Pupils in remedial classes

Anna-Lena Ljusberg
To my daughters
Frida and Tora
Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to increase understanding of being a pupil in a remedial class. The thesis is based on interviews, questionnaires, and observations and includes parents, teachers, and pupils in ten remedial classes. Fifty-five percent of the studied pupils had no specific diagnosis. The thesis is based on five articles emanating from the interdisciplinary BASTA project (Basic skills, social interaction and training of the working memory). Article I focuses on self-concept, with a rating scale completed by the children. In Article II ethical issues related to the methodology of interviewing children are stressed. Article III focuses on teaching children in remedial classes, and is based on questionnaires completed by teachers and parents. Article IV is based on interviews with pupils. Article V is based on interviews with teachers and on classroom observations, and highlights the classroom climate.

The theoretical approach used is a socio-cultural perspective. From this perspective, learning is seen as becoming involved in different discourses, where interaction is seen as part of learning and development.

The results of the thesis show that the pupils become bearers of the school’s perspective and blame the referral to remedial class on shortcomings in themselves. In transferring to the remedial class the pupils can lose their friends. Factors that reinforce this construction are the structured teaching and organisation of the classroom. These may hinder the pupils both in terms of friendship and of learning of subject knowledge. The main result is, however, that what the pupils in remedial classes primarily learn is to be pupils in remedial classes.

Keywords: Remedial class, attention and/or concentration deficits, pupil perspective, pupil’s perspective, classroom climate, socio-cultural perspective, self-concept.
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Hjorthagen 090206

Anna-Lena Ljusberg
LIST OF ORIGINAL PAPERS

This thesis is based on several sub-studies reported in the following articles, which will be referred to by the roman numerals I to V.


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INTRODUCTION

It has become increasingly common for schools in Sweden to attempt to solve difficult classroom situations by moving pupils to a remedial class, often called a “little group” (Ljusberg, in press; Matson, 2007). There are many reasons for moving a pupil to a little group. Some of these are to allow the pupils to avoid a difficult situation, to gain time to catch up, and to give them opportunities to concentrate (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2004). One of the teachers interviewed for this thesis declared that “it can be easier to move a pupil than a teacher” (Ljusberg, in press). Separate teaching groups are not new phenomena; they have been in existence for as many years as Sweden has had compulsory education (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2004; Elowson, 1995). There has also been a parallel discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of segregated instruction.

This thesis is being written in the research field of child and youth studies. This field brings to the fore children’s and young people’s own perspectives on their experiences, feelings, and life environments. Hendrick (2000) states that if there is one thing that childhood researchers can learn from feminism researchers, it is that “standpoint matters”. For me this has meant that it was necessary to listen to pupils’ statements about the remedial classes, and not just to those of their teachers and/or parents. It has also meant that the researcher’s gaze has been directed at the pupils’ circumstances.

During 2004 and 2005 I followed ten remedial classes whose pupils had been regarded as having concentration problems. Characteristics of the remedial class include the fact that they are most often integrated in a school setting, that there are very few pupils in the classes and very few pupils per teacher, and that the teaching situation is strictly controlled and often carried out on a one-to-one basis. The pupils’ desks are most often separated and placed along the classroom walls, and there are frequently screens available to separate each pupil from the others (Ljusberg, in press).

In general, studies that investigate how it is to be a person have mostly been concerned with adults (Hendrick, 2000) or white middle-aged men (Walkerdine, 1988). This has not just brought about an uneven representation of knowledge, but has also meant that in many studies both women and children have been regarded as deviating from the normal, i.e. from the prevailing norm (Allred & Burman, 2005). Children easily become the objects of adults’ care in various activities. Doing research with children, however, involves listening to them, trying to confront them and regarding the chil-
dren as subjects. This encounter is not completely free of problem, it pre-
sents a number of questions of different kinds. These questions are on the
one hand purely epistemological aspects, such as whether it is possible to
research from someone else’s perspective, and on the other hand methodo-
logical aspects, such as how to do this in a professional way. I will elucidate
these questions later on.

