”We shall copy, copy and write”
- conceptions of the mother tongue subject in the early years of primary school in a Peruvian public school

”Vi ska kopiera, kopiera och skriva”

Charlotte Malmgren
Syftet med studien är att undersöka vilka ämneskonceptioner som dominerar modersmålsundervisningen i grundskolans tidigare år i Peru, samt jämföra dessa med svenska förhållanden och forskning. Vidare syftar studien till att analysera varför dessa ämneskonceptioner dominerar, samt vilka slutsatser som kan dras med hänsyn till dessa ämneskonceptioners resultat. Metoden är kvalitativa intervjuer med tre lärare på en kommunal skola i Cajamarca, Peru, samt klassrumsobservationer vid tre tillfällen hos vardera lärare. Två intervjuer genomfördes med vardera lärare, en före observationerna och en efter att observationerna var avslutade. Undersökningens resultat visar att undervisningen på skolan huvudsakligen domineras av formaliserad undervisning med fokus på färdigheter och har även likheter med den bild av svenskundervisningen som presenteras i forskning på området. Resultatet är dock inte entydigt. Lärarna i studien visar, i olika stor utsträckning, tendenser och ambitioner att utveckla en mer varierad modersmålsundervisning, men har svårigheter att iscensätta en sådan i praktiken. Studien visar att det är av vikt att lärare får möjlighet att diskutera och reflektera över form och innehåll, samt över sin egen undervisning, för att på så sätt utmanas och i förlängningen förbättra sin undervisning. Undervisning karakteriserad av fokus på färdigheter riskerar att ge elever en begränsad syn på vad läsning och skrivning innebär.

Sökord: ämneskonception, modersmålsundervisning, formalisering, funktionalisering, spanska, Peru
Index

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 7
  1.1 Purpose .................................................................................................................. 8

2 Theoretical framework ............................................................................................. 8
  2.1 The conception of the subject ............................................................................. 8
  2.2 Education and literacy in Peru ................................................................. 9
    2.2.1 The Peruvian curriculum ...................................................................... 10
  2.3 The Peruvian and the Swedish Curriculum: a comparison ...................... 11
  2.4 Literacy education in theory and practice ............................................. 12
  2.5 Former research ............................................................................................... 13

3 Method .......................................................................................................................... 15
  3.1 Selection ............................................................................................................. 15
  3.2 Methods of data gathering ............................................................................. 16
  3.3 Procedure ........................................................................................................ 18
  3.4 Data processing and reliability ................................................................... 19

4 Result and analysis ..................................................................................................... 19
  4.1 The school: a short description of the context ............................................ 20
  4.2 Paola – a creative skills subject ................................................................. 20
  4.3 Maragarita – a “fun” skills subject .............................................................. 22
  4.4 Carlos – a skills subject with neatness in focus ....................................... 24
  4.5 Reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject .................... 26
  4.6 “We shall copy, copy and write” ............................................................... 28

5 Discussion .................................................................................................................... 31

Summary

References

Appendix I Interview guide 1

Appendix II Observation model

Appendix III Interview guide 2
1 Introduction

The summer of 2006 I did voluntary work at an association in Cajamarca, Peru whose aim is to develop the educational, social and nutritional situation of children from disadvantaged areas of the city. During my work at the association, as a student of education specializing in Swedish, I took a special interest in the children’s mother tongue education. At first the Peruvian education appeared very different to my experiences from Swedish schools. However there are also similarities. In an examination performed by the The National Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket) the literacy education in the early school years in Sweden often is characterized by a narrow approach to reading and writing (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:13). Einarsson (2004:299) states that language is the instrument by which the school accomplishes its task and exercises its power. The mother tongue education is therefore an interesting issue in education, as language and communication skills are needed in all school activities and also in society. The Swedish society is experiencing internationalization and the school has a responsibility to strengthen the pupils’ and colleagues’ ability to perceive the value in cultural multiplicity that the internationalization entails (Lpo 94:3f). In order to increase my knowledge and my possibilities to achieve this I decided to perform my study in a public school in the city of Cajamarca, Peru. As a student of Swedish in a multicultural society I believe it is an advantage to have experiences from different educational traditions and from encounters with persons with different cultural and social backgrounds in order to in my future work be able to better understand and communicate with the parents and students that I will meet.

Peru has a high level of primary school coverage comparing to other Latin-American countries (Cotlear 2006:4). Despite this the Peruvian students have proved having problems with reading comprehension and evaluations have been performed on how to improve the mother tongue education (Montané Lores, Llanos Masciotti & Tapia Soriano 2004). The Cajamarca region has a high level of illiterate persons and the students in the early grades of primary school are below national average concerning reading and writing skills (Ministerio de Educación a, c). For this reason the Cajamarca region is of special interest when examining mother tongue education. Sweden does not struggle with illiteracy, but the The National Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket) has, in the evaluation previously referred to, examined the literacy education in the country in order to ascertain in what extent the pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their reading and writing (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000). In able to do so the literacy education has to be active and take place in a meaningful context. However, it was found that this was often not the case (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:6). The Peruvian and the Swedish mother tongue education are for these reasons interesting through a mother tongue perspective.

A subject’s traditions are reflected in teachers and their teaching and will effect upon the choices made by the teacher concerning contents and general principles of the teaching (Bergman 2007:34). For this reason I believed that it would be of interest and relevance for my future work as a teacher to examine the early literacy education in the Peruvian context in order to better understand the advantages and disadvantages that the early literacy education in Sweden present. Examining and comparing with Swedish conditions a context apparently different from the Swedish may facilitate the understanding of the literacy and mother tongue education in Sweden, as well as the Peruvian. With this background and especially the Peruvian pupils’ deficiencies in literacy skills, I believe that it would be of relevance to make a study of the visions and conceptions on which the language teaching are based.
1.1 Purpose
The overall purpose of this study is to examine the mother tongue teaching in Peru. In a small study like this it is impossible to draw any conclusions about language teaching in general in Peru, wherefore I will concentrate on the mother tongue education (Spanish) in one public school in the city of Cajamarca. More specifically I would like to study the conceptions of mother tongue education at the school. The results will provide other perspectives to the mother tongue education in Sweden and would presumably point out some indications which, if implemented and thoroughly discussed and evaluated, could improve the mother tongue teaching for the disadvantaged children, as well as my own mother tongue teaching. In able to achieve this and obtain a more complex perspective on the results, these will be compared with Swedish conditions and research on the field.

The questions at issue will be the following:

- Which conceptions of the subject dominate the mother tongue education?
- Why are these dominating?
- Which conclusions can be drawn with respect to the result of these conceptions of the subject?

The definition of the term conception of the subject that I will use is a definition presented by Svedner (2000). Svedner (Ibid.:108) defines the conception of the subject as the ambitions and the primary principles on which the teaching are based. A more detailed definition of the term will be given further on (see 2.1 The conception of the subject).

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 The conception of the subject
A key concept for this study is conception of the subject, which makes it necessary to define the meaning of the term. As was pointed out earlier the conception of the subject is the combination of the ambitions and the primary principles on which the teaching are based. A school subject and its content do not exist in a static meaning, but are conventions created and stated in curricula and syllabuses to which teachers have to adjust to. However, teachers and schools are able to interpret and influence these by their priorities (Svedner 2000:107). In the following two models for the analysis of the conception of the subject of Swedish will be presented. Svedner (2000:108) suggests that all teachers of Swedish have a number of ambitions that describes the influence and the effect they wish to attain with their teaching. The author states seven different ambitions concerning the development of general linguistic capacity and specific language proficiencies, the development of the pupils’ creative linguistic capacity, mediation of proficiency in language and literature, development of a positive attitude towards language and literature, development of the pupils’ general awareness in their view of the reality, mediation of cultural tradition and ideological influence (Svedner 2000:108). A teacher’s overall ideas about how the teaching should be organized in order to implement the ambitions are a teacher’s primary principles (Svedner 1996:120). Svedner (1999:18f) differentiate between the principle of separation and the principle of integration. A teacher may opt for organizing the different parts of the subject separately or integrate them, i.e. work only and intense with literature or writing skills or integrate the different parts of the subject and work with them simultaneously. The principles of a formalized subject and a functionalised subject are also mentioned by Svedner (1999:19). These principles do in some meaning form part of the previously described principles and the first is defined by a teaching
Malmgren (1996:86ff) describes how it is possible to find three different subjects and perceptions of the subject in the teaching of Swedish in Sweden, which briefly are one based on formalized exercises with the aim to teach the pupils to dominate formal linguistic techniques (Swedish as a skills subject), a second one with the main focus on the history of literature (Swedish as a literary education subject) and a third one with the experiences of the pupils as a basis (Swedish as an experience-based pedagogic subject). The fundamental presumption in Swedish as a skills subject is that linguistic development is favoured by reiteration of exercises of linguistic proficiencies, which makes the context and the content of the subject secondary. Above all the subject is a language subject aiming to practice linguistic techniques and skills. Literature is a small part of the subject and is separated from the practice of the linguistic proficiencies. The pupils are presumed, after repeated practice, to be able to apply the techniques in contexts and further the techniques should be useful in the everyday life. (Malmgren 1996:86). In Swedish as a literary education, on the contrary, the subject has an evident content in the mediation of a common cultural heritage, represented by a number of literary works considered to be of special value. The purpose is to provide the pupils with a common frame of cultural reference, but it is also presumed that the reading of important literary works will have an effect of personal development for the pupils. But grammar and the history of language are also found in the subject of Swedish as a literary education subject, however as an independent area (Malmgren 1996:87).

Swedish as an experience-based pedagogic subject differs from Malmgren’s two first subjects, as the knowledge context and content is in focus and determined by the specific situation and the pupils’ experiences and prerequisites. The pupils’ interest and curiosity for their surrounding world is considered a requirement for the development of knowledge and language. This subject aims to include and discuss human experiences, from a present and historical perspective, in order to develop the pupils’ social and historical understanding. The literature serves a purpose as an intermediary of human experiences, instead of only as a common cultural heritage. There is also an aim to practice the linguistic proficiencies and linguistic production in general in authentic communicative and functional contexts (Malmgren 1996:88). Both authors, Malmgren, as well as Svedner, point out that these subjects and ambitions are theoretical constructions and presume that most of them are found in all teachers of Swedish. However, the positions and priorities done by each teacher will create differences (Malmgren 1996:88, Svedner 2000:108). It has to be addressed that Malmgren’s subjects and Svedner’s ambitions are based on Swedish conditions, however I believe this will give me a favourable base on which I can base my analysis of the dominating conceptions of the subject.

