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The Possibilities and Obstacles of using ASL – from Five Teachers’ Perspectives

Möjligheter och Hinder med ASL – ur Fem Lärarens Perspektiv

Amina Tsouria Belaid
Fatma Tsouria Belaid

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Examinator: Anna Wärnsby
Handledare: Ingrid Hortin
Preface

This degree project has been co-authored and both authors have participated in each step of the study and contributed to making this study possible. Both authors have equally been involved in:

- selecting the subject and research questions,
- gathering and analyzing research and empirical data,
- conducting the interviews,
- structuring and writing the paper.

We hereby declare by our signatures that everything mentioned above is authentic.

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Amina Tsouria Belaid         Fatma Tsouria Belaid
Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine what possibilities and obstacles teachers may experience when working with the ASL-method from a perspective that concerns students’ literacy development. The reason why we have chosen to study the ASL-method is that this method has spread like wildfire in Swedish schools to streamline literacy development among students. We have gathered our empirical data through semi-structured interviews with five teachers who actively work with the ASL-method. The results show that the method contributes to individualized and enjoyable learning since students can work from their own knowledge and language levels. This study also shows that the ASL-method contributes to more opportunities than obstacles, but there are some factors to consider when implementing this method in the classroom such as the teachers competence, personal qualifications and what demands it may put on teachers and students. Altogether, this study gives a balanced presentation of the ASL-method to teachers who are considering implementing this method in their teaching.

Keywords: ASL-method, possibilities, obstacles, literacy skills, literacy development, enjoyable learning, inclusive learning, individualized learning.
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1. Introduction

This section has the intent to introduce the aim of this study and presents the subject and scope of the degree project. Moreover, we also present the purpose and research question that we have formulated for our qualitative study.

1.1. Subject and scope

Sweden is one of the countries in the world that top the list of those that use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (Samuelsson, 2014, p. 1). Making use of digital tools has therefore become a given matter for many Swedes; it has extended to education, workplace and everyday life. This means that society today requires digital competence. Digital competence is one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning that the Council of Europe and the European Parliament has put forward (Samuelsson, 2014). According to the European Commission (2007), digital competence involves “the confident and critical use of information society Technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT)” (European Commission, 2007). The school has a fundamental role in this and should actively increase digital competence among young learners (Samuelsson, 2014, p. 8). In the national curriculum, it is stated that one of the school's responsibilities is to ensure that each student should know how "to use modern technology as a tool of knowledge, communication, creativity and learning" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 4, own emphasis). Learning through modern technology is thus one of the goals of the school. Many schools today are striving to achieve this goal by using different teaching methods that implement modern tools aimed at developing students’ different abilities. The main abilities that students struggle with are the reading and writing skills and this can be seen in recent statistics (Skolverket, 2013). Reading and writing skills are two abilities that permeate the entire curriculum and provide a foundation for students to be able to manage to acquire and develop knowledge (Skolverket, 2011). This is why we have focused on these abilities since they are two fundamental abilities that every individual should be able to master in order to be part of the democratic society (Liberg, 2013).
Swedish schools' results in literacy skills have deteriorated in recent years according to the PISA 2012 surveys (Skolverket, 2013). Therefore, the importance of increasing Swedish pupils' reading and writing skills has become increasingly important and effective methods are highly sought; since one of the school's most important missions is to provide all students with opportunities to develop their reading and writing skills (Skolverket, 2011, p. 222). For this reason, many municipalities in Sweden have invested in language development and initiated several school development projects with systematic quality work as their goal. Systematic quality work means that schools systematically and continuously monitor, analyze and develop education in order for all students to receive an equal education (Skolverket, 2014).

One of the projects initiated by many schools in Sweden is the ASL-method (Att Skriva sig till Läsning). This method is a language development strategy developed by Arne Trageton and is based on the fact that writing is easier than reading (Chomsky, 1982, referred to in Trageton, 2014, p. 15). The ASL-method uses the computer as a writing instrument instead of using pens, and this is because writing on a computer makes it even easier for the young learners who may have insufficient motor-skills (Genlott and Grönlund, 2013). It has shown positive and improved results in literacy development among young learners in several schools in Sweden (Hultin & Westman, 2014; Liberg, 2014). This method has influenced many schools and we have had the opportunity to see how teachers actively work with Trageton’s method in our teaching practice. Although it has shown positive results, there are some teachers who are critical of this method, mostly because, this method has inadequate research resources to develop expertise at a higher theoretical level (Trageton, 2014, p. 232).

The ASL-method has become very popular in recent years and an increasing number of schools have begun practicing this method. This has aroused our curiosity and we would like to find out what possibilities and obstacles the teachers may encounter concerning language development when dealing with the ASL-method. Furthermore, we are also interested in identifying different teachers’ views and attitudes towards this method.
Since the ASL-method is a language-oriented method, we find it highly relevant to our specialized topic: English. This is because it focuses on reading- and writing skills, rather than just a specific language. The method can be applied regardless of language. We will consider this approach when we inquire into this method.

1.2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of our research is to develop an overall view of the ASL-method in teaching from a perspective that concerns literacy development. We want to examine what possibilities and obstacles teachers may encounter when working with the ASL-method and study where the learning takes place from the teachers’ perspectives in terms of the students’ literacy skills. Furthermore, we have formulated four sub-questions that will help us find the answers that we are looking for.

- What possibilities do teachers experience when working with the ASL-method?
- What obstacles do teachers experience when working with the ASL-method?
- How do the teachers experience the impact of the ASL-method on the development of literacy skills?
- What approach and attitude do teachers have towards the ASL-method?
2. Background and literature review

This section describes and elucidates what we mean by literacy, reading and writing and discusses what is required to become literate. This section aims to discuss how the purpose and perception of reading and writing skills have evolved through time and stress how the national curriculum emphasizes reading and writing ability. Furthermore, a detailed description of the ASL-method and previous research is presented.

2.1. Definition of literacy

The term ‘literacy’ has a broad scope and can be defined in various ways. In Cambridge Assessment’s research report (2013) it is stated that literacy is the same as being literate and can sometimes refer to reading and writing, sometimes to only reading and other times to writing, speaking and listening. In other words, it is a continually evolving term. All these definitions are based on the linguistic features that enable knowledge and allow communication (Stadler, 1998). According to the National Encyclopedia’s definition, literacy is anchored in the cognitive and psychological development and carries on social and cultural aspects of reading and writing. Given that the word can have several meanings, we want to clarify that when we use the word literacy we refer solely to reading and writing skills.

2.2. Definition of reading and writing

The term reading is a broad concept that does not have a single comprehensive definition. Lundberg (2010, p. 11) argues that we read and interpret everything we see, such as signs, pictures, texts etc. Further, Lundberg (2010: 11) believes that the definition of reading raises more questions about what it really means; is it the understanding of a message, interpretation of the meaning or alphabetic symbols or is the understanding of what is written emphasized? Taube (2007) explains that reading consists of two components: decoding of language and understanding of the meaning. According to this formula, Taube (2007) underlines that in order to get something out
of reading we need to understand the meaning and the message of the written language.