Perspective has to do with orientation, as well as with gaze and position,
with how to regard something and where to stand. It can also mean theory,
visual angle, aspect, point or direction from which something is seen or de-
picted. In this thesis different scientific perspectives, different aspects, and
different positions are used and discussed. Here a distinction is made be-
tween different actors’ perspectives, and between pupils and teachers. Dis-
tinctions are also made between different research positions, between differ-
et ways to listen, and between children’s perspectives and the child per-
spective. The child perspective concerns the child and the child’s world as
seen from the outside, from the researcher’s viewpoint, and here it is not
necessary to talk to the child itself. The children’s perspective – in this case
the pupils’ perspective – means that the children/pupils themselves have
made their contribution, in the same way that the teacher can contribute the
teacher’s perspective. Of course there is not only one pupil’s perspective,
just as there is not just one teacher’s perspective. Nor should perspective be
regarded as something static; one individual has not just one perspective but
rather many changing ones.

In this project children are studied in a certain context, specifically the
remedial class where the child is a pupil. Therefore I choose to use the terms
pupils’ perspective and pupil perspective instead of the children’s perspec-
tive and the child perspective. When children are discussed in a larger con-
text than that of the classroom, the term “children” is used. I have also cho-
en to call all the various adults who surround the pupils in the classroom
“teachers”, in order to distinguish them from other adults who do not have
the same role in the pupils’ lives.

Views of childhood

The concept of childhood is used as a social category in order to avoid an
essential way of thinking. In the research orientation that has come to be
called new ‘sociology’ or ‘new social studies of childhood’, the concept of
child research is avoided in favour of the generation concept – childhood
research – to emphasize that childhood is studied as a period in life with
societal and cultural significance (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). This thesis is
based on childhood as a social category, at the same time individual pupils
are studied and make their contributions. The introduction of the concept of
generation can be said to have had a similar function to that of the concept of
genus in feminism research (Halldén, 2003). Childhood is understood as a relational category (Mayall, 2002). By using the concept of generation, we facilitate the step from pointing out an essential way of thinking to place the child/pupil in a context, and the strong connection between child and biological development is decreased (Qvortrup, 1994).

One advantage with the generation concept is that it underlines how the concept of children is relationally. Children must be understood on the basis of the position they have in the generational system. Children cannot be defined by their natures alone, i.e. their physical and mental development level (Halldén, 2003, p.16, my translation).

One idea would be to study the daily lives of pupils in remedial classes. Another idea would be that pupils are social actors, and therefore to shift from object to subject in research, in other words from regarding pupils as objects to regarding them as co-actors. They are not seen as passive but rather as actors who have the right to have and give their own opinions and their own perspectives on issues that involve them, i.e. on issues that have to do with their own experiences of being pupils in a remedial class. The pupils are seen as informants with their own unique and valid perspectives that can contribute to the field of knowledge. Not only do they have the right to offer their viewpoints; the researchers have a responsibility to listen to and study how pupils influence and are influenced as actors (The Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet], 2002).

A third idea is that pupils create their lives in interaction with others in different social practices, for example the remedial class. They create their own relationships and their own contexts in which they learn to relate to others, learn about themselves and about what it means to be – or not to be – members of a group (Alderson, 2000; Corsaro, 2000; Greene, & Hill, 2005; Hendrick, 2000). For pupils in remedial class this may be more apparent than it is for others, as they are moved from one context to another, with new classmates and teachers.

As for independence and autonomy, both pupils and teachers are seen as both independent and dependent on others. However, being a child/pupil often means having a low rank and an inferior position in the generation system. Löfdahl (2007) discusses children’s agency, along with Mayall (2002); she claims that childhood is:

in all important contexts related to the adults’ system of ordering life, a relationship that contains a balance of power in which it is rather the adults than the children who have the agency (Löfdahl, 2007, p. 14).
Pupils are seen as active, reflective, and participating in the construction and upholding of the social environment. As this is not always obvious, attitudes like this become important:

It hardly needs to be said that if children are to be seen as social actors, they first have to be seen as being capable of social action; second, those areas in which children are socially active have to be identified, and third, we have to see ourselves as being in a relationship with children, rather than simply possessing roles assured by the principle of governance (Hendrick, 2000, p. 55).