2.2 Education and literacy in Peru

The basic education in Peru consists in eleven years, divided in two levels, Primary school (Educaración Primaria) and Secondary school (Educaración Secundaria). The primary school education is divided in three cycles (ciclos), named III ciclo, IV ciclo and V ciclo, which are a continuation of the two first cycles of the optional preschool education (Educaración Incial). Each cycle comprehends two school years; consequently the Peruvian primary school consists
in six school years. The pupils get grades in all subjects from first year of compulsory school (Diseño Curricular Nacional 2005).

The socio-economic differences in Peru are big and over a half of the Peruvian population lives in poverty and almost a quarter lives in extreme poverty (www.sida.se). Regarding education, Peru still struggles with adult illiteracy even though the number of illiterate persons has decreased from 30% to 8% over the past 35 years and the Peruvian Government recently presented that the aim for 2011 is to eliminate illiteracy completely (Ministerio de Educación a). At the moment, the Cajamarca region displays the second highest percentage of illiterate persons in the ages of 15 to 24 years (Ibid.). However, Peru is ahead of most Latin-American countries in terms of primary school coverage, but the quality has been shown to be below average than in neighboring countries (Cotlear 2006.;4). In 2001 Peru participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the result was evaluated by the Peruvian Department of Education. The evaluation shows that only a few of the Peruvian students succeeded in resolving and answering questions that required them to reflect upon and evaluate the texts (Montané Lores, Llanos Masciotti & Tapia Soriano 2004). Insufficient skills in reading and writing have also been noticed in the earlier grades. According to the Peruvian Department of Education statistics the percentage of children that after two years in school were not able to read or write was duplicated between the years of 1985 and 1998. In 2003 the number of children without these skills was still high (21%), however it was slowly decreasing (Ministerio de Educación b). In Cajamarca only about 5% of the pupils had reached the expected proficiency level by ending second and sixth grade. The same number in the rest of the country was 15% of the second graders and around 12% of the sixth graders (Ministerio de Educación c).

2.2.1 The Peruvian curriculum
In order to understand the reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject of the mother tongue education in the Peruvian school where the study was performed it is necessary to study the Peruvian curriculum. The National Curriculum of Peru (Diseño Curricular Nacional 2005) is useful in the understanding of methods used by the teachers and the understanding of Peruvian educational traditions. I will from now on refer to the Curriculum as DCN 2005. It is expressed in the DCN 2005 (2005:14) that a series of traditional praxis in education has to cease, such as punishment, copying, recitation, memorizing etc. Furthermore, the DCN 2005 determines the characteristics that the pupil should have developed by finishing basic education, for example to be able to question, argue, analyse and reflect upon different opinions and points of view and to be able to express themselves in different contexts (Ibid.:15). The proficiencies that should be reached and the aims for each subject by finishing each grade are explicit (Ibid.:32ff). In this case the aims expressed in the syllabus for the subject of Spanish (Comunicación Integral) are especially interesting and give an idea on what the teachers in Peru must focus on and adjust to. In the overall description of the subject of Spanish in the Primary school education the syllabus expresses that the principal aim is to develop the pupils’ communication skills and this should be accomplished by interaction with different types of texts and interlocutors, in varied and authentic situations (DCN 2005:115). Furthermore, the communication and understanding of a message are emphasized in the description of how to put the subject into practice and “[t]he children find it difficult to understand the meaning of the written language when they only work with letters, syllables

1 PISA is an international study that evaluates the proficiencies of pupils about to leave the obligatory education, i.e. 15 year old pupils within the formal educational system. The study focuses on the evaluation of the pupil’s skills in literacy, mathematics and science (Montané Lores, Llanos Masciotti & Tapia Soriano 2004:9).
and words out of context, for this reason it is indispensable that the school includes dimensions that belong to the every day life to the teaching of reading and writing” (Ibid., my translation). Regarding text production it is pointed out that the pupils should produce whole texts with a purpose from the beginning (Ibid.:117). The syllabus of the subject of Spanish presents a series of proficiencies which should be developed, which are organized in three main areas; oral expression and comprehension, reading comprehension and text production. The proficiencies that should be reached by the end of each school year are explicit, and divided in the three mentioned areas. The proficiencies have the character of isolated language skills (DCN 2005:118ff).

2.3 The Peruvian and the Swedish curriculum: a comparison
In order to accomplish the purpose with this study I find it necessary to make a brief comparison of the directive that Peruvian and Swedish teachers have to adjust to. The syllabus for Spanish and Swedish are of particular interest in this case. The syllabuses have similarities, but also differ in some aspects. The DCN 2005 does, as well as the Swedish curriculum (Lpo 94), stress the importance of acknowledging and make use of cultural multiplicity. Regarding the syllabus of Spanish it points out the language as a key instrument for communication and schoolwork (DCN 2005:115), which is also pointed out in the syllabus for Swedish (Kursplanen i svenska 2000). Both syllabuses stress development of respect and understanding for cultural differences and different manners of expression (DCN 2005:116, Kursplanen i svenska 2000). However the syllabus for Swedish emphasizes the connection between language and identity and the strengthening of the pupils’ identity in a way that is not visible in the Peruvian equivalence (Kursplanen i svenska 2000). Furthermore the syllabus for Swedish makes use of an enlarged conception of text and stresses the importance of language development mediate a language in use in a meaningful context. The Swedish syllabus does in some extent apply a gender perspective “the conditions for the language development, in speech and writing should be advantageous for both sexes” (Kursplanen i svenska 2000, my translation), which is not visible in the Peruvian syllabus. The syllabus for Spanish points out the application of different types of texts, but with focus on written texts (DCN 2005:115ff). Regarding meaningful contexts does the Peruvian syllabus express in the introduction that the development of the communication skills should take place in authentic situations. Further on it is expressed that the same should be developed parting from ordinary life situations (Ibid.:115f). Nevertheless, the Peruvian syllabus is not as explicit as the Swedish regarding this aspect.

One of the most obvious differences between the syllabuses for the subject Swedish and the subject Spanish are the goals to be reached. The syllabus for Spanish does not contain explicit goals to strive towards, but descriptions of how to develop the three main areas (DCN 2005:115ff). The goals expressed in the Peruvian syllabus are divided for each school year and more numerous and explicit in comparison with the Swedish ones. This becomes most evident in the goals regarding grammatical aspects. It is stated in the syllabus for Spanish that the pupil should “use personal, possessive, relative pronouns. The pupil makes use of full stop, question marks, exclamation marks and comma when enumerating. The pupil uses qualificative adjectives” (DCN 2005:121, my translation). Further there are two other goals regarding grammatical aspects. The equivalent goal regarding grammatical aspects in the Swedish syllabus would be “The pupil should be able to use capital letter, full stop and question marks in their own texts” (Kursplanen i svenska 2000, my translation).
2.4 Literacy education in theory and practice

As previously has been pointed out, literacy education is one of the main focuses in the mother tongue education of the first years of the Peruvian primary education (DCN 2005). For this reason it is of importance for the analysis of the result to further examine the research in this field, from linguistic development in general, to more specific parts of the literacy education.

The ideal basis to create favourable learning situations for the linguistic development is to part from a meaningful context and by a functional language use, practice the proficiencies (Bergman 2007, Björk & Liberg 1996, Lindö 2002). Bergman (2007:337f) refers to the teaching advocated by Beach and Myers, which describes strategies to, by the active participation of the pupils, critically explore and create social worlds. In this way the pupils are provided with opportunities to critically reflect upon how different worlds, cultures and values are created and changed over time, employing different tools, such as speaking, writing, reading, listening and symbols, illustrations, film and narratives. The central focus in the approach is the understanding of how meaning is created by symbolic signs. This kind of active and functional approach to language is naturally valid also in the early literacy education. Literacy education parting from meaningful contexts for which the children have previous understanding favours the early literacy development (Björk & Liberg 1996). Even though Björk & Liberg’s, as well as Hagtvet’s, primary focus in literacy education seems to be the reading and writing itself, the content is in greater or less extent taken for granted (Bergöö 2005:299), I still find their writings useful for the analysis of the possible result of the dominating conceptions of the subject. Björk & Liberg (1996) point out the importance of talking about a text in order to found a previous understanding. Furthermore the authors (Ibid.) assert that experiences of dynamic and active reading and writing favour a development of awareness of the written language and why and how we read and write. The teacher needs to provide the pupils with meaningful reading and literacy education, in order to the pupils to discover the meaningful in reading (Smith 1986:153). In this work it is essential to individualize the teaching and activities in order to optimise each pupil’s development and engage them in for them meaningful work (Björk & Liberg 1996:101). “Pretend-writing” and “pretend-reading” is one way of putting an individualized teaching in practice (Björk & Liberg 1996, Bergöö 2007). Bergöö (Ibid.:70) refers to Hagtvet who points out that the early literacy education must part from playful methods and must be organized in a way that lets the becoming readers and writers experience success. Consequently “pretend-writing” is very effective, as it builds up the self-reliance and makes the pupils see themselves as readers and authors (Björk & Liberg 1996:23f). In the early years of primary education the aim of writing activities should be that the pupils attain a flow in their writing, as a flow is the base and first stage in the development of writing proficiencies. At this point it could have devastating consequences if this stage is forced by demanding the children to produce correct texts from the start, as the pupils will apprehend writing as correct spelling, and not as communication of a message (Ibid.:114f). The teacher must assure the pupils that the important is the content and the message they convey in their texts. In order to accomplish this the pupils must be given the opportunity to make mistakes without these being corrected. Continuous corrections will communicate the contrary to the pupils, that the importance with reading and writing is to perform it correctly (Ibid.:16). Smith (1986:157) does also warn of correcting early mistakes as it most likely creates uncertain and anxious readers.