In order to learn how to write one must understand the written language’s two basic principles: the phoneme-principle (sound principle) and the morpheme-principle (understanding meanings) (Taube, 2011, p. 17). The phoneme-principle, known as the main principle, is characterized by the fact that each letter represents a phoneme with some exceptions regarding combination of letters that can result in distinctive phonemes (Lundberg, 2008). The morpheme-principle is based on the principle that a morpheme (word) is spelled the same way regardless of context. In a language, there are dozens of dialects, but with the help of the morpheme-principle one can relate to one language norm. If the spelling is based on the dialect and predicated on sounds, the written language will not be sustainable and will be difficult to understand. The morpheme-principle ignores local variations and relates to a written language with common standards (Lundberg, 2008).

2.3. Prerequisites for literacy development

A child is born with a natural drive to learn to understand and control its environment (Taube, 2007a: 9). This urge is essential for language development relating to the four all-round communicative language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing (Lundberg, 2010). To speak and listen to speech, are two natural abilities that we learn in a natural process in a social setting (Stadler, 1998). Stadler (1998) argues that most children learn to speak spontaneously without any conscious effort, this is because the speaking and listening abilities rests on a biological basis. The human brain is predisposed to learning languages and has an innate grammatical ability that controls the development of speech without explicit guidance (Stadler, 1998: 11). Furthermore, she believes that the ability to listen and speak only develops in interaction with people and through meaningful conversations. Through conversations the young child is immersed to learn the structure of the language, intonation and the vocabulary increases (Stadler, 1998). This indicates that we have an inherit capacity to develop the speaking and listening skills. This, however, cannot be applied for literacy development. The human being has no biological predisposition to learn to
read and write. Literacy requires different learning techniques; it needs explicit teaching and training in order for one to become a good writer and reader (Lorentzen & Smidt, 2009). It is also dependent on the child's awareness and volitional effort (Taube, 2007). This is because the reading and writing abilities require a high level of abstract thinking and cognitive- and linguistic maturity (Stadler, 1998).

Learning occurs continuously as a result of social interaction; it is, therefore, difficult to point out a specific time of when a child's reading and writing process begins (Fast, 2007). Literacy development is dependent on social contexts. Fast (2007) claims in her thesis that children are socialized into the written language. When children are exposed to writing and reading activities with others at an early age, they start to understand the important function of reading and writing. Even Krantz (2015, p. 29) shares the same opinion and states that an extensive research shows that early linguistic and cognitive abilities lay the foundation for later reading and writing development. This indicates that children develop their literacy skills long before they are exposed to formal education.

Reading and writing is a form of communication that requires an explicit and conscious approach to the language (Lundberg, 2008). According to Liberg (2013), there are basic terms and conditions required for children to be able to succeed in their reading and writing. In order to learn to read and write, one must master the metalinguistic ability and the metacognitive ability. Mastering the metalinguistic ability can be equated with linguistic awareness and distinguish a good phonological awareness about the letters and their phonemes (Liberg 2013). All words are made up of phonemes (sounds), and each phoneme represents various combinations of letters. To have knowledge about every letter’s particular phoneme is a basic prerequisite for literacy development (Lundberg, 2008). The metacognitive ability refers to reflection and intellectual development (Taube, 2011). Liberg (2013) describes it as having the ability to be able to reflect on how reading and writing works and what function it has. Additionally, Liberg (2013) accentuates that the metalinguistic and metacognitive abilities are extremely important in order for one to develop sustainable reading and writing.
2.4. The purpose of literacy – a perspective from history to modern days

Christina Florin, a Swedish historian, argues that elementary school has its roots in the 1600s Lutheran orthodoxy, which decreed that every believer should be able to read the catechism and the Bible to find the right path. Nilsson and Längsjö (2005) also agree with this and state that this is when literacy commenced in Sweden. In 1686, the Swedish church law introduced reading as an obligation for every citizen (Nilsson & Längsjö, 2005). The father in the household was responsible for teaching his family to read and the priests controlled this by making household examinations once a year. Every priest had his own way of assessing and there was no valid code within the country that was clear upon what reading skills meant. Those who did not master the reading skills were risking penalty and were not allowed to get married and build a family later in adult life (Nilsson & Längsjö, 2005, p. 27). This indicates that those who did not master the reading ability could not be a part of the society (Florin, 2010). One should note that it was only the reading ability that was requested at this time. The writing ability was not as extended as the reading ability. It grew slowly in pace with social development and is a sign of democratization. Already in the 1840s, 85–90% of the adult population in Sweden was considered literate (Längsjo & Nilsson 2005, p. 29). Here one can question what it meant to be literate in the mid-1800s since there were no central guidelines for the assessment of reading skills.

The state took on the power of the public education and intended to replace the ecclesiastical system (Florin, 2010, p. 2). The perception and purpose of education in literacy development changed in the mid-1800s when the elementary school took shape and aimed at developing the society and prepare for the future. At this time, the society changed both technically and constitutionally, which required better public education in order to simultaneously get in line with the social development. Since then, the educational system has always aimed at preparing and providing good conditions for the people to be able to actively take part in society. Furthermore, it is clear that this perspective still characterizes the purpose of teaching. The national curriculum stresses that:
The school has the task of imparting fundamental values and promoting pupils’ learning in order to prepare them to live and work in society. The school should impart the more unvarying forms of knowledge that constitute the common frame of reference that all in society need.

(Skolverket, 2011, p. 22)

The common frame of reference in the Swedish society today is the use of digital tools since Sweden is one of the countries in the world that tops the list of the use of ICT (Samuelsson, 2014, p. 1). This implies that society today requires digital competence and we can also see this in the national curriculum; the use of computers has become a mandatory and every student should know how to write on the computer (Skolverket 2011, p. 227).

Children today are immersed in digital practices from an early age and as they continuously develop their digital competence the importance of implementing and integrating contemporary methods and digital tools, such as computers, in the teaching is essential for meaningful learning experiences (Vasquez & Felderman 2013). Additionally, it is highly favored to use contemporary research and proceed from students’ prior knowledge and experiences in order to obtain better quality in the teaching, which in turn improves literacy learning (Skolverket, 2011). Moreover, educational institutions should adapt the teaching to the technical progress, instead of focusing on older standards and traditions of writing and learning to read.

2.5. ASL as a teaching method for literacy development

The ASL method is, according to Trageton (2014b), not a new literacy method. It is rather a combination of the two classical reading and writing methods; the sounding method (ljudningsmetoden) and the whole method (helhetsmetoden).

The sounding method, also known as "Bottom up" is based on the syntactic approach (Längsjo & Nilsson, 2011). The method is grounded in the language's smallest components onto the whole. The main focus of “bottom up” is that students should firstly develop an understanding of the alphabetic system principles and the
relationship between phoneme and grapheme. Each letter should be taught separately in order for the students become confident and certain at every letter’s form and sound.

