with ease. In addition he tries to keep constant eye-contact with Markus to be sure he understands what is said during the lesson.

f) Dialogue and policy documents

In relation to the policy documents, Göran is well aware that the students have the right to have special tests, for example listening and speaking: “They have rights and opportunity to use adapted tests. For one thing certain criteria in the course curriculum can be ignored when grading, for another all parts (of tests) do not need to be regarded. Listening comprehension and oral exams should be adapted to the student.”

Sven is also aware of the fact that Leila entitled to special tests, in particular listening tests, where she can sit alone, rewind the tape recorder and listen to what is said several times. Regarding the steering documents he believes that they should be interpreted as general suggestions.

Eva shows us a copy of the supportive measures that teachers are entitled to use for pupils with special needs during the National Test.

g) Possible improvements

According to Wennergren (2007) it is important to let both teachers and pupils name what could be done and what is wished in order to improve the situation in school for pupils with a hearing impairment. On this matter, Göran seems to be quite satisfied of the present situation in the school. He believes that he has enough technical support, having access to the internet and being able to show films and programs in English with help of the subtitles. Besides, the pupils can also borrow computers from the school. The problem for him is not the technical equipment but the low motivation of the students. He considers that he has support from his colleagues and that he has not needed the help of a special teacher for the deaf for any of his hearing impaired students. He thinks that the hearing impaired pupils that he has had do not/did not get tired when following his lessons because of the low tempo. According to Göran, they do not/did not need individualized lessons either, since the other students’ results are so poor and the general level is very low. He says: “Had it been a better school where everyone has MVG, Markus and Niklas would have had problems to keep up with, but not here, where the level is not so high.”
Sven wishes his students to feel that the teacher knows about their difficulties and that has respect for them. Secondly, he considers the possibility of working in a team: “I believe that it is not wrong to have two teachers in a class, a team, complementing each other. Unfortunately, many schools think it is not possible because it costs too much money.”

He also believes that the school could offer him and the other teachers that have to deal with hearing impaired pupils, a course in order to acquire enough knowledge to cope with pupils with a hearing impairment. In his opinion, poor knowledge leads to insecurity and stress. For these reasons, he would appreciate more contacts with a special teacher for the deaf. Nevertheless, he thinks that pupils with a hearing loss should not be a concern for the special teacher only: “I have noticed that in general, many teachers have a tendency to send their pupils with special needs to the special teachers and by doing so they believe that they have solved the problem. But this can create barriers between students and teachers.”

Sven would also like to have access to language labs and special audio-visual programs for the deaf. In these programs the students can see, write and listen without being disturbed by background noises.

Finally, Eva seems to be satisfied of the situation in her school and believes that she is offered all the possibilities a school can offer in order to deal with a pupil with a hearing loss. Her only wish is to attend a special course in Swedish sign language.

5.2 Interview with the pupils

The interviews with the pupils are for obvious reasons structured in a different way compared to the ones with the teachers. Nevertheless, they are of course related.

a) Perceived difficulties
We believe it is important to find out what difficulties pupils with a hearing impairment experience in their education and how these pupils experience communication and dialogue in school. Markus does not seem to have many problems in English and in the
first part of the interview he seems very firm in stating that everything is “just fine”: “I can’t really say to have problems in English.”

Markus points out that there are not many students in class and that this diminishes the background noises, and therefore it is not difficult for him to hear what the teacher says. However, he mentions that if his classmates speak in a low voice he cannot hear them, but he mostly follows the lesson. His place in the middle of the class is quite strategic and allows him to see the faces of his classmates and of the teachers. Furthermore, when listening to films or to a registration he usually reads the subtitles or the transcription. “When we do listening exercises I usually have the text as aid so that I won’t miss anything,” Markus says.

Markus shows little enthusiasm in relation to English as a subject in school but he has no problems getting passing grades. We also understand that he gets his best results in writing and reading. He tells us that he has no problems asking the teacher to repeat whenever he feels he has missed something. All in all, it really seems that Markus has no problems of any kind. However, when put in front of an example of a potential embarrassing moment in which he has to ask for more information or for a repetition he admits that he often choses to show that he has understood although in reality he has not. In addition, he cannot remember any class discussion or group work, and most, if not all, of the tasks are individual. Therefore, there seems to be very little communication in class and it is thus hard to say if Markus is offered the right conditions to participate without problems in communicative activities. For these reasons it is hard for us to state if Markus has problems with eventual background noise since, as we have already said, there is very little communication in classroom.

Emma has a slightly different background compared to Markus’. She attended a special school for the deaf before moving to mainstream classes in high school. She says that without a doubt she felt more comfortable in the special school, where she could have more individual support from the teacher and had more in common with her school friends. In the special school she also learned the sign language for the deaf. Nevertheless, she says she is adapting well in mainstream school especially because of the good acoustics in the classrooms and the receiver that she can wear when the teacher speaks. She mentions that her mother has been reminding the school many times about all the necessary requirements for hearing impaired students and checking acoustic and light in the classrooms.
She also mentions one of her relatives who also has hearing problems and who goes to another school. According to Emma her cousin does not receive the same treatment as she does, because his parents are not as persistent as Emma’s mother and therefore the school fails to help hearing impaired pupils. Consequently, Emma’s relative does not achieve the same grades as Emma and has a harder time in school. In other words, we have a confirmation of what we mentioned earlier in our work, which is the fact that “success” in school depends on the support students receive but also on the student’s (and parents’) persistence in making requirements regarding technical equipment and a good acoustic environment (Antonson, 1998). In fact, Emma receives a lot of technical support. At home, for example, they use special assistive aids that make it easier to listen to radio and TV.