The essential task for the teacher is to facilitate the literacy development for the pupils. However, there are actions that could disturb the literacy development. There is little use in focus on the teaching of phonetics, as the phonetic conventions are abundant and contains
many exceptions, which makes the context a better tool for reading and understanding a foreign word (Smith 1986:154f). In the early stage of literacy development it is possible to discuss orthography conventions with the pupils. However mainly to verify the existence of the conventions and to arouse the pupils’ interest for the written language’s superficial aspects, as it at this point will not facilitate the pupils’ development of their literacy proficiencies to know orthography conventions (Björk & Liberg 1996:87f). By letting the pupils write their own texts the writing and reading proficiencies complement each other and are developed simultaneously. The writing facilitates the pupils to focus the structures of the written language, such as the letters, sounds and articulation. Writing is advantageous in this sense as it provides the children with time to devote attention to these aspects (Bergöö 2005:70f). Björk & Liberg (1996:113) do also point out the importance of letting the children write their own texts in the early literacy development. The authors state that it is disadvantageous to wait with the creation of texts until the pupils have learned all letters, as it will then take to long before they write their own texts and suggests “[t]hey should learn the letters by an active writing of meaningful texts, which should be read to or for others for the sake of the message” (Ibid., my translation).

2.5 Former research

The syllabus for Spanish in the Peruvian Curriculum (DCN 2005) presents a series of proficiencies which are organized in three main areas; oral expression and comprehension, reading comprehension and text production. In order to analyse the reasons behind and the possible result of the dominating conceptions of the subject in the studied classrooms it is advantageous to present results from research in these areas.

Dysthe (1996) has performed a case study in two American and one Norwegian Upper Secondary Level classrooms with focus on the interaction between the verbal and written language in a learning situation. The question of issue for the study was to examine what happens in the classroom when the teachers systematically try to implement writing and conversation as tools for learning (Ibid.:14). Dysthe (1996:227ff) refers to Bakhtin’s dialogism in order to elucidate how the polyphonic classroom can favour the potential of learning. I will in the following briefly explain Dysthe’s definition of Bakhtin’s dialogism. The basis of his dialogism is that a person is defined, and defines himself or herself, by his or her relationship to other people and due to this a person uses the language to establish a dialogue, to communicate, and not mainly to express oneself. According to Bakhtin it is in the interaction, i.e. the dialogue, between sender and recipient that significance originates (Ibid.:63ff). Consequently a fundamental aspect of Bakhtin’s dialogue is that all understanding is social and active. The dialogue consists in a variety of voices and it is in this variety that we see and hear ourselves (Ibid.:228f) (for a more exhaustive definition of dialogism and dialogue see Dysthe 1996:61-73).

The main conclusion in Dysthe’s (Ibid.:220) study is that the learning potential increases when the teacher deliberately plans and supports an interaction between writing and verbal expressions. In one of the classes in the study the dialogue between teachers and pupils, and between pupils and pupils, was an essential point for the work in the classroom. The dialogue was built up by the teachers by using the pupils’ texts in the classroom and the establishment of a dialogue between teachers and pupils, pupils and pupils. Gradually the pupil’s self-

2 A classroom where the language is in focus and the multiplicity of voices, created in combination of the voice of students, teacher, books and other texts, is made use of and profited (Dysthe 1996:13, 68).
reliance was built up and they began to see themselves and their classmates as thinkers and resources of knowledge. In order to accomplish this it is necessary that what the pupils write and say is taken seriously and is considered as a resource (Ibid.:228f). The results of the study showed that a balance has to be maintained between control and scaffolding. In situations where the tasks were outside of the pupils’ proximal zone of development the support from the teacher was important in order for the pupils to learn from the writing tasks and for them to keep the engagement. However, it was also, in accordance with other studies, of importance that the pupils themselves were in control over the aims and the methods of the work as the pupils tend to find the writing uninteresting and instrumental if they not were allowed to participate in this (Ibid.).

Dysthe (1996) emphasizes the importance of considering and using the pupils’ knowledge and experiences as resources. This is also the case in a recent thesis about the subject Swedish at the Upper Secondary School. The possibilities of construction of knowledge and development of the language will be more favourable, if the focus in the mother tongue education is a language in use with the aim to cause meaning in relation to content, instead of a focus on language proficiencies (Bergman 2007:333). In a teaching, as the previously presented, the main issues for the teachers are to choose which content and contexts that should be focused. This means that the language proficiencies are used and developed in a context, as conversation, reading, writing and listening perform the exploring of the content. However, the results of Bergman’s study showed that in all four classes that participated in the study the teaching was, in greater or less extent, dominated by a focus on the language proficiencies, rather than the content (Ibid.:93). One of the teachers expressed in the interviews that the most important was to provide the pupils with abundant opportunities to practice their proficiencies and consequently the content could be whatever, as long as it worked as a motivator for the pupils to train the aimed proficiencies. An ambition focused on the language proficiencies puts the knowledge context in a subordinate position and the practice of the proficiencies becomes the actual content. In the interviews with the pupils it became apparent that they did not apprehend the subject Swedish as one, but divided in parts all treated separately. The pupils experienced the teaching as shattered and had trouble putting it into a context (Bergman 2007:91). Bergman (Ibid.:102) asserts that the described teaching does not have endorsement in modern research which recommends a functional grammar teaching based on the pupils’ own linguistic usage. The engagement is of importance for learning and school performances and if the pupils can relate their own lives and experiences to the treated contents in the classroom it will presumably increase their engagement in the schoolwork (Dysthe 1996:238). This requires that the school utilizes the pupils’ thoughts and knowledge and provide them with opportunities to experience that what they write is of significance and is read by other people. In this way what the pupils write, say and read about, becomes the primary content of the schoolwork (Bergman 2007:99f).

The previously presented studies were both performed in Upper Secondary School. However, the results are still of interest in this study as the benefits of a polyphonic classroom which focuses a functional use of the language in a meaningful context are valid in all levels of the educational system. The following concentrates compulsory school in a more direct way. Bergöö (2005) has, from the perspective of teacher training, performed a doctoral thesis on Swedish as a school subject. The aim of the study is to analyze the participating students’ construction of the subject of Swedish and to analyze education in Swedish from an institutional point of view. I will focus on parts of Bergöö’s analysis of the students’ construction of the subject, as it will provide me with a base on which I can base my analysis of the dominating conceptions of the subject. The participating students are students of
teacher training for the first to seventh year of the compulsory school system with the emphasis on the subject of Swedish and social studies (Bergöö 2005:30). The picture of the subject of Swedish described and experienced by the students, not only during their own schooling, but also during their practice periods, is characterized by formalized exercises and activities, and contains large portions of individual work. This picture is also confirmed by research about the subject of Swedish and evaluations done by the The National Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket) (Ibid.:252f). According to an examination of literacy education in Swedish schools the quality of the teaching environments is varying and the examination resulted in the development of a scale of criteria of the implementation of the literacy process (Skolverket 2000:6). Mainly three types of environments were found, which were called A-, B- and C-environments. The A-environment is characterised by a functional and active use of language, provided reflecting learning processes inviting the pupils to participate in authentic dialogues (Lindö 2002:68). In the B-environment the work with the literacy process is not as systematically and consciously realized, and a two-voice environment dominates the classroom communication. The C-environment is characterized by formalized learning situations predominated by recitation and reproductive activities in a monological environment. The most common teaching environments found in the examination were B- and C-environments, or a mix between the two (Skolverket 2000:11f). In a learning environment as the previously described the pupils have few opportunities to reflect upon and verbalize their knowledge (Dyshte 1996). The students in Bergöö’s study often question a subject of Swedish based on formalized training of proficiencies and make attempts to create a new subject of Swedish with focus on the knowledge context and based on the pupils’ experiences (Bergöö 2005:255f), close to the A-environment described previously. The respondents are aware of the importance of taking advantage of the experiences of the pupils and parting from a, for the pupils, important and known context. However the students experience difficulties in defining and embodying a new subject of Swedish an put it into practice, and do therefore occasionally reproduce a subject of Swedish based on proficiencies (Ibid.).

3 Method

This study is a qualitative study based on the data gathered by classroom observations and qualitative interviews. Qualitative methods are often a favorable tool in order to understand concrete courses and processes, and are often combined in order to get wider and more profound data (Repstad 1999). The study has been performed in three classes of the first cycle of Primary school (1st and 2nd grade) and with the form teachers of these classes.

3.1 Selection
The study was performed in the early grades of primary school in a public school in the city of Cajamarca, Peru. The contact with the school was made through my supervisor in field. She has contact with several schools in the area through her work with children from disadvantaged areas in the city of Cajamarca. The school suggested by my contact person has a large number of pupils, over 1000 pupils, from primary to secondary school. About a third of the pupils are attending the primary school education at the school. Over a 40% of these pupils suffers from chronic malnutrition and most of the parents are illiterate (ESCALE 2008). The school suffers difficulties in reaching the expected proficiency level and the aims expressed in the Peruvian Curriculum. Due to this and after consulting the principal of the school it was decided that the study should be performed in this particular school. The
principal had a special interest in literacy methods why we decided that I would perform the study in the early grades of primary school.

After my first visit to the school a meeting was organized by the principal with the teachers of first and second grade of primary school. In this meeting I introduced myself to the teachers, and explained about the study I was about to perform. In accordance with the ethic principles developed by Vetenskapsrådet (the Council of Science) the respondents were informed that the participation was voluntary and that they were allowed to terminate the participation if they wished to do so (Vetenskapsrådet 2001). In the publication by Vetenskapsrådet (Ibid:7) it is pointed out that very detailed prior information might jeopardize the aim of the study in studies based on participant observations. Due to this the respondents were informed that I was to realize a degree project and that I was interested in different methods applied in the mother tongue education. Furthermore the respondents were informed that their participation would be completely anonymous and that I would be the only person having access to the information received in interviews and observations. They were also communicated that the information would be used only for this investigation (Ibid.:12ff).

Three form teachers for first and second grade participated in the study. From the beginning all four of the employed form teachers at the school were to participate. However one of the teachers decided not to be a part of the study. It might be controversial for teachers, used to work on their own, letting a stranger into their classrooms. In this particular case there are other factors that need to be taken in consideration as well in order to understand the reasons behind the decision that one of the teachers had to not participate in the study. Swedish education has good reputation internationally, which may have caused a sense of inferiority in the teacher that decided not to participate. The geographical setting is Cajamarca, Peru and has already been mentioned, but the name of particular school will not be mentioned. It will be referred to as the school and the names of the teachers are fictitious.

3.2 Methods of data gathering

The purpose with this study is, as already has been pointed out, to study the conceptions of mother tongue education in primary school education at a public school in the city of Cajamarca, Peru. Classroom observations and qualitative interviews have been used to attain the purpose of the study. In order to get a good picture of which conceptions that dominate language teaching classroom observations were used. The observations will also be useful in the analysis of the result of the dominating conceptions. To complement the observations and in order to seek the reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject the respondents were also interviewed.