The “whole method” (also known as "whole language") is an approach that assumes literacy learning takes place throughout the text and is the opposite of the "bottom up". The methods’ pedagogical approach is based on the analytical (holistic) approach. "Whole language" is based on the idea that children who learn to read will mainly develop reading comprehension and realize that a text has a purpose and message (Fridolfsson, 2015). The characteristic feature of this method is that the representatives of "Whole Language" emphasizes that children should not be taught to read (Fridolfsson, 2015:86). They argue that reading development occurs in a natural process as long as the student is exposed to texts (Fridolfsson, 2015). According to this method, the sounding principle leads to missed text messages. They thereby, this method advocates that teachers should avoid teaching phonemes and give phonological training.

With the combination of the sounding method and the whole method, Trageton turned the traditional literacy teaching from “reading then writing” to “writing towards reading”. In contrast to the traditional teaching of the reading and writing skills, Trageton (2014) propounds that it is easier to learn to write than to learn to read. The reason why he considers it appropriate to start with the writing before the reading is that the last 40 years of literacy research suggests that writing is easier than reading (Trageton, 2014, p. 15). On that basis, Trageton (2014) stresses that one should start with what is most natural and easiest for the child.

The method is also inspired by the US IBM's Writing to Read (WTR) program (Slavin, 1991), which advocates the use of computers as tools to develop reading and writing skills (Slavin, 1991). Trageton (2014) emphasizes that writing on a computer enables students to develop their first writing and reading skills in an effective way. He has adapted the method further for our digital age and introduced the computer as a writing tool. With the computer as a writing tool, all students can write, regardless of how far their fine motor skills are developed (Trageton, 2014). In other words, the computer facilitates students’ writing process and allows them to be on task instead of
focusing on forming letters. Another significant part of the ASL-method is that there is no emphasis on correcting students' texts, concerning language structure and spelling. Moreover, Trageton (2005) also advocates that teaching materials (textbooks) should be excluded from the teaching since students can create their own texts. Successively, the students' own texts serve as a basis for them to gradually produce books, newspapers, portfolios etc. (Trageton, 2005). Additionally, Trageton (2014, p. 11) argues that one should wait with the handwriting until second grade because many children have difficulties forming letters with a pen.

The computers are equipped with word processing software with speech synthesis. This means that when students write on the keyboard they can hear the sound of the letters, words and the sentence they type in their texts. This in turn, increases the students' phonological awareness and helps them to get an insight into the languages' sound system and understand the connection between a phoneme and grapheme. The speech synthesis also gives the students immediate feedback so they can revise and correct their own texts. The writing is done in pairs and is based on the students' experiences and language levels. Working in pairs allows linguistic stimulation where students learn from each other and are able to reflect, express and listen to each other while writing. Trageton (2014) relates to the socio-cultural approach to learning, which implies that students learn best in dialogues with others. Trageton (2014) contemplates that for best results it is optimal to introduce the method already in preschool and continue with it until third grade.

2.6. Previous studies on the ASL-method

Since the development of the ASL-method in the year 1999, there have been some studies on the method. A brief summary of the results of five studies from this field and criticism towards ASL is presented. We have also concluded a short discussion of how our research complements previous studies and what we can add to the field.
2.6.1 Trageton

To investigate the ASL method, Arne Trageton (2014) conducted a research project called "Tekstskaping på datamaskin", in four countries: Norway, Denmark, Finland and Estonia. He compared 14 classes with students between the ages of six and nine. He had a test group with students who started with the ASL method in preschool and a control group that had traditional teaching in reading and writing. The project ran from 1999-2002 and its purpose was to investigate how the ASL method affects students’ literacy development. According to Näslundh’s (2004) summary of Trageton’s study, the results showed that the test group wrote longer texts with better content and a more developed language compared with the control group. During the project, the groups were also tested in their handwriting and the results were that students in the test group had more developed writing style but wrote more slowly than the control group (Trageton, 2014).

2.6.2 Takala

Marjatta Takala studied the ASL method and examined how both teachers and students experience this method. Takala (2013) used both interviews and questionnaires in her study. Those who participated in the study were a total of 21 teachers and 68 pupils (Takala, 2013, p. 17). The results showed that the method is a good teaching tool that motivates and inspires students to write and develop communicative skills. However, she emphasizes that the usage of this method requires that both teachers and students must have basic computer skills (Takala, 2013, p. 20).

2.6.3. Genlott and Gröndlund

Annika Agélii Genlott and Åke Grönlund (2013) conducted a study of the ASL method in Sollentuna in Sweden. The purpose of Genlott and Gröndlunds’ study was to investigate if the students' reading and writing abilities can be improved by using the ASL method. The study examined two classes in first grade, who worked with the ASL method and were compared with two other classes who had conventional methods of reading and writing as a control group. The results of their study showed
that the test group had improved reading and writing skills, they wrote longer and richer texts and read with fluency, in comparison with the control group (2013, pp. 102-103).

2.6.4. Hultin and Westman

Eva Hultin and Maria Westman (2014) conducted a research project called "Digitalisering av skolans tidiga literacy praktiker". The purpose of the study was to investigate how the ASL method affects literacy teaching from a didactic perspective. Through observations at project meetings, field notes, discussions and interviews with eight teachers and thirty students, Hultin and Westman gathered the data for their research. The research results showed that students who worked with the ASL method wrote longer texts and could write in several genres (Hultin & Westman, 2014, pp. 24-26).

2.6.5. Liberg

Caroline Liberg has written a report and evaluated an ASL project in Uppsala municipality that lasted from 2011 to 2014. The purpose of the evaluation was to review in how students' reading and writing skills were developed by using the ASL method (Liberg, 2014, p. 3). The results of Liberg’s (2014) evaluation showed that computers as writing tools promote early literacy development. She claims that computers gives students the opportunity to build up their self-esteem of being writers and motivates them to write their own texts. Further, she stresses that the computer also allows for direct feedback and encourages literacy development (Liberg, 2014, p. 2). However, it appears that students in the ASL classes had poorer results regarding reading and reading comprehension in relation to the comparison schools (Liberg, 2014, p. 26).

All the studies above have shown that the ASL method promotes literacy development and all the researchers are united in the belief that this field needs more research. Our study will complement previous research regarding (a) what possibilities and obstacles concerning students’ literacy development that teachers
may encounter when working with the ASL (b) where the learning takes place (c) and what approach and attitude teachers have towards this method.

2.7. Criticism against the ASL-method

According to the researchers mentioned above, the main criticism of the ASL-method is that it does not rest on a scientific basis. Two of the leading literacy researchers in Sweden, Myrberg and Lundberg, are critical to the scientificity in Trageton's research, and stresses that Trageton have not studied the effects nor published any results in scientific journals about the ASL-method (Löfstedt, 2008). There is research on some elements found in the method, but there is no research that supports the method as a whole. Furthermore, Tyrén (2013) claims that the method is not sufficiently scientifically evaluated and that the long-term consequences of this method are not explored enough in order to replace traditional literacy teaching. The ASL-method is also criticized for excluding the handwriting and that students should wait with the handwriting until grade two (Lundberg, 2008). Lundberg (2008) emphasizes the importance of writing by hand and describes it as a significant opportunity for literacy development. Furthermore, there is other criticism against the exclusion of textbooks from the teaching (Myrberg, 2001), which is valid since the ASL-method among other things excludes textbooks and allows students to read texts on a computer screen. If the students are not given opportunities to read on books, it may pose a risk for them to not develop their vocabulary sufficiently, which in turn affects literacy development in a negative way (Myrberg, 2013, p. 82).
3. Method

This section presents the methodological choices we made for our qualitative study and what selections we have made. We further discuss the procedure of the data collection process, what selections we have made, what ethical considerations we have taken into account and an analysis of the data.