My interpretation of this is that pupils are granted status as fully capable co-actors and not as objects of adults’ care, although this does not mean that we can ignore the fact that adults have the final responsibility. Teachers, pupils, and researchers are seen as co-actors. Pupils are seen as active and competent, but are nonetheless dependent on teachers and other adults. In the interaction between pupil and teacher the discourse, social practice and the actors’ interpretive background are regarded as entwined and therefore significant. Learning, both informal and formal, is seen as something that happens between people as well as between people and artefacts in different social practices. This is central to the theories about children and childhood that are the basis of this thesis. A fundamental position is that it is important to bring the pupils’ narratives to the fore. In order to spotlight the circumstances, the narratives are set into a context.

Different perspectives

When the encounter between the pupil and the school does not work what happens between the different actors is often not problematized. What usually happens instead is that the spotlight is turned on the pupil (Börjesson & Palmblad 2003; Hjörne, 2004; Karlsson, 2008; Ljusberg, 2008, in press; Lloyd, 2006; Lundgren, 2006; Skidmore, 2004). The pupil becomes the bearer of the “problem”. A result of this is that the number of psychiatric diagnoses, of which AD/HD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is one of the most frequent, increases continually (Skidmore, 2004). At the same time we notice an increase in the number of pupils in need of special support in Swedish schools (Matson, 2007), which can be one reason for the increase in the number of special solutions (Ljusberg, 2008). During the school year of 1998/99 there were 112 remedial classes in Stockholm, and eight years later, in 2006/07, the number had increased to 180 groups (Local Education Authority, 1998/99; 2007).

The ways in which researchers and teachers regard the situation in the school has consequences for the pupil, and also has to do with power. There are various discussions in the research society. For pupils who need extra
support the focus is often on a compensatory perspective, while from a critical standpoint it is said that the school needs to be reformed (Skidmore, 2004). Throughout this thesis I use the word “encounter” to describe what happens between pupil and school. It is a word that covers all the pupil’s interactions in school as well as under the school’s auspices. It includes interaction with both individuals and artefacts in school. It concerns relationships between pupils as well as between pupils and teachers and other adults in school. In other words it is not only about instruction, but also about the different kinds of encounters that can occur at a school. It embraces emotions when the pupils feel – or do not feel – to be listen to, to be seen, understood, and participatory.

The collective concept for pupils who have difficulties in their encounter with the school is “pupils in need of special support”, and this includes both pupils with various functional impairments and pupils who have other school problems (Lundgren & Persson, 2003; Nilholm, 2003; SFS, 1985:1100).

The perspectives that are discussed in this thesis include pupils’ perspectives, the pupil perspective, the compensatory perspectives, the socio-cultural perspective and the critical perspective. The compensatory perspective has also been called the medical psychological perspective (Bailey, 1998), and the individual or categorical perspective (Emanuelsson, Persson & Rosenqvist, 2001). Nilholm (2006) states that the compensatory perspective regards special needs:

… as an individual quality; such needs are demarcated and categorized. ... Special, rather than inclusive support is advocated; what is seen as special education expertise is supplied immediately, related to the diagnosed problems in the pupil. The reason for the special education support is seen to depend on impairments that are either congenital or in some other way attached to the individual (Nilholm, 2006, p. 17, my translation).

From a compensatory perspective the difficulties are attached to the pupil, in a critical perspective in the organisation and from a socio-cultural perspective the difficulties are studied as social constructions in a classroom situation.

One school for all

Goals in both the Swedish school law and the curricula state that all pupils are to be regarded as equal, to have equal rights to education, and equal circumstances in school. The ultimate goal is “one school for all”. The definition of the “one school for all” concept is not clear-cut. In this study it is defined as “an inclusive school” (Salamanca Declaration, 2001), i.e. a school that includes all pupils and that also includes the teaching itself and the cur-
ricula (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2004). Skidmore (2004) gives the following description of inclusion:

Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Through the process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils (Skidmore, 2004, p. 23).

This refers to a school with a common, unified, and thus accessible school as well as a curriculum for all pupils, where an opportunity is offered to all pupils to attend a school near their homes. What can be added to this description is the pupil’s own experience of participation, both during classroom time and breaks – being able to take part in and have access to the information that flows in and outside of the classroom.