Before starting the observations the respondents were interviewed. Johansson & Svedner (2001:24) express that the qualitative interview together with qualitative observations are favorable to gather information about teachers’ view upon education and aims, for what reason I have combined these two methods in the study. The initial interview will serve to get previous knowledge about the teachers’ views upon education and thoughts about mother tongue education. Kvale (1997) has written about how to realize and how to think when realizing qualitative interviews. The interview guide can contain a description of the general areas, which will be treated in the interview or a number of established questions. According to the author which type of guide is chosen for the interview depends on how the interview is organized and in what extension the interviewer should vary the questions depending on the respondents answer (Ibid.:121). Also Johansson & Svedner (2001:25) mention the importance...
of being able to vary the questions in order to receive as complete answers as possible. For this reason an interview guide with no in advance established questions was used in this study (See Appendix I).

There are different methods of classroom observation. The two main approaches towards classroom observation are quantitative and qualitative methods (Wragg 1994:7ff). After considering the two different methods, I decided that a qualitative method would be more favorable since it would provide me with a better comprehensive picture of the dominating conceptions of the subject and what the possible result of these might be, than if I would have used a quantitative method. Qualitative methods usually concentrate on the meaning, significance and impact of classroom events and are often labeled ethnographic (Ibid.:9). Kullberg (2004) describes how to use ethnography in pedagogical research. The author suggests nine parts that should be taken in consideration to begin with when doing observations. The parts involves observing space, participants, activities, objects, actions, time, aims and emotions experienced and expressed (Ibid.:104). These parts were taken in consideration during my observations in order to get an overall picture of what was happening in the classrooms. Wragg (1984:14) addresses the entrance of an observer in a classroom may influence what happens and the behavior of the pupils and the teacher. Furthermore Wragg (Ibid.) points out that it is difficult to know how the presence of an observer will effect what happens and that this depends on many factors. Therefore I observed the classes on several occasions in order to, in what extension it is possible in a small study like this, try to be a part of the everyday activity. For the same reason and in order to not draw further more attention to myself I used handwritten notes to record my observations, even though I am aware of the limitations that taking handwritten notes might have (it is time-consuming etc). Kullberg (2004:153ff) recommends taking brief narrative notes to begin with and gradually enlarge these to more detailed descriptions, which also was done in this study. Johansson & Svedner (2001:33) recommends a model for observations, which I have adapted and used for my observations (see Appendix II). The authors claim that the model has several advantages, such as the notes recorded in this model put the observation in a context and it is possible to describe the actual course of events (Ibid.). For this reason I used this model and after the observations the recordings were enlarged to a more detailed text.

Classroom observations are generally followed by interviews with the participants (see for example Wragg 1984:107), as was done in this study. The interviews supplement the observations and will serve to understand the reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the mother tongue education. Wragg (1984:9) addresses the advantages of interviewing the participants as they can give their perceptions of the situation, which is of relevance for this study, as an important part of the research is to find out the reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject. If possible I will do the interviews directly after the observed classes, so that the teacher and I can go over the notes with a fresh memory. Regarding the contents of the interviews it will concern the teachers’ conceptions of the subject, their purpose with the lesson in regard and what they believe to be the possible result with the lesson etc (See Appendix III).

The observations together with the interviews will provide me with material to analyze the dominating conceptions of the subject and the reasons behind them. It is difficult to know what the exact result of the conceptions of the subject actually is, but by observing the reactions of the children and the interviews with the teachers will give a solid base on which I can base my analysis of the possible result.
3.3 Procedure

After the previously described first meeting (see 3.1 Selection) with the four teachers an individual interview was scheduled with each teacher. The conditions for these first interviews were favorable. They were performed in a private room and all four interviews were recorded. Except for one of the interviews that had to be performed in the teacher’s classroom during the break with children going in and out of the classroom. All interviews lasted about 15 minutes each. The questions were based on the fields of question established in an interview guide, which was elaborated previously (see Appendix I). Consequently the questions were not established in advance, but all interviews involved all areas. However all teachers were asked about their education, years in the profession and number of years in the regarded school.

After the interviews an appointment was made for the first observation. As already has been pointed out one of the teachers decided not to further participate in the study. Accordingly three appointments were scheduled. The following appointments were scheduled directly after each observation. The observations lasted about half a day, i.e. approximately 2.5 hours. Most of the observations were made during lessons with focus on the mother tongue. However the schedule in the early grades of primary school is rarely strictly divided in subjects. Consequently I have observed the classes during regular schooldays. In total all three teachers were observed three times each. My intention was to be able to interview the teachers directly after the observations in order to go through my notes with a fresh memory. However this was not possible in the extent that I had intended since the teachers usually were occupied with pupils, in some occasions with parents and also wanted to have a little break before next class. Nevertheless it was usually possible to have a short talk of about 5 minutes after each observation. It is usually not favorable to use a recorder during spontaneous talks after or during observations (Repstad 1999). Consequently these talks were not recorded. However, I took notes about what had been said afterwards.

The first time I visited a classroom all teachers let me introduce myself to the pupils. To begin with I told them my name and where I came from. I also told them that I was a student at the school of education in Sweden and that I was there to see what they did. After the introduction I sat down in the back of the classroom to be able to get an overall view of the class and the classroom. The center of my attention was the activities and how they were introduced to the pupils. However the pupils’ reactions and behavior were also of interest in order to be able to draw conclusions about the possible result of the conceptions of the subject and discuss these with the teachers. To be able to observe all these occurrences I used a model for observations without fixed categories (see Appendix II). These notes were handwritten. Generally I stayed at the table where I sat down during most of the class, but a totally passive observer may create insecurity among the involved persons (Repstad 1999). For this reason and in order to get a better picture of what they were doing and to be able to talk to the children, I occasionally walked around the classroom as the pupils worked individually. When I left my place I did not take the notebook with me, but when I got back to my place I took brief notes about what I had been observing. My intention was to try not to draw to much attention on me. However this was, as I had expected, quite difficult as the pupils were very interested in me and often wanted to know what I wrote in my notebook. The pupils’ interest in me gave me the opportunity to talk to the pupils, even if they were not interviewed in a formal meaning. Directly after each observation I copied out my notes and made a more detailed text of the notes.
When all the observations were completed I interviewed each teacher individually again. This second interview had to be held in the teachers’ classrooms, as the private room where the first interviews were performed was not available at the time. One of the interviews was performed in two parts. The first occasion had to be interrupted as the teacher had forgotten about another appointment and it was not possible to finish the interview. However the interview was finished a few days later. All the interviews were recorded and all of them lasted about 20 minutes, apart from the one that was performed in two occasions that in total lasted about 30 minutes. As in the first interview were there no in advance established questions. The questions were based on the observed classes and on what the respondents had expressed during the previous interview (see Appendix III). The circumstances during these second interviews with children and other teachers interrupting at times made the interview situation a bit more difficult. It may have affected the concentration of both the respondents and myself. I am aware that this also may have affected the outcome of the interviews.

3.4 Data processing and reliability
In order to analyze the data the transcription of the interviews and the observation notes were read thoroughly several times. The quotations and sequences gathered in the observations and interviews were organized in categories based on Svedner’s (1996) ambitions in order to obtain an overall picture of the teachers’ conceptions of the subject. Finally quotations and sequences that were illustrative for each teacher were chosen and developed into portraits of the teachers. Svedner (1996:117ff) emphasizes that a teacher’s view upon their teaching is complex and often contradictory, why the author chooses to describe the conception of the subject as the number of ambitions and primary principles that has been exposed earlier (See 2.1 The conception of the subject). The ambitions and the primary principles are variable over time and room. I am aware of the problematical aspect of defining a teacher’s conception of the subject and have therefore chosen to present the teachers in portraits as it allows a more righteous and complex image of the teachers. The portraits are favorable to make a description of the variable dimensions of the teachers’ conception of the subject. The quotations used in the presented result are my own translations of the literal transcriptions of the interviews and literal notes taken during the observations.

4 Result and analysis
In the following the gathered data will be presented. It has been organized in three parts according to the three questions at issue and adherent to each part an analysis. The three teachers have been given fictitious names, Paola, Margarita and Carlos. In those cases where names of the students appear are those also fictitious. A short description of the school is presented, followed by a portrait of each teacher, which will elucidate their dominating conceptions of the subject of Spanish. Each portrait begins with a short presentation of the teacher. It has to be addressed that the portraits of the teachers are presentations of what is most distinctive for each teacher. In the two following parts the data gathered in the observations and the interviews is not presented teacher by teacher, this in order to be able to make an overall analysis of the reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject in the early grades of primary school in the regarded school and their possible result.
4.1 The school: a short description of the context

In order to facilitate the reading of the result I find it suitable to provide the reader with a short description of the context, the Peruvian school where the study was performed. The school is located in the center of Cajamarca in an old colonial building, which is typical for the schools in the city center. This means that the classrooms are situated around the patio that constitutes the center of the building. The patio’s pavement is of concrete and does not contain anything else. This is where the students spend their breaks. There is also a smaller football field of concrete pavement further inside the building where the students normally are allowed to spend their breaks. However, the football field was under reconstruction when the study was performed. The patio is also where the students line up, class by class, in the beginning of the school day to say a common prayer.

The classrooms are worn down compared to Swedish conditions and are shared with two or three other classes. The school day in Peruvian public schools are normally divided in two or three shifts. At this particular school it meant that Secondary school used the classrooms during the morning shift. Primary school had the afternoon shift, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. In the evenings some of the classrooms are used for municipal adult education. The organization of the classrooms entails that the students cannot keep any personal belongings in the classroom and the teacher has a cupboard that he/she shares with the other teachers to store some material. The school does not provide the students with any material. The parents are expected to buy pencils, notebooks etc and the teacher charge the parents a small amount every month for photocopies. However, approximately every second year the government provides the school with textbooks from school year 2 and up.

4.2 Paola - a creative skills subject

Paola is currently working as a form teacher of a second grade class and will follow the class to sixth grade, when they will finish Primary school. There are 20 children enrolled in her class at the moment. Approximately half of them have been in her class since first grade and the rest have been transferred from other classes or schools. Most of the children are in the age of 6 or 7. Paola has been working as a teacher for 15 years and has at the time worked in the school for seven years. Before she started her current position as a form teacher in the school she worked in a country side province outside the city of Cajamarca.