3.1. Qualitative research

We chose to conduct a qualitative study since we are interested in finding more detailed information as opposed to mere quantitation. Thus, we want to find out how teachers experience the ASL-method in a real setting. Since the objects of the study are teachers who actively work with the ASL-method, a qualitative study is highly appropriate for our research question. Hatch (2002, p. 7) emphasizes that a qualitative study of this type “seeks to understand the world from the perspectives from those living in it.” This indicates that, by a qualitative study, we can capture information through the participants’ experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, Hatch (2002) stresses that a qualitative study can capture how people make sense and describe how they understand different social circumstances.

3.2. Semi-structured interviews

We have conducted semi-structured interviews as the data collection method for our qualitative study. We consider semi-structured interviews appropriate for our study since they provide opportunities for direct contact and allow us to control and adapt the interview depending on the answers we get. Bryman (2011, p. 415) stresses that a semi-structured interview is a flexible interview process since it allows the interviewer to ask questions that are not included in the interview guide and gives the respondents the opportunity to formulate their answer in a way that suits them.

In our interview guide, we formulated questions for the interviews that could provide answers to our specific research. We were certain about what we were looking for;
therefore, we adapted the questions with relevance to our research questions and purpose of our study. We have considered Brymans’ (2011, pp. 422-423) category of questions that one should keep in mind when performing a qualitative interview. The question types we had in our interviews were divided into six categories: (1) preliminary questions, (2) follow-up questions, (3) probing questions, (4) clarifying questions, (5) direct questions and (6) indirect questions (see appendix 2). We included these types of questions in our interviews in order to gain a balance where we could see the nonverbal communication and listen to how the respondents reacted upon our questions. According to Bryman (2011, p. 423), the interviewers must be responsive to how the respondents act and what they say. We have also treated some answers with silence, which, according to Bryman (2011), gives the interviewees time to complement and reflect upon the answers they give. In addition, we intentionally had questions that could give us repetitive answers, because we wanted the interviewees to reconsider and reflect upon their answers.

3.3. Analysis of method

We are well aware of the risks associated with interviews. The risks may be that the interviewer does not always get the correct answers due to psychological factors, such as anxiety, stress, pressure etc. It may also be that the respondent unwittingly distorts the truth or lies, or that the overall purpose of the interview is unclear (Jonsson, 2009). We have had this in mind during the interviews, mainly to avoid exposing our respondents to excessive pressure and to get credible answers.

Another risk with using interviews as a data collection method is that the results are only based on what the participants say and not on what they actually do. We cannot know for sure whether the participants’ sayings correspond to what they do in real settings. Denscombe (2009, p. 289) states that people’s expressions and sayings do not necessarily reflect the truth. In order to gain more credibility, we could have made a triangulation of methods where we combine other methods of research, such as observations, in order to obtain more information sources. Since the aim of our study was to find out what opportunities and obstacles teachers experience when working
with the ASL-method, we believe that interviews as a data collection method is enough for us to get relevant answers that matches our research question.

3.4. Procedure

In order to gather empirical data and find suitable interviewees, we sent out a message (see appendix 1) to several groups on Facebook for teachers who work in primary school. We also visited schools and contacted teachers who work with the ASL-method.

Altogether, we had five interviews with five teachers who actively work with the ASL-method. The interviews were made in three different elementary schools in Malmö and were conducted orally in Swedish. The intention of conducting the interviews in Swedish was to ensure that the teachers could express themselves clearly and avoid misunderstandings. The interviews were recorded, briefly transcripted and translated to English, in accordance with the instructions given for this course. The interviews lasted between 25-50 minutes and the variation between the durations depended mostly on discussions and follow-up questions. As a whole, the data collection process lasted for two weeks.

3.5. Strategic selection

We have strategically selected our participants because we have a narrow context with a particular area of research. We only wanted to interview teachers who actively work with this method in order to analyze in detail and discover facts through the teachers’ experiences. The only way to get answers for our research questions is through teachers who actively work with the method. Through teachers experiences we are able address the possibilities and obstacles regarding students’ literacy development when working with the ASL-method.
3.6. Participants

The participants of our interviews have in different ways inspired others to work with the ASL-method. One of the participants is an ICT educator who has arranged inspirational lectures, networking events, workshops and expert lectures to give teachers guidance on how to work with ASL-method. Two of the participants have produced a book about ASL, and the other two have participated in the inspirational lectures and workshops about ASL. Common to our participants is that all five are active as teachers in primary school and make use of ASL. We refer to them as teacher A, B, C, D and E.

We are aware of that the participants in our study are actively promoting the ASL-method and that it may affect our results since they might advocate the method. We do not find having "ASL-experts" problematic for our study because we want to identify and analyze the ASL-method from teachers who actively work with this method. Moreover, with careful considerations we have critically examined and analyzed their responses.

3.7. Ethical considerations

We have assumed four ethical considerations that are stressed in Vetenskapsrådet (2011, p. 6): “the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality and use requirement”. All these considerations concern how to protect the integrity of the participants of our study. Before we went out on the interviews, we informed our participants that their participation is voluntary and that they could cancel their participation without any negative consequences. We also informed them about the purpose of our study and that everything in our study will be de-identified and that the information will be treaded confidentially and only used by us, for our study.
3.8. Analysis of data

We have had a hermeneutic approach when we analyzed the empirical data which means that we have distanced ourselves from our personal opinions and views as individuals, and tried to base our findings and interpretations on a more professional and analytical foundation. Alvehus emphasizes that having a hermeneutic approach is important when analyzing data (Alvehus, 2013, p. 22). According to Alvehus (2013, p. 112), the analysis of the results of a qualitative study is a process that requires one to be nuanced and subtle when analyzing the empirical material. When analyzing the data, we processed the information thoroughly in order not to miss out on important information. We listened to the recordings of the interviews several times, discussed together to gain more insight and made notes separately in order to see the similarities and differences in our interpretations to create a familiarity with the collected data. The collected material from the interviews was coded, analyzed and systematically categorized in accordance with the purpose and the research questions. Dalen (2011, p. 74) advocates that coding of the gathered material is an important part of the analysis process. Furthermore, we constructed a chart and sorted the responses from the interviews into themes with different sections that concern the four areas that we have researched: possibilities when using ASL, obstacles when using ASL, how the learning takes place and what attitudes teachers have towards this method. The chart facilitated the analysis of the empirical data and enabled us to sift information to get a clear structure on how to organize the results. Even Dalen (2011, pp. 84-85) stresses that this type of coding allows for one to find out where the emphasis in the analysis should be, which in turn facilitates the analysis process.
4. Results

This section presents, displays and describes the results of our empirical data that we have gathered through interviews with five teachers who actively work with the ASL-method. The results are sorted and organized in four different subsections and every subsection is arranged according to the research questions and purpose of our study.