In Sweden today we can see that medical discourse has been given a great deal of space in the educational context. Researchers in Great Britain, the USA, Canada, and Australia point out this phenomenon (Harwood, 2006; Lloyd, 2006). Lloyd describes the same paradox in Great Britain and the USA that we see in Sweden. While we are drawing ever closer to achieve an inclusive school with understanding of different functional impairments, the medical field and special education’s compensatory approaches are given more attention. Of the pupils who attend remedial classes in Stockholm, about 20 percent are there because they are seen, perceived, and treated as having concentration problems and/or acting-out behaviour (Local Education Authority, 2007). This thesis is about some of these pupils. The questions asked are: How does life in school appear to pupils who attend remedial classes? And what do they have to say themselves about what it means to be singled out and be in the remedial class?
Data was collected within the framework of the interdisciplinary, BASTA (Basic skills, social interaction and training of the working memory) project which is described below. The idea was that the project, partner institutions with their various perspectives, would shed light on different parts of the project. The different focuses were: medical, pedagogical and child centred. My major focus was on the child perspective, the pupils meaning making and their circumstances in the remedial group.

The BASTA project

The project started in 2003 with the general purpose of investigating how training of the working memory with the computer-based RoboMemo program affected pupils’ basic skills and social interactions. The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration one, undertaken by what was then the Stockholm Institute of Education (Lärarhögskolan i Stockholm [LHS]) and the Karolinska Institute (KI). LHS was responsible for the child and youth studies (which was my part) and special education segments of the project, and KI for the medical segments. RoboMemo is an interactive training program developed by researchers at Astrid Lindgren’s Children’s Hospital. It is based on the assumption that the working memory can be improved with training. The research group at KI has conducted various studies (Klingberg, Fernell, Olesen, Johnson, Gustavsson, Dahlström, Gillberg, Forssberg & Westerberg, 2005) showing significant improvements in problem-solving, attention span, and impulse control when children with diagnoses of AD/HD worked with the program. Working-memory research is based to a great extent on neurological findings focused on biological phenomena and presumed genetic defects.

Neuropsychiatric diagnoses

Of the 41 pupils included in the BASTA project, 19 had diagnoses, and of these 17 had diagnoses of AD/HD. There are no diagnostic medical or psychological tests for AD/HD; instead the diagnosis is determined on the basis of a clinical evaluation of behaviour. In Sweden a diagnosis of AD/HD is
often made with the aid of DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). The slash between AD and HD was added in 1994 to emphasize the division into three different groups. AD stands for primarily attention disorder, HD for primarily hyperactivity/impulsiveness, and ADHD for a combination of the two. The literature refers to various numbers for the frequency of psychiatric diagnoses. Ljungberg (2001) states that three to six percent of all school-age pupils have AD/HD. In the USA the figures are similar; there it is stated that between three and seven percent of the elementary-school pupils have the diagnosis, and that the frequency of AD/HD in boys is about three times that of girls (DuPaul & White, 2006).

Working memory

The function that we use to temporarily store information in order to perform cognitive intellectual tasks is called the working memory (Baddely, 2002). This function is central to concentration ability, impulse control, and activity direction. The working memory is closely related to series of higher cognitive capacities such as deductive capacity, problem-solving, and learning. It was thought earlier that the working memory was constant in all individuals, and that it was impossible to improve. Today, however, research has shown that it is possible to train the working memory. In order to process all the information we encounter, a temporary “warehouse” is needed – a comprehensive coordination, interpretation, and prioritizing – in other words, a working memory (Westerberg, 2004). Briefly, we use the working memory to remember what we are going to do next, in problem-solving and to direct attention.

In a review of working-memory research Yuan, Steedle, Shavelson, Alonzo and Oppezzo (2006) describe how the view of working memory has evolved from short-term memory to what we understand today to be a more complicated system with more components. Researchers are somewhat divided on questions about the working memory’s contents, structure, complexity, and function (Miyake & Shah, 1999). One example is Kieras, Meyer, Mueller and Seymour’s (1999) working memory model, which does not include just components for auditory and visual information; it differs by also adding tactile and kinesthetic information. Other unanswered questions about the working memory concern how information from the external world is combined with information from the long-term memory, and whether the working memory controls its activities actively or passively. In working-memory research today, there is (1) consensus on the fact that the contents of the working memory do not just include task-relevant information, but also task-irrelevant information, (2) consensus on the fact that the working memory consists of both phonological and visuospatial components, (3) consensus on the fact that the short-term memory’s storage is a
function of the working memory, (4) disagreement on whether an independent executive control is a necessary working-memory component, and (5) disagreement on whether the control function is active or passive (Yuan et al., 2006).