In Paola’s interviews two ambitions for her subject of Spanish are specially emphasized, the development of general and specific language proficiencies and the development of a creative linguistic capacity. These are also palpable in her teaching, even if the ambition to develop general linguistic capacity and specific language proficiencies is more present than the other.

Paola finds the subject of Spanish very important and emphasizes the expression of the children: “[f]or me, the most important is the expression of the children. That they openly can express what they feel.” (Paola, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). Further Paola explains how she usually works with text production and says: “[w]e give them a piece of paper with a picture and they observe it and then, then they pick a title and write their texts. I find this work important so that the child is creative as well” (Ibid.). However, she finishes by saying: “Afterwards we correct it, the spelling, and how they do it” (Ibid.). This becomes evident in one of the classes. Paola hands out a piece of paper with a picture of a girl giving a woman flower and over the picture it says: “Observe the picture and write a text”. The children work individually with their texts while Paola walks around the classroom helping the pupils:
Paola is walking around the classroom and says to a girl that a word is spelled with an h in the beginning. The girl erases it and the Paola walks away. [...] The children go up to the teacher and show their texts. Paola says to a girl that she has written ‘Me quieres’ [You love me.] twice. Then Paola says something to a boy which I can not hear and continues requesting the children to look through their texts before showing them. ‘Hijo [son] is spelled with h and mamá [mome] with an accent’ Paola says to another pupil. (Paola, Observation 2, 2008-05-07)

As shown above Paola mostly comments the spelling. Afterwards she explains that the purpose with the exercise was for the children to practice their writing and “[w]e correct it afterwards and then the children write the correct version on the backside”. The previously described sequence is in many ways representative for Paola. She stresses the importance of letting the children express themselves, but has troubles deciding what is most important: “it is most important that they write, but also that it is correct. Spelling is important”. A teacher can choose how to organize the teaching, for example, to formally practice proficiencies or use the proficiencies in a functional context (Svedner 1996:120). Paola explains the exercise by saying that it was to “practice” writing, which indicates a primary principle of formal practice, rather than a functional use of written language proficiencies. Svedner (1996:118f) states that the ambition to develop the pupils’ linguistic proficiencies may have different focus, one general, often with focus on creativity and another with focus on specific language proficiencies. Paola expresses an ambition of creativity when she talks about her teaching. “You must think that the child should be creative. The creative thinking about the exercises that will be done comes from the child” says Paola when she explains how she plans her classes. However the technical proficiencies often seem to prevail as was indicated above.

This conflict is present also when Paola talks about reading in class. Paola explains that the texts, often fairy tales, are chosen according to themes she wishes to discuss with the children and also “texts that are appropriate for them, their age, their grade so that they will understand them” (Paola, Interview 2, 2008-06-02). But she also explains how they read in class: “I let the children read. I see how they read. Afterwards I tell them how to read. I give them a way to do it. I show them how to hold the book, even how to read.” (Ibid.). Further she points out that they talk about the texts. Nevertheless, the technical reading tends to predominate. In one of the observed classes the class worked with the classic fairy tale, Peter and the Wolf. Paola asked the children about their thoughts upon the fairy tale and their opinions about the characters conduct. A short discussion about lying and the pupils’ view upon and experiences of lying was held, which displays an attempt to use literature to discuss human experiences and could be an expression of the experience-based pedagogic subject Malmgren (1996:88) describes. However, more time is dedicated to extracting sentences from the text and in the end of the class a piece of paper with the fairy tale and reflection questions is handed out to the pupils. Paola introduces the exercise by saying: “Now I’ll see how much you’ve learned of what we’ve done. Write your names. [...] It’s the same text and the same questions as before, but I want to see how you write” (Paola, Observation 2, 2008-04-30). Consequently the focus is displaced from the pupils’ opinions and interpretations to a practice of writing skills. In Swedish as a skills subject the content of the practice of proficiencies becomes subordinated, as the technique is emphasized (Malmgren 1996:86).

Svedner (1996:117ff) emphasizes the complexity in a teacher’s conception of the subject. It is constantly changing over time and room, which is also discernible in Paola. She shows an awareness of the importance of including the childrens’ experiences and interests in the teaching. “There must be an interchange in the learning between the pupils and between us, the teachers”, Paola says. She points out at several occasions that it is of importance that the
pupils are given opportunities to express their feelings and experiences from their surrounding world and this is occasionally reflected also in her teaching, as previously was pointed out. However, what characterizes Paola’s teaching and her way of expressing herself about it most distinctly is an ambition of a development of general linguistic proficiencies and creative linguistic capacity. The primary principals on which Paola bases her teaching seems to be dominated by one characterized by formalized practices.

4.3 Margarita – a “fun” skills subject
Margarita started her career as a teacher 12 years ago in a countryside school in the region of Cajamarca. Three years ago she left the countryside school for her current position in the school. Currently she is the form teacher of a first grade class, which she will follow to third grade of Primary school. Margarita has usually worked in the early years of Primary school and when I ask her how come, as it is costume in Peru that a teacher follows the same class through their whole Primary school time, she laughs: “I guess most teachers don’t have the patience to work with the small children.” (Margarita, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). In Margarita’s class there are 18 children enrolled at the moment, but since the beginning of the year only 15 of them have been assisting. Even though most of the children are at the age of 6, there are some five-year-olds as well. Margarita considers the development of the childrens’ linguistic usage to be the most important task of the subject of Spanish, as “some of them can’t speak, I have pupils that can’t... and in their homes they speak different, you know? Inco..... incoherent words, right? [...] You must watch their language, correct them. And in their homes they can’t help them as most of the moms and dads are illiterate.” (Margarita, Interview 1, 2008-04-23).

Margarita’s teaching is dominated by training of formal linguistic techniques. However the picture is far from unequivocal. The respondent displays a complex composition of ambitions when she talks about her teaching. The complexity is to a certain extent visible in her teaching. During the interviews Margarita displays an expression for an ambition to develop positive attitudes towards language. She emphasizes the importance of awaken the children’s interest by using material and applying activities that will provide the children with a desire to learn. Margarita gives songs, riddles, stories and concrete material as examples of how to develop positive attitudes towards linguistic development among the pupils: “[a] song, a poem, a wall chart, a picture, something nice, right? So they will have an interest in learning. When the activity is meaningful they will learn.” (Margarita, Interview 2, 2008-06-17). However Margarita’s ambition to awaken the students’ interest for language seems to be focused on the specific activities that will be realized. The ambition to develop positives attitudes towards language and literature that Svedner (1996:118f) presents also includes an ambition to provide the pupils with a preparedness to reflect upon linguistic and literary aspects. This part of the ambition to develop positive attitudes is less visible in Margarita’s expression about her teaching. When Margarita talks about her teaching she often returns to the importance to part from the students own experiences. She says that working with literature gives the opportunity to “compare with the real life, how would you like to live? We work with the values in every story” (Margarita, Interview 2, 2008-06-17). Margarita also emphasizes the importance of adapting the contents to the reality of the school and the students. In Swedish as an experience-based pedagogic subject it is important to discuss human experiences and to develop the students’ comprehension for human issues (Malmgren 1996:88), which also is important according to Margarita. Nevertheless, this aim seems subordinated compared with the aim to develop the students’ linguistic proficiencies. Margarita explains that she selects the stories according to the letter or specific language
proficiency that is treated currently. She gives an example on how she worked with a poem about the moon (luna):

Here we wrote a poem, and then we draw a picture, the moon. We still have to divide it in syllables, the L with the A, how does it sound? [---] How does each letter sound? For example, the L sounds LLL and then with the A. How does the A sound? By sounds. Because the faster they learn the sound, the phoneme and the letter the faster they learn and don’t forget. Otherwise they forget. After a week they can read moon (luna), but they don’t know what letter it is. (Margarita, Interview 2, 2008-06-17)

Here the acquirement of formal linguistic knowledge seems to be emphasized. In Swedish as a skills subject the students should acquire an awareness of linguistic patterns and the content becomes subordinated (Malmgren 1996:86). Even though Margarita occasionally expresses an ambition to develop and discuss the children’s view upon reality and human issues the ambition to develop the students’ linguistic proficiencies seems to be more important, which also corresponds with her concern for the pupils’ linguistic usage that she considers is the most important task of the Spanish subject.

In Margarita’s classes her complex vision of the subject is less visible. An attempt to bring up and discuss values and the students’ experiences is in some meaning noticeable, however the practice of the proficiencies are devoted more time and is also what Margarita principally stresses when posterior discussing her classes. In one of the classes, before Mother’s Day, the class worked with a poem dedicated to the mother. The class read the poem about a young girl giving her mother a flower on Mother’s Day together with the teacher. Afterwards the teacher asked the students about what they could give their mother and a short discussion was held about what their mothers did. The rest of the class was devoted to different types of skills training of words containing the letter m. The students are asked to copy the poem in their notebooks, underline the word mother in the text and draw a picture of their mother. Before ending the class the teacher handed out letter written on small pieces of paper. The children are now asked to write the words hand (mano), table (mesa), I love (amo) and mum (mami) with the letters. One of the other observed classes is exclusively devoted to formalize exercises parting from a song about chickens. After singing the song the teacher asked the children to propose sentences containing the word chicken. “The teacher writes ‘El pollito dice pío, pío, pío’ [The chicken says pip, pip, pip] “This letter, e, how does it sound?” asks the teacher. ‘Eee’ says the teacher, answering her own question. Then she writes ‘Pamela’ and asks ‘What letter is this?’ and points at the letter p. ‘P’ calls someone.” (Margarita, Observation 3, 2008-06-03). Afterwards Margarita expresses that the purpose with the class was for the students to recognize the letter p: “[h]ow you write it, how it sounds, dad [papá] for example. Then to write words with p, dad [papá], chicken [pollo], pipe [pipa], different words containing the syllables pa, pe, pi, po.” (Ibid.). The ambition to relate to the students’ own experiences and work with values are in these examples is hardly perceptible. Margarita’s teaching and way of expressing herself about it have similarities to the subordination of the knowledge context as a result of a main focus on language proficiencies expressed in Bergman’s (2007:93) study.