4.1. Possibilities when using ASL

One of our research questions concerns what possibilities teachers experience when working with the ASL-method regarding literacy development among young learners. As we gathered empirical data for our study concerning the possibilities when working with the ASL-method, we can confirm that all the five teachers who participated in our study agreed on what opportunities the ASL-method provides. The results showed that the ASL-method conduces enjoyable learning through, among other things, a theme- and experience-based learning, which in turn motivates and increases opportunities for literacy development.

Teacher A - "I feel that students have greater possibility because it is enjoyable and much more personalized."

All the five teachers believe that students have greater opportunities to develop literacy skills since the ASL-method is personalized, which allows all students to participate in the learning activities, including students with reading and writing difficulties (e.g. dyslexia). This in turn, contributes to students to develop literacy skills on the basis of their own language levels.

Subsequently, all the five interviewees stated that the opportunities for the students to develop their linguistic awareness increases when they work in pairs. The ASL-method is characterized by sociocultural learning and promotes the students to stimulate each other linguistically. Students’ opportunities also increase with the speech synthesis because it provides them immediate feedback and supports them in their reading and writing development. Teachers C, D and E stated that this stimulation increases students' self-esteem to write and produce texts. The students
become engaged in the writing process, get greater self-esteem and feel proud of their achievements.

Teacher D - ” The students become very engaged because they…the self-esteem they feel when they manage to write…ehm…gives them a lot…they become proud”

All the five teachers have collected evidence in the students’ portfolios and used this to illustrate the statements they made in the interviews. The portfolio makes the literacy progression clear and allows the students to see their literacy development in a concrete way. In pre-school the students have already become linguistically aware, they write longer and richer texts with a more fluent language. Based on our participants' experiences, students have never before been able to write as much as they do now in the first grade.

4.2. Obstacles when using ASL

The second research question concerns what obstacles teachers may experience when working with the ASL method.

The results showed that the participants shared the same opinions about what obstacles they experience when using ASL. Teacher A, D and E pointed out the time frame if the technology were to fail. This could make the students feel anxious, interrupt the students’ work and disturb the atmosphere in the classroom.

Teachers B and C highlighted other obstacles that concern writing in pairs. When having many writing-pairs writing simultaneously, they believe that it is hard to give all the students the right support for their literacy development. Teacher C adds that this requires that the teacher should make careful observations in order not to overlook any student that may fall behind. Another obstacle according to teacher C is that this method can set high demands on students regarding cooperation. Some students are difficult to work with and others do not want to cooperate with a writing partner.
4.3. If the ASL-method develops literacy skills, then how?

In our study, we wanted to identify where the learning takes place from teachers’ perspectives in terms of literacy skills. All the five teachers were united in this question and had similar answers. The results showed that the learning takes place when the students interact with each other, but also in the conversation about the text with the writing partner and teacher. Teacher B emphasizes that this is a type of scaffolding for language learning. All teachers mentioned that the learning takes place through text conversations where students learn from each other when they discuss the content and sentence structure for the text and how it should be written. Furthermore, teacher B argues that the students create the language during the activity.

Students explore and discover together while getting immediate feedback of how words and letters sound when using the speech synthesis. Teacher A gave us a clear description of how the learning takes place in the following quote:

“I feel that a lot happens in the CONVERSATION because they learn from each other; one writes what the other says, then the other read what they have written and then they make sounds again loudly [by typing on the keyboard]. This way they both get to hear and produce.”

4.4. Teachers’ approaches and attitudes towards the ASL-method

We also studied what approaches and attitudes teachers have towards the ASL-method. The results showed that all the five teachers had a positive attitude towards the ASL-method. The teachers in our study think that it is advantageous to make use of the computer in teaching because the computer is part of many students' everyday lives. Teacher B says that it is the technical development of the society that contributes to the use of contemporary methods such as ASL. All the five teachers also believe that students have the opportunity to develop at their own pace when working with the ASL. Teacher B protests against conventional reading and writing
methods, which often advocate for all children to do the same thing at the same time. Teacher B states that all students are different and they should not be affected by the rest of the group, therefore the ASL-method is the most suitable method since it is personalized and the students can move forward in their education without being affected by the rest of the group.

Teacher A, B and C acknowledged that the ASL-method is not a cut and dried method since it can be adapted in accordance with the class. All five teachers agreed that the best prerequisite for this method is that the teachers are engaged and interested in this method, and that they have good knowledge of teaching literacy skills.
5. Discussion

This section discusses the results in relation to our research questions and analyzes the possibilities and obstacles that the teachers experienced when working with the ASL-method. It also relates the results to the literature review, the background and other research that complements and supports our statements and findings.

5.1. Positive remarks

We live in a time where reading and writing skills are essential matters for all. Literacy skills enable children to capture knowledge, further develop, communicate and participate in the text-rich and information-based society. Therefore, the school demands high standards for literacy skills; this is evident since a big part of the curriculum is devoted to the literacy skills. The schools’ main responsibility is to provide every student with the right conditions in order to develop these essential basic skills.

5.1.1 Individualized and inclusive teaching

According to our results, the ASL-method provides conditions that may allow every student to develop their literacy skills regardless of the students’ knowledge- and language levels. This is partly because the method is *individualized* and contributes to the *inclusion* of all students. We find it essential that classrooms have an inclusive learning environment since our mission as teachers is to promote every student’s further learning and acquisition of knowledge (Skolverket, 2011, p. 10). The concept inclusion is a key point in the Swedish school system because it is based on democratic values. Some researchers believe that inclusion means a sense of belonging, safeness and confidence (Andersson et al., 2015, p. 59). The inclusive learning environment contributes to education for all and every child can participate in the learning experiences on their own terms, and no student will be singled out or feel less valued than anyone else. This in turn, increases the students’ desire to learn and make the learning meaningful (Jönsson et al., 2010, p. 54).
Individualized teaching, on the other hand, is about letting every student work at their own pace and proceed from their language and knowledge levels. The participants in our study emphasized that they appreciate that the ASL-method can be individualized. This is primarily because they have experienced that older methods have required that all students should do the same things at the same time even though the students are at differing levels in their development of literacy skills. We find this argument reasonable since the task of the school is to promote learning by stimulating each student’s creativity, curiosity and self-confidence, as well as their desire to acquire and develop knowledge and personal growth (Skolverket, 2011, p. 11). It is unreasonable that all students should do the same thing at the same time due to the fact that a class consists of unique individuals with different needs and learning styles; there are students with reading and writing difficulties; second language learners; newly arrived students; gifted students; students with concentration difficulties etc. Despite the diversity in the classroom teaching should always be challenging enough for each student to acquire and develop skills. It is important to balance the teaching in order to stimulate all students to extend the learning and Read (2007, p. 9) has stated that:

If activities are too easy, children will simply become bored, de-motivated and possibly disruptive. If activities are too difficult children are likely to become anxious, and also de-motivated and possibly disruptive.

The statement above elucidates the importance of a balanced education; the teaching should neither be too easy nor too difficult. We believe, that a balanced education with appropriate activities will provide and challenge the students to develop their literacy skills since the activities have been adapted to the students’ linguistic and cognitive levels.