Working memory training with RoboMemo

RoboMemo is the name of the interactive computer-based training program that the pupils in the project used to train their working memories. The program consists of nine different exercises, of which five to six are to be performed per day. The exercises are intended to train the working memory in different ways, both visuospatially and verbally. The degree of difficulty is automatically adapted to the pupil’s abilities, so that it stays as close to the limit of the pupil’s optimum abilities as possible; i.e. it improves the pupil’s capacity. RoboMemo is designed to make the training as enjoyable as possible. Pupils can follow their progress, which is displayed as a column showing their point score. A “robot” gives encouraging comments on the exercise session. The training in the study was carried out in school, during school hours. The pupils trained for a five-week period, five days a week, for 30-45 minutes per day. In each school a trainer was appointed for each pupil. The trainer was to be available – in the room – for the entire session to support the pupil. Each pupil also had a personal “coach”, who led the training and provided support and motivation during the training period. The coach was an educated psychologist who had experience of pupils with diagnoses of AD/HD. The coach adapted the training to each pupil by developing individual training programs. After each training session each pupil’s results were reported to the coach via Internet. He/she could then, with the aid of a specially-developed system, read the training results. This helped the coach to give the right feedback, and also to make appropriate adaptations in the training program. The coach’s initial task was to evaluate whether the pupil had the potential to benefit from working memory training. The evaluation was made by phone with one of the parents and an evaluation form that the teachers filled in. If the psychologist was of the opinion that the pupil would not benefit from the program, then the pupil was devised not to carry out the training.

To investigate whether further training with the computer program would be useful, beyond the five weeks for which every pupil participated, fourteen of the pupils were offered a ten-day booster course after six months. The course was offered before the final round of tests was carried out.

In my thesis the working memory per se was not studied, but rather whether the training affected the self-images of pupils who attended remedial classes and who had worked with the RoboMemo working-memory training program. My major focus was, as earlier mentioned, on the child
perspective, the pupils meaning making and their circumstances in the remedial group.
The aim of this thesis is to increase the understanding of being a pupil in a remedial class and the pupils school conditions. The focus of the thesis was on pupils from nine different schools, who attended remedial classes. Ten remedial classes were studied from the pupil perspective as well as a pupils' perspective. Both the terms for the specific pupils as well as their ways of creating meaning and context are highlighted. The thesis is based on five articles that respond to five different questions:

- What self-concepts do pupils in remedial classes have and does the self-concept change when the pupils work with the working memory training program?

- How do teachers’ and parents’ view school setting and education of children with AD/HD?

- Which ethical issues are related to interviews with children?

- How do pupils between nine and twelve years of age describe why they attend remedial classes and what it means to be a pupil in that setting?

- How are the remedial classroom and teaching structured?
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This section begins with a short review of research in the medical/psychological field, followed by a brief summary of the remedial class in a historical context. Then follows research on pupils at risk, and research focusing on what precedes placement in remedial classes. Finally, Swedish research on pupils in remedial classes is reviewed.

School research and concentration difficulties

The compensatory literature, as previously mentioned, discusses and describes difficulties arising between school and pupil in terms of a problem within the pupil and describes various approaches to compensate for the difficulties. Research from this perspective has shown that pupils diagnosed for instance with AD/HD often have a difficult school day (Barkley, 2006; DuPaul & Eckert, 1997, 1998; Pfiffner & Barkley, 1990). Key areas highlighted are the pupils' distraction problems and difficulties in following instructions and rules, in maintaining attention, listening, and completing the tasks which are central in school. Other problems often mentioned are oppositional and disruptive behaviour, and inability to sit still at their desks (DuPaul & Stoner, 2003).

In the USA interventions focus on medical treatment, followed by psychosocial interventions and finally academic interventions. Sweden has a more restrictive and restrained view on medication. The growing medicalisation of pupils in the USA during the 1990s was established by Sax and Kautz (2003) as follows:

The prescribing of medication for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has increased substantially in the United States during the past 10 years. The amount of methylphenidate (e.g. Ritalin, Concerta) prescribed in the United States increased by more than 500% between 1991 and 1999, while the prescribing of amphetamines (e.g. Dexedrine, Adderall) increased by more than 2000% during the same interval (Sax & Kautz, 2003, p. 172).