Both Malmgren (1996) and Svedner (1996) stress that the conceptions of the subject are theoretical constrictions and in actual teaching it is difficult to find them in absolute form. This becomes evident in Margarita’s teaching and expression about her teaching. She expresses a number of ambitions, which however, are less discernible in her teaching. Margarita’s teaching, as well as her expressed ambitions is dominated by practice of general
and specific linguistic proficiencies. In her expression about her teaching Margarita emphasizes entertaining methods and activities. When the linguistic proficiencies are the primary focus the primary principle of the teaching tends to be formalized (Bergman 2007:93). This is also the case of Margarita. Her main focus is the linguistic proficiencies and she considers repeated practice of the proficiencies as essential for the pupils’ acquisition of the same.

4.4 Carlos – a skills subject with neatness in focus
Carlos has worked as a teacher for 18 years. He started his career in a countryside district, close to Cajamarca. After ten years in the countryside he went to a bigger city on the coast. Five years ago he returned to Cajamarca and has been working in the current school since then. Carlos is currently the form teacher of a first grade class and will follow the class to the end of Primary school. There are 17 children enrolled in Carlos’ class and most of them are at the age of 6, but some of them are older.

Carlos’ description of the subject of Spanish is mainly technical. In first grade Carlos emphasizes the work with the consonants, vowels and syllables: “[t]he identification of the syllables and then the words, right? And then later make sentences and short texts. In the end of the year they should be able to do this.” (Carlos, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). However, does Carlos also stress the understanding and the mediation of a message as the aim with this work (Ibid.). Nevertheless it is the technical focus on linguistic proficiencies that is most clearly manifested in his teaching, in which the linguistic form of the utterance and neatness seem to be emphasized.

When Carlos describes the teacher’s profession he emphasizes the devotion to the children and the ability to understand them and reach them. He expresses an intention to take advantage of and use material which is chosen by the children and that the children find pleasing, specially when it comes to reading and literature. Carlos tells me about a campaign which has been launched at the school to increase the pupils’ reading and interest for literature. He explains that the idea is to part from texts that the pupils have shown a special interest for, instead of only letting them read texts chosen by the teachers: “[w]hen the child experience pleasure for something that draws his attention, oh, that is wonderful... Instead of us telling them, read this. Then, it is more difficult for them... because it’s like a compulsion.” (Carlos, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). The campaign and Carlos’ description of it may be an expression of what Svedner (1996:118f) refers to as an ambition to develop interest in and positive attitudes towards language and literature. In this case the literature is emphasized. Carlos does, in some degree, stress parting from the pupils’ interests and experiences as a strategy in order to increase the pupils’ interest for literature. However, when describing how he works with reading in his current first grade class Carlos’ description tends to be predominated by an emphasis on the practice of specific linguistic proficiencies. Carlos explains that at the moment the work in the mother tongue lessons is focused on writing separate words and when describing how they work with reading he says: “I read texts that they should understand, but they tell me orally. And they do and then they look for synonyms, opposites of the words” (Carlos, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). Furthermore Carlos express a wish to organize the classroom management differently further on and says: “later on I plan to take them to the computer room so that they can work with the letters... games as well” (Ibid.). Even if Carlos mainly expresses himself about the practice of linguistic proficiencies he seems to have undefined visions about another mother tongue teaching.
In Carlos’ teaching the main focus seems to be specific language proficiencies. The first time I observed one of Carlos’ classes the class worked with the number three. The class begins with an exposition of an exercise introducing the number three. Carlos hands out the exercise to the students and sticks an enlarged copy of the exercise to the blackboard. After the exposition of the exercise the students start to work with the exercise in their notebooks. When finishing the exercise Carlos writes the figure three on one page in the students’ notebooks and on the next one he writes the word three. The students are requested to finish the pages copying what Carlos has written. As the students finish they show Carlos their work. Carlos comments on the students’ work, usually about the form of the letters and figures.

Carlos walks up to child and asks him how the figure 3 is supposed to look like. Than he walks up to the blackboard and draws a 3 with a very small upper curve and a big bottom curve. ‘Is it supposed to look like this?’ he asks. ‘No’ call the children. ‘No, we write nice and proper.’ says the teacher. (Carlos, Observation 1, 2008-05-15)

The same type of comment is made later on when concerning how to write the word three. Carlos explains that it is of importance to work with the children’s handwriting during the first school year, as there are less possibilities to work this in the following grades. Even though these examples are taken from Carlos’ Mathematic classes they characterize his teaching. Carlos’ teaching appears to be based on what Svedner (1999:19) denominates a formalized subject. In a formalized subject the specific proficiencies are practiced separately. The class is asked to practice the writing of the figure 3 and then to practice the writing of the word three. In the second interview Carlos explains that they have worked with all the numbers up to number nine and now they will work with number ten, before starting to work with addition and subtraction. According to Carlos this is a way of integrating different subjects: “[y]ou have to find connections with other subjects. At the same time as we’re talking about numbers we relate it with... Spanish, when we write the word, right?” (Carlos, Interview 2, 2008-06-12). Carlos conception of integrating different subjects seems to be focused on practicing specific proficiencies, rather than using proficiencies working with a common theme, which rather has similarities to the primary principle of separating different parts of the subject than integrating them (Svedner Ibid.:18).

Carlos’ teaching of Spanish, the mother tongue teaching, also seems to focused on specific language proficiencies with an emphasis on a development of a neat handwriting. The third observation made in Carlos’ class was a class in Comunicación (Spanish). The lesson was devoted to work with syllables containing the consonants m and p. Carlos had written eleven sentences containing words with the particular syllables on the blackboard. The syllables were underlined. The students were asked to copy the sentences to their notebooks. When this exercise was finished Carlos explained that they will continue with the exercise they had started before the break. Words that together can form a whole sentence were disorderly written on the blackboard and the students were supposed to change the order of the words in order to compose sentences, for example, “mamá, mi a Amo” (mother, my I love). There were five groups of words written on the blackboard. Carlos started to do the exercise together with the class:
‘Okey. How do we put the words here?’ Carlos asks. At the same time as he reads the words out loud he writes the words in the correct order. Afterwards he says, as he points at the words on the blackboard: ‘Copy, copy, I will... You do it like this in your notebooks. This (pointing at the disordered words) in black. This (pointing at the completed sentence) in blue and only one on each line.’ (Carlos, Observation 3, 2008-06-05)

No further explanation was given of the exercise. Afterwards Carlos wrote the title of the exercise and numbers of the sentences, leaving one line empty for the correct sentence, in the childrens’ notebooks. The rest of the lesson was devoted to this exercise. The comments Carlos made during the lesson were mainly comments about the form (the colour of the text, number of lines between the sentences, the size of the letters etc). In the following interview Carlos described that the purpose with the exercises was for the children to recognize the syllables that they had been working with. The presented teaching sequences have a character of the skills subject that Malmgren (1996:87) describes. The activities are formalized and external details, such as handwriting seem to be in focus. In Swedish as a skills subject different language proficiencies are practiced by repetition (Malmgren 1996). Repeating and copying of words or sentences are recurrent parts of Carlos’ teaching.

Even though it is possible to discern different types of ambitions in the way that Carlos expresses himself about his teaching, the predominating ambition seems to be an ambition of development of general linguistic capacity and specific language proficiencies. This ambition also applies to Carlos’ teaching where other ambitions seem to be almost absent. As has been presented previously Carlos seems to emphasize neatness as well. There are small varietys concerning the primary principles of Carlos’ teaching. The primary principles on which he bases his teaching appear to be based on formalized exercises.

4.5 Reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject

As has been exposed in the previous chapters Paola’s, Margarita’s and Carlos’ conceptions of the subject differs in many ways, but do also have several similarities. Mutual for the three of them is the focus on linguistic proficiencies. I will in the following seek to analyze the possible reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject.

As already has been pointed out the conception of the subject are the ambitions and the primary principles on which a teacher bases the teaching (Svedner 2000:108). Common for the three teachers in this study is the domination of the ambition of development of the students’ language proficiencies and a principle of formalized training of the same. All three theachers do in some extent express an ambition to take advantage of the pupils own experiences and part from a for the pupils meaningful content. It is possible to find support for this ambition in the DCN 2005 in which the syllabus for the subject of Spanish emphasizes a teaching that parts from authentic situations and taking advantage of the students’ own experiences (DCN 2005:115f). Paola is the one of the three that most explicit express and put into practice a subject with similarities to Malmgren’s experience-based pedagogic Swedish. She expresses an image of the pupil as a mediator of knowledge and stresses that “there must exist an exchange of learning and knowledge between the pupils and between us and the pupils” (Paola, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). An attempt to put this into practice is also discernible in her teaching and she includes discussions about texts and contents (see 4.2 Paola – a creative skills subject), which indeed do not have the dialogical character that Dysthe (1996) advocates. Paola evinces ambivalence in deciding what is most important, the language proficiencies or the free expression of the children. The students in Bergöö’s
(2005:254) study appear to have difficulties defining and put a new subject of Swedish into practice. Paola may experience similar difficulties.

Paola’s preoccupation for the language proficiencies is shared by Carlos and Margarita. And even if the *DCN 2005* points out the importance of parting from authentic situations, is this less visible in the goals to be reached by the end of each school year. The goals are devided in the three main areas, oral expression and comprehension, reading comprehension and text production, and enumerate a number of proficiencies that the pupils should master, for example “the pupil describes the physical characteristics of persons, animals and things in a clear way” (*DCN 2005*:118, my translation) and “The pupil uses personal pronouns, makes use of full stop, question marks, exclamation marks and uses qualificative adjectives.” (*DCN 2005*:121, my translation). Margarita explains that the local syllabus is developed in accordance with the three main areas for the subject of Spanish exposed in the *DCN 2005* and the focus seems to be the proficiencies, “the pupil narrate in a clear manner his or hers needs, about their family, that is that each pupil narrate and here you write the grade and the one that narrates best gets the best grade, right?” (Margarita, Interview 2, 2008-06-17). The elaborated local syllabus in the schools in Bergman’s study are based on the grade criteria exposed in the curriculum (Lpf 94) and has a character of skills training (Bergman 2007:94), which seems to be the case also in the school in this study. The goals and grade criteria are often a determining factor in the teachers’ interpretation of the national syllabus and are also perceived as more important than other parts of the syllabus (Ibid.:96). Presumably this is one of the reasons behind the predominant work with language proficiencies in the school in this study. Paola and Carlos express a preoccupation for the spelling and the childrens’ handwriting, as they find it difficult to work with spelling and handwriting further up in the grades and Paola says “there are pupils in 5th grade that still can’t spell” (Paola, Conversation, 2008-05-07).