5.1.2 Enjoyable learning

According to the teachers in our study, the students can develop literacy skills through a theme-based teaching and experience-based learning. This way, the students receive common experiences that function as sources of inspiration for writing and create
discussions between the students. For the learning process to be a positive experience, it is important to include learning activities that develop creativity and imagination to create optimal conditions for the learning, even if the linguistic competence among students is limited (Read (2007). Read (2007, p. 10) advocates that this type of learning is enjoyable, allows students to bring forth their hidden talents and develop their fluency of thinking. Trageton (2014) advocates the use of theme-based teaching and experience-based teaching in order to make the learning meaningful and concrete. According to Dewey (as cited in Trageton, 2014, p. 23) younger children find it easier to embrace knowledge if the teaching is subject-integrated. This approach provides both access to subject specialization and language training. Trageton (2014) advocates the use of theme-based teaching and experience-based teaching in order to make the learning meaningful and concrete. According to Dewey (as cited in Trageton, 2014, p. 23) younger children find it easier to embrace knowledge if the teaching is subject-integrated. This approach provides both access to subject specialization and language training. Moreover, Trageton (2014) emphasizes that this increases the joy of reading and writing and makes the learning process enjoyable.

The results also showed that the teachers in our study believe that the ASL-method contributes to a meaningful learning since students can write and produce texts without having to struggle with the handwriting. We believe that when students can overcome their motor difficulties, they can “translate” their thoughts into written words easily. With the computer as a writing tool, students can produce longer and richer texts with a better content; this was also confirmed by previous research (Gröndlund and Genlott, 2013; Takala, 2013; Liberg, 2014; Hultin and Westman, 2014). Trageton (2014) indicates that the computer motivates students to write and increases their desire to learn since it is an effective writing tool. Liberg (2014) claims that computers have a positive influence on the self-esteem, which in turn motivates students to become sufficient writers and inspires them to develop communicative abilities.

Stanley (2013, p. 2) also argues that computers can engage and motivate students since many young learners are immersed in digital practices at an early age. However, Stanley (2013) emphasizes that every teacher should be careful when using technology in education, since it is easy to miss the educational concept behind the
use of technology. Many teachers are seduced by using technical devices in order to modernize their teaching and end up in a danger zone and develop the so-called Everest Syndrome. This syndrome refers to teachers who only “use technology for technology’s sake” without any pedagogical intentions (Stanley 2013, p. 3). Therefore, we believe that it is important for the teacher to be aware of the purpose of integrating technology and how it can be beneficial for the learning. Lyon-Jones (2011) stresses that it is significant to have a principled approach when integrating technology in the classroom. A principled approach is to carefully and critically examine the choices made, and according to Lyon-Jones’s (2011) checklist, a teacher should always consider the outcomes, the purpose and for whom the computer is optimal (see appendix 3). If the teacher is uncertain about whether technology enhances and supports the learning or not, then the technology should according to Lyon-Jones (2011) be excluded from the teaching.

5.1.3. Learning in interaction and scaffolding

We can ascertain that the ASL-method is based on the socio-cultural theory in which students’ development is considered to be social rather than individualistic.

From a sociocultural theoretical perspective, where all learning is said to occur in social interaction with appropriate forms of assistance (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), peer interaction provides learners with opportunities for ‘languaging’ (Swain, 2000, 2006; Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009) and ‘collective scaffolding’ (Donato, 1994).


Considering that children are socialized into the language, it is more natural to continue the linguistic development in interaction with others. It is also confirmed in Fast’s (2007) and Krantz’s (2015) research, that learning occurs continuously in social interaction. This means that the literacy development is a socially embedded process and not only psychologically driven (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10).

Based on the results, collaborative work enables linguistic stimulation, which in turn develops the students’ literacy skills. When the students work in pairs they learn from
each other since collaborative work enables language activities where the students can confabulate, clarify, discuss and reflect upon what they want to write (Gibbons, 2012).

From a cognitive perspective (e.g. Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1996), interaction provides learners with opportunities to negotiate language input and, more importantly, to receive feedback that will encourage them to modify their language output to make it more target-like.


Collaborative work also functions as a form of scaffolding where the students support each other when they write, for example when they guide each other to spell correctly, or when to use large and small letters, punctuations etc. Gibbons (2014) stresses that scaffolding is to give students support occasionally when it is needed in order for students to perform successfully in given tasks.

The external dialogue that proceeds from conversations about the text enables students to acquire knowledge and discuss the structure of the language and develop meta-cognitive skills, which according to Liberg (2013) is necessary for developing literacy skills.

Vygotsky would argue that this external, social dialogue is gradually internalized to become a resource for individual thinking, or what he refers to as "inner speech". The child’s external dialogues with others later become an inner personal resource for the development of thinking and problem solving.

(Gibbons, 2002, p. 8)

It is favorable to use knowledge differences that occur in a class and use those as resources where children learn from each other since every individual can contribute and share experiences. Jönsson (2010, p. 49) also acknowledge this by stating that children who know more can teach children who know less.

Furthermore, the students also receive immediate feedback from the speech-synthesis when they type on the sounding keyboard. This allows students to further develop
their phonological awareness were they can see the relation between phonemes and graphemes, which will according to Liberg (2013) encourage literacy development.

5.2. Critical remarks

We found it more difficult to receive negative remarks when using ASL since all the teachers in our study had a very positive attitude towards the ASL-method. Since all the participants were overly positive towards this method, it prompted us to critically question it. If ASL is as successful as they claim it to be, why has it not been applied more widely? It is good that the teachers we interviewed were engaged in the ASL-method and really believed in the approach, but being too optimistic could pose a risk of missing parts of the whole. We believe, that an overly positive attitude towards anything can blind one's view of looking at things and miss negative impacts. As a teacher, it is important to continuously critically examine the advantages, disadvantages and evaluate students’ performances and results from an approach based on current research. Further, Kiely (2009) claims that evaluation is a way to enquire the achievements of a given approach and examines the impacts of it.

5.2.1. Computer as a learning tool

One of the negative remarks that the teachers agreed about was the time frame if the technology were to fail. The teachers in our study witnessed that the obstacles they could encounter include that it can take too long to sign in, some computers may not start, other may restart in the middle of a writing process which leads to students losing their texts and the printer might not work etc. All these elements affect the atmosphere in the classroom in a negative way and disturb the students’ learning process. The school should provide a good environment for students to grow and develop their learning (Skolverket, 2011, p. 10). It is therefore highly important to take the time frame into account and value the school hours. One of the participants in our study argued against this by drawing parallels with everyday events and that anything can fail, such as if one want to cycle and the bike accidentally get a puncture. We consider it obvious that anything can fail, but since the computer is an
essential part of the ASL-method one could question the effectiveness if the computers would constantly fail.

Using computers as writing tools may effect students’ literacy development in a negative way. Lundberg (2008) argues that when students only learn to read by typing on the computer, they miss out on the benefits of handwriting because the handwriting is a great asset to the students’ literacy development. Lundberg accentuates that when writing by hand with a pen the muscle movements activates which in turn helps the brain to consolidate the orthographic patterns, consequently when students only write on a computer they miss out on this significant opportunity (Hedström, 2009, p. 77). Even McCarney et. al. (2013, p. 105) emphasized this and advocated that "the tactile feedback gained through handwriting may play a vital part in developing children's ability to form orthographic representation of their thoughts and ideas" which in turn leads to automaticity in their writing.