Emma believes that more could be done in order to improve her situation in class. A different class disposition, for instance, a u-form class like she had in the special school for the deaf, could be more helpful in order to better understand, communicate and feel more active in dialogue. She adds that she is, however, able to follow what the teachers say thanks to the receiver she uses during lessons. In addition, she feels comfortable reading lips and deducing the topic of discussion. However, it is harder for Emma to understand people if she does not wear hearing aids.

b) Social climate in the class
As to the social climate in the classroom both Markus and Emma show a different picture compared to the one given by their teachers. At first, as we have already mentioned above, Markus avoids talking about possible problems but when questions are asked from a different angle Markus states quite clearly that he has very little communication and social life with his school friends: “It is hard and most of the times I avoid eye contact so that I won’t be included in a conversation that I can’t understand.”

Emma describes herself as a quite shy person and she mentions that it is always hard to be in a group. Nevertheless, she recalls that she was much more open with her friends when she went to a special class for the deaf: “I used to say much more. Now, I’m silent most of the times.”

She still sees her old friends from the special school even though they live far away from her. When referring to the group of girls she is doing a project with she
gives a completely different picture compared to the one that Eva gives us. She tells that she is with that group because she has to.

Outside the classroom, Emma has a hard time in hearing and understanding what other people say, often because of the noise: “It can be difficult to hear for example when we eat lunch together. Too much noise and too many voices, so it is hard to hear what the others say.”

Consequently, Emma rarely dares to speak in these situations since she is often afraid of, for example, asking the “wrong” questions unrelated to the discussion. What is more, Emma refuses to ask the teacher when she does not understand because she wants to be like the others and dislikes being seen as different or in need of extra-help. However, Emma states that she often does not have any problems because she is “an outstanding lip-reader.”

Emma tells us also that she does not meet any of her school friends outside school time. Instead, she still meets her old school friends from the special class for the deaf, with whom she feels she has much more in common: “My school friends like to party all the time and I have a hard time in there because there is too much noise. It is much easier with my old friends: we do different things and we feel comfortable.”

c) Possible improvements
Markus does not have any suggestions to improve his situation in school and his communication in class. We try to take this question from different sides but the answer that we receive is “I have never thought about it”.

Emma, on the other hand, believes that although there might be something that can be improved, her situation is rather good. She believes that this is also thanks to the great interest and the good effort that her mother puts in order to improve her possibilities in school. She mentions again her relative and all the difficulties that he has in school, caused by the poor knowledge and understanding of the problems that one hearing impaired pupil might encounter in school. She concludes by stating that “if I think about my relative and his situation then I feel quite satisfied in my school.”
6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges and the possibilities that some English teachers perceived when teaching hearing impaired pupils and to understand how some students experienced their English lessons in inclusive classes. However, and this can also be seen from the results, during the interviews we felt that at times the knowledge about hearing impairment/s was so poor that it was hard to keep a somewhat concise discussion related to the subject English. Instead, due to the poor knowledge shown in the interviews, we had to shift the discussion to more general perspectives. However, although the interviews were not related to the English subject as we actually had expected, the discussions with the teachers and the pupils lead us to the analysis of not less important issues.

The first important problem that we believe deserves attention was the huge difference between the studied schools in terms of resources used in order to improve the hearing impaired pupils’ education and to facilitate their dialogue in school. Markus and Leila, for example, receive very little support from the school in comparison to Emma. To mention an example, Emma uses an aid called FM-system that costs about 100,000 SEK and is paid by the school. Still according to Emma, her relative goes to another school where they refuse to accept such a big expense, obviously influencing negatively his/her education. In this case, Göran described the situation very concisely: “It is a matter of money”. Yet, we have also noticed how this difference is directly related to the interest and the knowledge of the pupils’ parents. During the interviews related to Markus and Leila, for example, we have never heard any mention of their parents’ interest in improving their children’s education. By contrast, in Emma’s case, we have noticed how her mother’s presence and interest, has always ensured that all the requirements, for example good acoustics, were fulfilled. We believe that Emma’s mother’s effort has somewhat given no other choice to the school but to give all the necessary facilities to help Emma in her education. The difference made by the involved presence of a parent felt even more persistent when compared to
Markus’ answer when asked what he wished in order to have a better education. The answer was namely that he had never thought about it. We believe that not all the studied schools have given the right to their pupils of an equivalent education as required in the Curriculum (2011, 10). Two out of three of the schools taken in exam, have not succeeded in giving their hearing impaired pupils all the possible aids to enter into dialogue with school friends and teachers. Pupils were not put in the condition of exchanging ideas and perspectives and therefore they could not feel as active participants. According to the Curriculum for the subject English A, for example, pupils have to “develop their ability to communicate and interact in English in a variety contexts concerning different issues and in different situations” (Kursplan 2000). We believe that at least two of the studied schools have not done enough to ensure, or facilitate, interaction for hearing impaired students, neither in English nor in other subjects.