It is pointed out in the *DCN 2005* that traditional praxis such as copying and recitation should be avoided. These are nevertheless recurrent activities in the observed classes. Carlos’ students spend a large portion of time in class copying words and sentences. He also displays a confidence in the profitability of continues repetition and emphasizes “working more with the first consonants will probably be easier with the rest” (Carlos, Interview 2, 2008-06-12). Carlos classes also contains formalized repetition. “Most of the children are now finished with the introductory exercise of the number four and are now writing the figure 4 in their notebooks. They shall fill one page with the figure 4 and another with the word four” (Carlos, Observation 2, 2008-05-21). A subject’s background and traditions may function as a support for the teacher when selecting methods, but may also imply selections that are nothing but takeovers of fixed models and teachers often use methods that they met in school (Svedner 1999:18). The fact that the *DCN 2005* (2005:14) explicitly numbers a series of traditional praxis, considered antiquated, that have to cease indicates that the same are still put in to practice in large extent in the Peruvian educational system. For this reason it is likely to presume that also the teachers in this study are influenced by these praxis. A subject’s traditions are not always challenged by new curriculums and syllabuses and in order to understand a teacher’s choice of content and teaching practice, the teaching culture and environment that the teacher is a part of is important (Bergman 2007:34ff). The directive in the *DCN 2005* do not seem to be completely anchored within the teachers.

It was previously exposed how the teaching in the three classrooms lack of authentic dialouges. The strong monological tradition that is found in classrooms has to do with that it seems natural to transmit the knowledge from the one who knows to the ones who do not have
the knowledge. It is a way of controlling a large amount of pupils and is often manifested by sequences of question-answer-evaluation in the early grades of the compulsory system (Dysthe 1996:222). These type of sequences were common in the visited classrooms and the aspect of control was also explicitly expressed in some cases. After discussing a story Paola hands out a paper to the class and says “[n]ow I’ll see how much you’ve learned about what we’ve done. Write your names.” (Paola, Observation 1, 2008-04-30). Both Paola and Carlos express in the interviews that they occasionally let the students cooperate in exercises. However, they often find it preferable to let the children work individually as it allows the teacher to see how every child works. Carlos talks about advantages and disadvantages of working in groups and says: “sometimes it has its disadvantages as well, because there are some that have better abilities and the other let them do all the work. That’s why I’m letting them work individually at the moment, to discover who has those abilities” (Carlos, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). Paola expresses similar thoughts when talking about the organization of the classroom management. In the examination of the literacy education in Sweden performed by the The National Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket) it was found that teachers often found it convenient to organize the classroom work having the students working individually with a number of exercises, often of reproductive character, as it according to the teachers creates order in the classroom (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:15). Paola and Carlos’ thoughts upon individual work may have its origin in the same. According to both of them it is easier for the teacher to see who is doing what when the students work individually.

The exact reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject in the school where the study was performed are as shown difficult to find, but are probably to be found in the conflict between the traditional praxis that the teachers are part of and new research and new, yet ambiguous, directive expressed in the DCN 2005 that the teachers try to assimilate and adjust to.

4.6 “We shall copy, copy and write”

The teaching in the school is principally dominated by an emphasis on the development of general and specific language proficiencies which are trained by formalized exercises. In the following I will seek to analyze what conclusions can be drawn with respect to the result of these conceptions of the subject. In order to facilitate the reading I have divided the analysis in the three main areas that appears in the DCN 2005, i.e. oral expression and comprehension, reading comprehension and text production.

The work with oral expression and comprehension seen in the observed classes differs from class to class. The time devoted to oral expression and comprehension in Carlos classes was relatively limited, as far as concerning the observed classes, and the dialogue had exclusively a character of question-answer-evaluation. Each activity was introduced by a brief introduction by the teacher in front of the whole class. During these introductions the students answered questions asked by the teacher: “‘Let’s see! Can two people form a trio?’ ‘No’ all the children now answer.” (Carlos, Observation 1, 2008-05-15). This is representative for the interaction between teacher and pupils in Carlos’ classes and is an example of what Dysthe (1996:9ff, 222f) denominates monological dialogue. The learning potential in the monological classroom is modest as the pupils have few opportunities to verbalize their knowledge and are likely to lose interest in what is treated (Ibid.:12). Similar sequences were common also in Margarita’s and Paola’s classrooms, yet with other elements as well. Margarita does in some extent incorporate the students’ thoughts and opinions in the question-answer-evaluation sequences, “‘What can you give your mothers?’ asks the teacher. ‘A flower’ several children
answer. ‘Yes, you are also young and can’t work.’” (Margarita, Observation 2, 2008-05-06). However, there are rarely longer discussions or comments on the pupils’ contributions. Concerning Paola are her verbal interactions with the class closer to a dialogue in Dysthe’s (1996) meaning. When Paola’s class works with *Peter and the Wolf*, Paola asks the pupils about what they liked best in the fairy tale and why. The children are at some extent provided with an opportunity to verbalize their thoughts. However, it is a one-way-communication between the teacher and one student at a time.

Carlos does in some extent express an ambition to work with texts chosen by the pupils, but the main purpose with reading seems to be analysis of the parts, the letters etc. The understanding of the message transmitted by the text seems to be subordinated. Margarita and Paola address the work with the message and the content of the text more explicit, as described in the DCN 2005. Nevertheless, a correct decoding is emphasized also in Margarita’s and Paola’s teaching. When helping a pupil who has troubles reading a text about a lagoon Paola says “How does m sound? And with e? It says [comer] here! E with r.” (Paola, Observation 3, 2008-05-19). In one of Margarita’s classes the class worked with a song about chickens. A boy was asked to read a word from the song. ‘‘Chicken’ [pollo]. ‘Where does it say chicken?’ asks the teacher. ‘Small chickens’ [pollitos] says the boy. ‘Small chicken’ [pollito] says the teacher.” (Margarita, Observation 3, 2008-06-03). Presumably do continues corrections of early mistakes, as in these examples, create anxious and uncertain readers (Smith 1986:157). The majority of the parents to the children in this study are illiterate, which also is pointed out by the three teachers. All children have not experienced reading aloud in their homes and in these cases the school has a responsibility to provide these children with opportunities to experience and discover literature (Björk & Liberg 1996:12).

This is also one of the aims with the launched reading campaign at the school that the informants refer to. However does the organization of the reading in the observed classes not always promote the same. Previously it was shown how Paola tried to discuss values parting from the fairy-tale *Peter and the Wolf*. In an unanimous environment the teacher is the only receiver and specific response and support is rarely provided (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:12), which is displayed in the reading of *Peter and the Wolf* when Paola expresses “Quiet, when they read. I can’t hear.” (Paola, Observation 1, 2008-04-30). The children are often corrected when reading in similar ways as in the previous example from Margarita’s class. It is of importance that the pupils do not get caught in a reading exclusively based on decoding as it may restrict the understanding of the text (Björk & Liberg 1996:67). As the reading is performed in the observed classes it is probable that the students obtain a limited experience of reading.

The classes in this study do not work according to work-schedules, but the organization of the work has similarities. In Läs- och skrivprocessen (2000) the possible results of working with so called work-schedules are discussed. The examination suggests that it creates students who work without reflection. As time passes the pleasuring feeling of finishing an activity fades and the work has a character of dull reproductive formalism. The reaction of the children in the classes in this study confirm this suggestion. “We shall copy, copy and write” (Paola, Observation 3, 2008-05-19) said one of the pupils in Paola’s class to himself while waiting for new instructions, which indicates that the student experiences the work as dull, rather than stimulating. Another example that confirms the suggestion is André:
André continues to tap his fingers on the table. The teacher sits up front by his table writing something in a pupil’s notebook and asks: “Quiet! Who’s making that noise?” André starts to blame others and says different names, other children also shout different names. Now André walks up to the teacher and show the teacher his work. “Very good” says the teacher. (Carlos, Observation 2, 2008-05-21)

André performs the tasks and activities with facility and is also one of the student’s in the class that is most active during expositions. In the examination (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:15) it is also expressed how reproductive skills training creates students who work instrumentally copying or making a pretence of working without reflecting. This appears to be the case with the students in the previous examples. Others seem to work only when the teacher looks or tell them to work and “several of the pupils systematically walk up to the garbage bin to sharpen their pencils and others walk around the classroom without any clear purpose” (Carlos, Observation 1, 2008-05-15). Occasionally the students seem to have difficulties understanding the tasks. In one class Carlos asked the pupils to put disordered words in correct order to make whole sentences and “several pupils walk up to me and ask for help. Juan does not understand what he shall do at all” (Carlos, Observation 3, 2008-06-05). In preschool classes and in year 1 of compulsory education a narrow approach to reading and writing was noticed, which may cause problems for the pupils who do not understand the activities (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:13).

Preferably students should have the opportunity to create their own texts from the beginning of their literacy development, as waiting until they have acquired all letters will take to long (Björk & Liberg 1996:113). Both Margarita and Carlos express the acquisition of the letters as a prerequisite to the creation of texts, which presumably creates a literacy teaching characterized by a focus on writing skills and not by meaningful writing. Bergöö (2005:252) refers to how an investigating thematical work in a secondary school appears as pure skills training. The pupils’ texts are not discussed or put in relation to each other and the writing, as well as the reading are reduced to practice of writing and reading skills. The description is similar to what happens in Paola’s work with the fairy-tale Peter and the wolf. She discusses the story with the children and afterwards she asks them to write about the same questions “I want to see what you have learned.” (Paola, Observation 2, 2008-04-30). What was meant to be an opportunity to reflect upon the fairy-tale mediate the written language becomes an absolute training of writing skills with the teacher as only receiver. It is important that the pupils have the opportunity to develop flow in their text production. If the pupils are expected to use the spelling conventions correctly from the beginning there is a risk that they apprehend the meaning with writing as correct spelling and not as the communication of a message (Björk & Liberg 1996:114). After the class Paola explains that the most important is for the pupils to express their thoughts, but also that their texts are corrected posterior. One of the students in the class who had trouble writing down the answers to the questions told me the next time that she had failed the exercise. Presumably the student in the example, if not given opportunities to write without being corrected, will experience writing as spelling.