Since the early 1980s researchers and professionals, primarily in the Western world, have developed specific treatment programs for children and adolescents diagnosed with AD/HD. The most common and most studied treatment
includes medication and behaviour modification in school and at home (Barkley, 2006). The Multimodal Treatment Study (MTA) targeted on AD/HD found that only medical treatment provided better results compared with behaviour modification alone. The clearest outcome of the MTA study was that the effectiveness of psychosocial intervention in AD/HD depends on many factors, such as the number of treatment components, precision in selecting the children, matching of treatment and pupils, tailoring to individual needs of each child with disabilities, and implementation and follow-up over a long period of time (Greene & Ablon, 2001).

Scientists in compensatory research argue that the most effective way to influence pupils’ situations in school has proven to be through educational and methodological guidance for teachers (DuPaul & Eckert, 1997; DuPaul & Stoner, 2003). They have shown that if a school-based intervention program is to be successful, the teacher’s/teachers’ attitudes to and knowledge about AD/HD are of critical importance. The organizational conditions in schools, class size, number of educators, and access to aid resources are also of importance, as are the attitudes of colleagues and headmasters. Furthermore, cooperation between parents and schools is also of major importance, as is a system for daily communication between home and school. If the effects are to be lasting, it is important that school interventions and parental education efforts are followed up regularly and over a long period of time, and are combined with other efforts (DuPaul & Stoner, 2003).

In Sweden, Gillberg and Kadesjö have been influential in proposing recommendations for pupils determined to have concentration difficulties and pupils diagnosed with AD/HD or Deficit in Attention, Motor Control and Perception (DAMP). Gillberg’s (1996, 2005) recommendations include small classes, individual instruction in mathematics, reading and writing, short periods of concentration (only five-minute intervals) in primary school, regular breaks, and physical activity (Gillberg, 1996). In Sweden, few trials or systematic observations describing various interventions have been performed (Hellström, 2004).

The remedial class

The observation that the Swedish school is, as earlier mentioned segregated is not new. In fact, it has been so ever since the public elementary school was introduced in 1842 (Brodin, & Lindstrand, 2004). During the 1950s the new comprehensive school developed in Sweden. The idea was that classes would be undifferentiated up to eighth grade. Despite this, previously established special education groups and support classes continued to exist. In the 1980 curriculum, (Lgr 80), all previous eponyms for special classes were replaced with remedial classes. The previous distinction between regular education and special education teaching was blurred and replaced with spe-
cial teaching methods and special educational efforts. The aim of this was to prevent pupils from having difficulties in school. Another objective was to aid pupils receiving special education to return to regular class as soon as possible, previously a relatively rare event (Elowson, 1995). Instruction in primary schools in Sweden may, according to the compulsory school ordinance (1994:1194) chapter 5, §5, be performed in remedial classes only if there are special reasons. All pupils in need of special support are entitled to receive that support and "it should primarily be given in the class or group where the pupil belongs" (ibid. my translation).

In research on inclusion, no support has been found for the superiority of remedial classes (Brodin & Lindstrand 2007; Gustafsson & Myrberg, 2002; Haug, 1998; Skidmore, 2004). Pupils attending remedial classes have often experienced numerous failures both in and outside the classroom (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2004; Hugo, 2007; Karlsson, 2008; Ljusberg, in press; Ljusberg & Brodin, 2007). The arguments supporting the establishment of remedial classes have in the past century fallen into two main categories. The first of these is to protect pupils attending the remedial class as it should bring a greater security for them and should support their self-esteem by shielding them from pupils who perform better (Ahlström, 1986; Brodin & Lindstrand 2004; Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007). It should diminish causes of distraction and promote a greater opportunity for individual adjustment of the teaching. The second argument is to protect other pupils from those transferred to the remedial class since the latter take up too much space in the class and prevent other pupils from doing their best (Deschenes, Cuban & Tyack, 2001). Research arguing against remedial class points to the potential dangers of pupils developing a “deviant identity” (Hjörne, 2004). Teachers’ expectations of pupils decrease, as does their level of ambition (Allodi-Westling, 2002; Gustafsson & Myrberg, 2002; Hjörne, 2004). Teachers' expectations of the pupils do not seem to change over time (Hjörne, 2004; Lundgren, 2006) and most pupils develop poor self-images (Groth, 2007). Pupils presumed at risk when they start school are likely to be seen that way during their entire school careers (Alín Åkerman, 2008; Brodin, 2008; Lundgren, 2006; Strander, 2008).