Another problem that we noticed during our research was the little support that teachers received from their schools regarding essential information about pupils with a hearing impairment and the possible strategies to help them. Instead, the teachers in the schools we studied were left with their own intuition and their own motivation in helping their pupils. Sven, for example, told us about the Friday individual meetings with Leila. Although we could understand the effort behind these meetings, we could not see any founded adapted pedagogical strategies. Sven was the first to notice this problem, claiming that a course to help him to better understand the problems related to hearing impairment would be of great help. Göran, on the other hand, told us that he was satisfied with the material and the information he was given, but at the same time we perceived a lack of knowledge, and perhaps instruction, in understanding how to actually use this material. Eva also seemed to be pleased with the support and the information she had received from her school, although in our opinion it was vague, and again we realised how this support was more thanks to Emma’s mother’s persistent interest. Finally, the teachers apart from Sven declared themselves happy about the information they were given. However, when asked to better explain how the used this material the teachers were not able to give a satisfactory answer.

Socialisation was also a serious issue that appeared during the interviews and that, in our opinion, deserves attention. In the discussion regarding how the needs of pupils with a hearing impairment are met in school, we find of extreme importance to
embrace the notion of inclusion, socialisation and the social consequences of a poor socialisation. Already in the 1920s, for example, Vygotsky believed in the importance of distinguishing the biological factors from the social consequences that a handicap can provoke:

Any physical handicap [...] not only alters the child's relationship with the world, but above all affects his interaction with people. Any organic defect is revealed as a social abnormality in behavior. It goes without saying that blindness and deafness per se are biological factors, however, teachers must deal not so much with these biological factors by themselves, but rather with their social consequences.

(quoted in Rozulin & Gindis, 2007, p. 335)

In the beginning of our interviews, in some cases it appeared that there were not any concerns about the pupils' socialisation and especially Göran (and even Markus during his interview) and Eva were persistent in telling us that neither Markus nor Emma had problems socialising. However, later it appeared that all the three pupils in the study had several problems socialising in school. Neither the teachers nor we could state if it depended from the pupils’ impairment but we suspect that none of the three pupils were happy about their social situation in school. We could not see either if the teachers dealt with the “social consequences” of the pupils’ biological problems. What is more, from the interviews we could not see any situation in which the pupils were asked to name any possible condition that in their opinion could improve their active listening role and therefore their socialisation. We believe that this is a fundamental step for an inclusive education based on communication and dialogue. According to Wennergren (2007), for example, “failure to work for the improvement of the pupils' oral dialogue competence in a class environment can contribute to a double feeling of marginalisation in contexts outside school” (94/95).

As we have already mentioned there was also a considerable discrepancy between theory and practice connected to the strategies to overcome the problems related to hearing impairment in school and facilitate the pupils’ dialogue. If at first, for example, all the teachers seemed well aware of the fundamental values on which the Swedish school is founded. During the interviews the teachers mentioned repeatedly slogans like en skola för alla or alla är olika. However, when switching the attention to
more practical examples, these slogans appeared more like empty political slogans rather than tangible strategies to encourage inclusion and dialogue in school.

For these reasons, we feel that in the studied cases, pupils have not always been put in the condition of participating in dialogue and communication. This has been caused by different reasons, both technical and environmental. Not always have the pupils been put in the condition of being in a learning environment where all individuals’ voices are heard, neither during English lessons nor in more general occasions. This has led to different consequences influencing the pupils’ social life, self-esteem and possibility of functioning and developing as human beings in a democratic society.

An article published the 9th of September 2009 in the newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, refers to the fact that in the nearest future in the most populated region in Sweden, Skåne, there will be only. According to Karin Johnsson, project leader at the National Agency for (Special Needs Education and Schools) the number of special teachers for the deaf active in Swedish schools has not increased in the last decades. One out of three councils cannot offer any help to the children since there are not enough special teachers for the deaf to hearing impaired pupils. Karin Johnsson is afraid that if the specialized teachers of the deaf disappear the problems experienced by the hearing impaired student in mainstream schools will be easily forgotten. A pupil’s hearing impairment is not always obvious and easy to discover. If nobody informs the teachers about this kind of problem they will have a hard time in understanding how to deal with this disability (Leijnse, 2009). If it is true that, as the project leader at the National Agency for *Specialpedagogiska Skolmyndigheten* Karin Johnsson says, that in the future there will only be ten specially educated teachers able to teach children with a hearing impairment, we share her fears that in the future many teachers will have a hard time in understanding how to deal with this disability (Lejinse, 2009). But then it is really true, as L. S. Vygotsky argues, that “a disability in and of itself is not a tragedy. It is only an occasion to provoke a tragedy” (Vygodskaya, 330).
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