The analysis of the conclusions that can be drawn of the result of the dominating conceptions with research on the field as background puts the results of the evaluation of Peruvian students’ literacy skills in new perspectives (see 2.2 Education and literacy in Peru). The students in the study seem to receive a narrow view upon reading and writing, which may influence their current and future language development.
5 Discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to examine the mother tongue teaching in Peru, focusing on a public school in the city of Cajamarca. I have studied the dominating conceptions of the mother tongue education, the reasons behind them and what conclusions that can be drawn with respect to the result of the dominating conceptions. Furthermore the purpose with the study was to compare the results of the study with Swedish conditions and research in order to obtain perspectives on mother tongue education in general, in Peru and in Sweden. The results of the study, with the purpose of the study as a background, will be discussed in the following.

The results of this study confirms the pictures shown in Bergman’s (2007) study and the evaluation of literacy education in Swedish schools (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000) that even if teachers try to problematize different aspects of the mother tongue teaching, the teaching is often dominated by formalized exercises. The teachers in this study show a complex set of ambitions and primary principles on which they base their teaching. However the dominating conceptions of the subject tend to be focus on general and specific linguistic proficiencies trained by formalized exercises. The conditions in the Peruvian school where this study was performed are different from Swedish conditions, but the results of interviews and observations show that the complex of problems in many ways is similar. Which stresses to me, as a student of Swedish in a multicultural society, the importance of problematizing and discussing form and content.

In this study the form seems to be superior to the content, i.e. the content often consists in the practice of specific proficiencies. In the observed classes the content seems to be a way of practicing the proficiencies. In Carlos case the content appears to be syllables or numbers, while Margarita and Paola usually part from stories, songs or poems as contents for their classes. Paola is the one that most explicitly try to use and take advantage of the pupils’ thoughts in the schoolwork when discussing and writing about the pupils’ opinions about the characters and occurrences of a fairy tale (Paola, Observation 1, 2008-04-30). However, the content of the story and the pupils’ texts do not seem to be the main focus, as would be in a functionalized subject (Svedner 2000:125). The school must provide the students with opportunities to experience that what they write is important and is read by others. In that way the pupils writings and expressions become the primary content (Bergman 2007:99f). It is possible to discern attempts by Paola to put this into practice by incorporating the students’ thoughts. She also makes conscious selections of the content: “[i]t’s a child in that story as well, right? In Peter and the Wolf, so for their age, in order for them to see and talk about values. [---] So, according to that we select the themes and the texts.” (Paola, Interview 2, 2008-06-02).

Dysthe (1996:222) stresses the importance of providing teachers with tools and knowledge on how to put a polyphonic classroom management into practice. Paola’s thoughts upon and ambitions with her teaching confirms this. She displays an ambition to take advantage of the pupils’ knowledge and experiences and she has an ambition of providing the pupils with opportunities to express their thoughts and opinions. Paola stresses that “there must be an interchange in the learning between the pupils and between us, the teachers” (Paola, Interview 1, 2008-04-23). A way of parting from a meaningful content in order to integrate the students’ experiences and to cooperate with the parents is also outlined by Paola. She describes how it is possible to work with science:
An excursion to the country side to take a walk, watch the animals, the plants [...] and we find a lot of themes. [...] And when we come back we work with this, maybe the dad knows something about it and the child writes it down” (Paola, Interview 1, 2008-04-23)

Paola’s expression is an example of how her dominating conceptions of the subject often are challenged by a conception of the subject closer to Malmgren’s (1996) experience-based pedagogic subject. However, Paola seems to experience difficulties to put this fully into practice. In her teaching it appears to be in the work with oral expression where she manages to in some way put her ambitions into practice. When her class works with the story Peter and the Wolf Paola shows an example of her ambition to use the pupils’ thoughts in the schoolwork and provide them with opportunities to verbalize the same. In Dysthe’s (1996:228f) study it was shown how one of the participating classes was able to establish a dialogue between teacher and students, students and students, by taking advantage of the students’ writings and verbal expressions. Presumably Paola would be able to take her work with the oral expression one step forward if given opportunities to further discuss and evaluate her teaching and the outcome of the same.

Even though all three of the participating teachers in this study represent a formalized language teaching, it is possible to discern differences between the teachers. To some extent do Margarita and Carlos also express ambitions to develop a more functionalized language teaching. Nevertheless is Paola the one that most distinctly and well thought-out expresses an ambition to create a classroom environment closer to Dysthe’s (1996) polyphonic classroom, as was exposed previously. The one of them that express and practice a formalized skills subject in the most explicit way is Carlos. However does Carlos express other ambitions with his teaching as well. When he describes the teacher’s profession Carlos stresses the devotion to the children and the ability to understand them and he does in some meaning express an ambition to part from the students’ own interests, specially when it comes to reading. However, these ambitions are difficult to find in his practice. In Dysthe’s (1996:220) study it was displayed that a deliberately planning of how to take advantage of authentic interaction between writing and verbal expressions may increase the learning potential. With this background and the teachers discernible potentials, I find it important to provide teachers with opportunities to thoroughly discuss and reflect upon their teaching in order for them to improve their teaching and put their ambitions into practice. Bergman (2007:291) refers to Hargreaves and emphasizes time and possibilities for cooperation as important in order for teachers to improve their work. Presumably would time to discuss and plan the teaching improve all three teachers’ possibilities to develop their teaching and themselves professionally, as it would give them opportunities to reflect upon their teaching and acquaint themselves with new perspectives on teaching.

The students in Bergman’s (2007:91) study express a picture of the subject of Swedish as shattered in different parts that were treated separately. In the classrooms visited in this study the picture is similar. Even though the students were not interviewed their reactions to the activities confirm the presumed result of monological teaching and formalized exercises presented in the evaluation of literacy education in Sweden (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000). The students in this study are in the early years of Primary school, but do already express some of what The National Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket) (Läs- och skrivprocessen 2000:15) denominates the dull reproductive formalism. With this background I believe that presumably it is not unusual that the Peruvian students fail in reading comprehension that requires reflection (Lores, Llanos Masciotti & Tapia Soriano 2004). If the pupils already in the early grades of primary school are socialized into a narrow
comprehension of the meaning of reading and writing it is possible that they will experience difficulties using reading and writing in a functional way and perceiving reading and writing as meaningful. For this reason I believe it is of importance to use the obtained experiences from this study, which may have a more explicit character of reproductive teaching than what has been seen in the Swedish context, to further examine and question what aspects of the current mother tongue teaching in Sweden have endorsement in modern research. The syllabus for Swedish (*Kursplan i svenska 2000*) stress that the pupils’ language develop when using their language in meaningful contexts and that literature is effective in order to understand ourselves and the surrounding world. In order to achieve this, teachers must have opportunities to reflect upon and discuss what a meaningful context means and how to implement the work parting from the same.

In conclusion, the dominating conceptions in the Peruvian school where this study was performed are mainly characterized by formalized and reproductive teaching, but do also show a more complex picture that if further developed and discussed may improve the mother tongue teaching in the school. The teachers in this study show an awareness of taking advantage and including the students’ knowledge and experiences in the teaching, which should be further, developed and appreciated in order to improve the mother tongue teaching. A purpose with this study was to obtain new perspectives on mother tongue teaching in order to learn and improve my own mother tongue teaching. The study has displayed similar problems noticeable in the Swedish mother tongue teaching. Educational traditions, i.e. values, ideals and views, are manifested in the chosen content and in the primary principles on which the teaching is based and may bound our thinking and work as obstacles for new perspectives. For this reason it is of importance to view contents maintained by tradition as perspectives that may be challenged and questioned (Bergman 2007:34ff). Despite the different traditions and conditions that the education in Peru and Sweden experience, the similarities confirm that new directives in curricula and syllabuses are not enough to challenge established traditions within a subject’s culture (Bergman 2007:34). For this reason I believe that it is of importance to keep evaluating and discuss the Swedish, as well as the Peruvian, mother tongue education and provide teachers with further education and opportunities to discuss pedagogical issues, in order to create an advantageous mother tongue education in which the language is developed in a meaningful context.
Summary

The aim of this study is to study the mother tongue education in Peru and compare this with Swedish conditions in order to be provided with perspectives on mother tongue teaching. More specifically the conception of the mother tongue subject in the early years of primary school in a public school in the city of Cajamarca is studied. The methods of data gathering used to accomplish the purpose are qualitative interviews and observations. Three teachers participate and are observed at three occasions each. The teachers are also interviewed twice, once before the observations and once afterwards. The content of the interviews concerns views upon mother tongue teaching in general and reflections upon the observed classes in order to understand the dominating conceptions of the subject and possible reasons behind them. In order to further examine the dominating conceptions of the subject and to be able to draw conclusions with respect to the result of the dominating conceptions of the subject, the focus during the observations is the performed activities and the reactions of the teachers and the students.

The result of the study displays a mother tongue education dominated by a focus on general and specific language proficiencies and based on formalized exercises. However the teachers express a complex set of ambitions with their mother tongue teaching, which also in some extent is discernible in their teaching.

It has been shown difficult to find out the exact reasons behind the dominating conceptions of the subject at the school. Nevertheless the interviews with the teachers and research on the field point at the traditional praxis that the teachers form part of and directive expressed in curricula and syllabuses effect upon the teachers’ conceptions of the subject. Further education seems to provide the teachers with new perspectives on the mother tongue teaching. With respect to the result of the dominating conceptions of the subject the study indicates a creation of students with a narrow view upon reading and writing and who may experience difficulties to reflect, express and draw their own conclusions upon texts.

My conclusion is that the conceptions of the subject dominating the mother tongue teaching at the school where the study was performed are characterized by formalized teaching and focus on general and specific linguistic proficiencies. The displayed picture of the mother tongue teaching at the school has similarities to the picture of mother tongue education in Sweden presented by research on the field. The results of this study and the comparison with Swedish conditions emphasize the importance of opportunities for teachers to discuss and reflect upon their teaching and further education for teachers in order to improve the mother tongue education.
References


Appendix I Interview guide 1

**Interview guide 1**

**The pedagogical assignment**
- in general
- personal

**The subject of Spanish**
- in general
- contents
- method of working
- the work in the current class

**Literacy education**
Appendix II Observation model

Observation model

Date:
Time:
Place:

Activity:  Pupils’ actions:  Teacher’s actions:
Appendix III Interview guide 2

Interview guide 2

The subject of Spanish

Observed classes:
- Activities
- Purpose
- Outcoming
- General pedagogical issues

Previous interview