From child to pupil at risk

Lundgren (2006) has studied the process that takes place when pupils “are considered and treated as if” they are pupils at risk. The concept of pupils at risk has been discussed by several researchers (Brodin, 2008; Lundgren, 2006).

Lundgren has studied the social impact of the concept at risk and how it can be interpreted.
The concept is broad and focuses mostly on the individual child and family rather than on the overall social, political, economic circumstances or on educational institutions’ impacts on people’s lives (Lundgren, 2006, p. 41, my translation).

Several researchers stress the importance of teachers’ positive expectations of the pupil (Grosin, 2004; Hugo, 2007, Hundeide, 2006; Jenner, 2004; Karlsson, 2008). Teachers often have critical views of pupils considered to come from adverse circumstances and they often retain those views, producing a kind of negative expectation (Lübeck & Garrett, 1990). Furthermore, these researchers state that as many as about a third of the pupils in primary school were considered to be in some sort of risk zone by their teachers.

Lundgren (2006) argues that adults objectify pupils, seeing them as passive and not as active parts of the process. Her study shows that pupils become carriers of the adults’ expectations. Thereby, educational practice creates its own risk zones. The teachers’ views of the pupils she is studying in school remain constant, and since the pupils share the views of their shortcomings, they, try to incorporate constant corrections to what is considered normal.

The fact that pupils are being corrected to fit what is considered normal has also attracted attention in the field of research on the remedial class (Hjörne, 2004; Karlsson, 2008; Ljusberg, in press). Lundgren’s theory is that teachers and pupils are part of a discourse – what is seen as normal – where pupils are categorized. The pupils not “fitting” into what is considered normal are then labelled deviant. What behaviour is normal and who is abnormal, is not discussed and questioned in the school Lundgren (2006) studied. The pupils were offered no other possible ways forward. The consequence, Lundgren writes, becomes a total failure for all – for school, pupil, and family – and the pupil is the one who bears the burden of the failure. Lundgren argues that all adults involved are led astray in believing that the pupil will be able to make progress only if he/she really is trying. This is not possible since the discourse of normality includes abnormalities and the fact that some pupils fail is therefore enshrined in the system.

The normality criteria in school includes the hidden curriculum that the individual will be socialized, sorted, stored, reproduced and qualified by social order (Lundgren, 2006). Lundgren finds in her study, like the American researcher Mehan (1993) and the English researcher Hester (1991), that teachers as well as parents blame the failure on the pupil. The parents in Mehan’s study (1993) also made school teachers responsible, placing the failure to some degree outside the pupil. In the “pupil welfare conferences” studied, the participants differed in their views of the situation of the pupil. The school psychologist often argued for a multifactorial cause of the failure, supported by test results and placed the problem in the pupil while parents and also, to a lesser extent, teachers formulated the problems in a more
contextual terminology. The psychologist localized the problem of the pupil as “beneath his skin and between his ears”, while the class teacher realized that the pupil’s problems varied from one classroom situation to another. The parents, in turn, saw how the pupil’s problems changed over time (Mehan, 1993). The system, Lundgren (2006) writes, measures its successes and setbacks; those individuals accounting for failures are not as capable as others and have difficulties being a part of the system. “The pupil alone must accommodate the adults’ demands, frustrations, expectations, and desires for change” (Lundgren, 2006, p. 179, my translation).

Placement of pupils in remedial classes

Mehan (1993) followed a pupil through the various stages in what he describes as going from a “normal to a handicapped pupil.” The main steps in the process were referral, testing, and placement decisions. The process starts in the classroom as the teacher refers a pupil by completing a referral form, and asks the “School Appraisal Team” (SAT) for help. After the school psychologist had assessed the pupil, SAT recommended that he should be considered by the “Eligibility and Placement Committee”. In the team, only the teacher’s view was expressed – not the pupil’s – nor were anyone else’s observations of what happened in the classroom given, such as the interaction between the teacher and the pupil. Description of the problem was made in general terms and not in specific terms and the pupil was objectified (ibid.).