5.2.2. Writing in pairs

Dividing students into pairs is something that many teachers find problematic deciding whether or not to divide the students into homogeneous or heterogeneous pairs. This is partly because there is limited research in this area and the available research is somewhat mixed (Aldosari and Storch 2012). Aldosari and Storch (2012, p. 32) have summarized early research that indicates, “…mixed proficiency pairing may benefit learners because there were more negotiations”. However, another research showed that “…pairing students of different proficiency may result in the more proficient learner dominating the interaction, particularly when the proficiency difference between members of the pair is large. This suggests that mixed proficiency pairing may disadvantage the lower proficiency participant” (Aldosari and Storch, 2012, p. 32). We can also link this to our results, which showed that the teachers in our study preferred different ways of pairing their students. One of the teachers felt that students should work in homogeneous pairs since the students have the same knowledge and language levels. While another teacher preferred heterogeneous pairs, where the students can take advantage of their different levels and dissimilarities that can act as a type of scaffolding. A third teacher believed that it did not matter whether the pairs
were homogeneous or heterogeneous. The remaining teachers did not have an opinion on this matter.

Another negative remark when using ASL, was according to our results, that it is hard to give all the students the right support for their literacy development when they write on the computers in pairs. Having too many writing pairs writing at the same time can result in that the teacher does not have time to see each individual’s efforts and involvement. Another disadvantage is that students who are linguistically weaker can have a tendency to “hide behind” their writing partner and rely on them. This in turn, puts demands on the teacher to make careful observations of each writing pair to ensure that no student falls behind.

5.2.3. Correct spelling and reading comprehension

Given that the ASL-method does not focus on correcting students’ texts, we consider it slightly problematic since the written language is dependent on a language norm. The importance of correct spelling is also emphasized in the national curriculum were it is stressed that every student should be able to make themselves understood in writing and have knowledge about basic rules of spelling and text structure (Skolverket, 2011, pp. 216-222). This indicates that the morpheme-principle is important in order for a text to be understandable and sustainable. The linguistic distance between spoken and written language can be factors that influence the writing skill and language phonology (Myrberg, 2007).

As a consequence of teachers ignoring to correct their students’ misspelled texts, students can develop fundamental problems for their literacy development, especially their writing ability (Myrberg, 2007, pp. 81-82). Myrberg (2007) stresses that when students spell correctly from the beginning, they develop a so-called “orthographic lexicon” i.e. that students memorize internal images in a visual from of how words are put together. Liberg (2006) also stresses that correct writing is a beneficial way to develop literacy skills, and that this in turn automatize the reading and helps the learner to focus on the reading itself. Myrberg (2007) further indicates that, the students can use their cognitive resources to actually understand the meaning of the
text. Furthermore, Liberg (2014) also affirms this and has questioned the reading comprehension when working with the ASL-method since it mainly focuses on the ability to know how to write and read. Myrberg (2001) argues that there is a difference between reading and writing ability and reading and writing skill. The ability only refers to the “technique” of coding and decoding words, while the skill refers to understanding the texts in a deeper level of abstraction (Myrberg, 2001, 5). Thus, one can question if the ASL-method develops literacy skills or literacy ability.

Research (Mangen et al., 2013) has shown that students who only are exposed to reading on a computer screen have poorer reading comprehension and are in need of paper-bounded (books) reading opportunities.

We know from empirical and theoretical research that having a good spatial mental representation of the physical layout of the text supports reading comprehension.

(Baccino & Pynte, 1994; Cataldo & Oakhill, 2000; Kintsch, 1998; Piolat et al., 1997).

(Mangen et al., 2013, p. 62)

This indicates that when students read paper-bounded texts, they get immediate access to the entire text, both in a visual and tactile way. Mangen et. al. (2013) claims that the reader can tactilely feel and see the text in its entirety which in turn facilitates the reading comprehension. In contrast to computer based reading, students only have access to one page at a time which according to Mangen et. al. (2013) can hamper the reading comprehension when students do not get access to the whole text.

Additionally, the ASL-method excludes textbooks from the teaching and advocates that students should write their own material and read on the computer screen. We are critical to this part and find it problematic when students are not given the opportunity to read textbooks and instead read on computers. Myrberg (2013, p. 82) stresses that if students are not given the opportunity to read books, they may develop a risk to not increase their vocabulary. Further, he argues that, in order for students to develop literacy skills, they must have a rich vocabulary that mainly can be achieved through reading books.
5.3. Teachers’ approach

The reason why all the five teachers in our study considered it advantageous to use computers in teaching is that computers are contemporary tools and a part of many students’ everyday life. Since teaching should be based on students’ background, experiences and also prepare them for the future, we believe that the ASL-method correlates with the aims of the national curriculum. We believe this indicates that the school is aligned with the technical development in society and with current research.

According to our results, the best prerequisite is that the teacher has a positive approach towards the ASL-method and a good knowledge of teaching literacy skills. We agree that it is important to have a competent teacher who has a good attitude towards the teaching since it can have a significant impact on students' performances. Moreover, Helm (2007, p. 110) indicates that students’ performances and success are related to the quality of the teachers. This makes the individual teacher an important element for students to develop “positive self-esteem and make positive academic gains” (Helm, 2007, p. 110). There are several factors that can contribute to a successful teaching and Helm (2007) has listed the following factors:

If a model could be developed to guarantee student success, it would most assuredly include a teacher who: (a) is highly qualified, (b) possesses the proper teaching license for their area, (c) possesses the dispositions of caring and empathy, (d) has strong work ethic and critical thinking ability…If all of those qualities and support systems cannot be present at the same time, I would take strong, positive teacher dispositions every time.

(Helm, 2007, p. 109)

In this quote, it appears that the teacher's positive attitude to teaching is a decisive factor in students' desire to learn and their further development. According to Dysthe (1996, p. 241), it is also beneficial to set high expectations for students and provide them with optimal conditions to reach the goals. Kiely (2009, p. 114) claims that any method can be effective for language learning, as long as the teacher is engaged and use their didactic competence. We somewhat understand why the participants in our
study experienced that their students achieved better results and developed literacy skills in an effective way. The students’ success reflects the teacher’s engagement.
6. Conclusion

The aim of our qualitative study was to investigate the ASL-method from teachers’ perspectives. This made our selected area very limited. We only interviewed teachers who are actively working with the ASL-method, which means that the results are limited and exclusively linked to the participants' experiences only. This, in turn, makes our results credible but they cannot be generalized since this study is a qualitative study with empirical data, rather than a comprehensive quantitative survey.

Through time, the perception of how learning takes place and the purpose of learning to read and write has changed and successively led to the growth and expansion of numerous literacy development methodologies (Längsjo & Nilsson, 2005). The ability to read and write has through time always been a fundamental prerequisite for the success of becoming a part of the society. Additionally, the society today requires digital competence since the use of digital tools in Sweden has increased significantly during the recent years and has spread to various domains at a breakneck speed. Subsequently, many children are immersed in digital practices at a very young age, which makes technology more practical to make use of since it has a great role in children’s everyday life. The computer also has a growing role in school and this can be underlined by the national curriculum where it has become a mandatory for every student to know how to write on a computer (Skolverket, 2011, p. 227). We can conclude that the computer is a central device in our society; it is timesaving, effective and creates good opportunities for the students to create their own texts in a rather effortlessly way (Stanley, 2013). However, it is important for the teacher to be aware of the purpose of integrating technology and how it can be beneficial for the learning

Drawing on the experiences of our interviewees, the ASL-method contributes to more possibilities than obstacles for young learners to develop literacy skills. The possibilities with ASL are that it allows for an individualized and inclusive teaching to take place. All students can participate regardless of knowledge- and language levels and motor difficulties, which, according to Jönsson (2010), increase students desire to learn. A further possibility is that the ASL method is based on the socio-
A cultural approach where learning is characterized as a social process rather than individualistic. According to our results, cooperation is beneficial for the students’ linguistic development. Aldosari and Storch (2010) affirm this and stress that interaction provides learners with opportunities to discuss the language. Another significant result is that the ASL-method provides with a meaningful and enjoyable learning since the students write on computers, work theme-based and get immediate feedback through the speech synthesis. According to our participants, students wrote longer texts with better content, which correspond with previous research on the ASL-method, which also showed the same results (Genlott & Grönlund, 2013; Hultin & Westman, 2014; Trageton, 2014). Furthermore, our results showed that the computer as a writing tool motivated and influenced students to write and develop communicative skills, which aligns with Takala’s (2013) and Liberg’s (2014) studies. Based on our findings, the obstacles were that technology could fail and disturb the classroom atmosphere. It could also put high demands on students to work in pairs and on teachers to make careful observations in order to give a fair assessment.

Our study can give teachers a nuanced picture of the opportunities and obstacles that the ASL-method can bring. Based on our empirical data, previous research and our own positions and values we have got a result that shows an overall view of the ASL-method from both a positive approach and a critical approach. By reading our study, teachers can identify how learning occurs and what they can take into account when working with this method, based on the five teachers’ ideas and experiences. However, we believe, that there is no distinctive method that can be applied for every child in order to develop literacy skills. Researchers through time have found it difficult to determine which method is the best, since there are several factors, beyond the method, that has an impact on students’ learning process (Stadler, 1998, p. 51). Stadler (1998) points out some plausible factors that may prepossess students’ learning such as the teacher’s knowledge, attitude and personal qualifications. Stadler (1998) emphasizes that the teacher’s qualification and skills have a substantial impact on students than a specific method, since the result heavily depends on how teachers create good learning opportunities and relate towards one method. Furthermore, Stadler (1998) stresses that this makes the research process complicated and obstructs the examination of a method’s outcome. Therefore, we want to clarify that our results are only based on the participants’ experiences and no generalizations are made.
In our view, the ASL-method may promote literacy skills, but there are several factors to consider when implementing this method in the classroom. Moreover, we acknowledge the courage of teachers who go outside their comfort zone and who admit that it is highly important to work innovatively in order to streamline teaching and promote students' development in line with how society is developing. Finally, we have some suggestions for further developments in this research area, which would involve examining the ASL-method from a student’s perspective, and to closely examine and compare students' texts and study the progressions.
7. References


8. Appendices

Appendix 1

Jobbar du med ASL-metoden?

Hej, vi är två lärarstudenter som läser grundlärarutbildningen med inriktning mot arbete i årskurs F-3 på Malmö Högskola. Vi går vår sista termin och har därmed börjat skriva vårt examensarbete om ASL-metoden.

Vi ser att metoden har spridit sig som en löpeld runtom i landet, men ännu är det många som är kritiska till denna metod. Därför vill vi undersöka vilka möjligheter och hinder som lärare möter när de arbetar med ASL-metoden. Vi undrar om någon av er som arbetar med ASL-metoden skulle vilja ställa upp på en intervju till vår undersökning?

Intervjun kan ordnas på flera sätt: vi kan besöka er, samtala via telefon eller mejl/chatt.

All information kommer att avidentifieras och behandlas konfidentiellt. Vi vore väldigt tacksamma om du kunde ställa upp!

Skriv gärna ett meddelande här på facebook eller kontakta oss via mejl.
Fatma.tb.andersson@gmail.com
Amina.Tsouria@gmail.com
Appendix 2

Intervjufrågor - ASL

• Hur länge har du arbetat i skolan?
• Vad har du för yrkesbakgrund? (Utbildning, erfarenhet)
• Hur kommer det sig att ni har valt att arbeta med ASL-metoden?
• Hur arbetar ni med läs- och skrivutvecklingen?
• Har ni de rätta förutsättningarna? (Utrustning, tid m.m)
• Har lärarna på skolan fått någon utbildning i hur man använder ASL-metoden?
• Vad tycker du om att man lämnar pennan vid sidan och istället använder datorn som skrivverktyg?
• Upplever du att elever har större möjligheter att nå kunskapskraven/målen när det gäller att kunna läsa och skriva?
• Skulle du kunna kartlägga hur och var lärandet sker när man arbetar med ASL?
• Hur sker bedömningen av elevernas utveckling när ni arbetar med ASL metoden?
• Vilka möjligheter finns det i arbetet med ASL, för dig och för eleverna?
• Vilka hinder kan det här arbetssättet medföra för dig och för eleverna?
• Vad krävs det för att den här metoden ska fylla sin funktion och ge resultat?
• Vad har du för uppfattning om vad ASL kan bidra med till skillnad från den traditionella undervisningen?
• Denna metod har fått en del kritik och många tar avstånd från den och håller sig till konventionella (traditionenliga) metoder för läs och skrivundervisningen. Hur skulle du argumentera för denna metod för att övertyga de pedagoger som är kritiska till den om att just den här metoden är bra?
Appendix 3

TEACHING WITH TECHNOLOGY – A BASIC CHECKLIST

WILL THE TECHNOLOGY BE USED TO ENHANCE AND SUPPORT LEARNING?

YES

Then you shouldn't be using it – full stop.

NO

WILL IT DO SOMETHING THAT COULDN'T OTHERWISE BE ACHIEVED?

YES

Then maybe you need to think about your reasons for wanting to use it a bit more.

NO

WILL THE STUDENTS BE IN CHARGE OF USING THE TECHNOLOGY?

YES

Sounds very teacher-centred. Think you need to give the way you plan to use it a bit more thought.

NO, THE TEACHER WILL

ARE YOU SURE THAT USING TECHNOLOGY IS THE BEST OPTION?

YES

Then you need to go away and think about it, until you are sure that it is or not, as the case may be.

NO

ARE THE COMPUTERS IN YOUR CLASSROOM CAPABLE OF RUNNING THE SOFTWARE YOU WANT TO USE?

YES

Then you need to have a run-through before your lesson, to avoid wasting time on the day.

I'M NOT SURE

Sounds good. Knock yourself out! Don't forget to take notes during activities, and reflect and evaluate how the lesson went afterwards.

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