The fact that the pupil is objectified and that teachers are not contested has been stressed and questioned by other researchers (Hjörne, 2004; Lundgren, 2006). Investigations of the pupils, shows, for example, the danger of generalizing, categorizing and thus not only facilitating a problem but turning the pupil into an object. He/she becomes a problem or a diagnosis and over time the pupil is no longer seen as an individual but as an entity belonging to a group with a special label (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007; Matsson, 2007).

A notable finding reported by Hester (1991) is that the psychologist, in investigations of pupils, rarely challenged the teacher’s generalizations of the pupil. The problems described by the teacher to the psychologist were taken at face value. Both the teacher and psychologist focused on descriptions – without problematizing – that were considered facts. The teachers were considered observers of the pupils, as witnesses. In the discussions, the psychologist’s recommendations were accepted without being challenged or contested, while the recommendations of teachers and parents were interrupted quite routinely with requests for clarification and additional information (Hester, 1991).
Different perspectives were recognized among the participants in Mehan’s (1993) study. These perspectives partly opposed each other but the psychological approach had precedence. The conditions seem in many instances to be similar in the UK, Sweden, and the USA. Hjörne (2004) argues that her observations suggest that the difficulties arising in the encounter between pupil and the school are individualized in the pupil welfare team and pupil welfare conference and placed inside the pupil. The fact that a pupil comes up for discussion in the pupil welfare team seems to be a signal that he/she should be seen as a pupil with difficulties (Hjörne, 2004).

Although team members had different professions and therefore could help with different perspectives on difficulties in school, Hjörne notes that everyone’s statements were based on the medical discourse and its diagnostic model. AD/HD and DAMP was, for example, fully accepted as a relevant category for sorting pupils, and was used as an entity for processing the cause of the problems within the pupil. Everyone involved, including parents, accepted AD/HD and DAMP as a relevant cause of difficulties in school. In the language expressed in discussions in the pupil welfare team meetings studied by Hjörne, negative categories almost exclusively referred to the pupil, thereby focusing on the pupil’s weaknesses and shortcomings instead of his/her strong points. It was difficult to say exactly what had happened in the classroom, what preceded the reported incident, and how the pupil responded in the situation. Hjörne argues that this meant that decisions were made on the basis of schematic and standardized stories about the pupil with a psychological explanation basis. In the Hjörne study, as in Mehan (1993), the pupil’s own perspective on his/her school environment was not addressed in these conferences. The teaching practice was left unexplored. The staff seemed to accept the prevailing practice and not express any need for change. The logic of this reasoning is subsequently that it is the pupil who is the problem, while the organization at school is taken for granted (Hjörne, 2004; Lundgren, 2006; Skidmore, 2004).

Classroom climate, self-image and expectation of teachers and pupils

The ability to succeed in school depends on many factors. At the individual level, efforts have been made to define this ability, and the research has for example been focused on intelligence and socio-economic background. However, studies in terms of schools’ different levels of success (Grosin, 2004) have also been performed. The research presented above indicates that a compensatory perspective is common. In order to be a successful pupil in school knowledge about how to decipher the discourse, also known as the “school code”, is required (Broady, 1982; Jackson, 1990) or “criteria of nor-
mality” (Lundgren, 2008; Nirje, 2003). Attending school is to take part in and give meaning to a social practice and the discourse ruling in this immediate milieu. If a pupil goes to a school where the causes of problems between the pupil and the school that may arise are placed within the pupil, it is a critical advantage for the pupil if the pupil has the “right” understanding of the environment. That he/she can give meaning to the situation in order to act in accordance with the prevailing discourse (Lareau, 2003). The key is to interact in the classroom in the right way, such as waiting, listening, concentrating, solving problems, answering and asking questions at the right time and in the right way, working on their own, collaborating, sitting still, and moving at the right time and in the right way. There is also another discourse outside the classroom, in the schoolyard, that must be decoded. Both in the classroom and in the schoolyard, negotiations between conflicting views, thoughts and ideas about the “genre that applies” interact (Bakhtin, 1986). Lundgren (2006) indicates that the school system in itself creates risk zones for pupils.

In a compensatory perspective teachers’ views are based on normality criteria and focus on the pupil’s weaknesses, which mean that there is always a risk zone. Then the question arises of what determines which behaviours are in the risk zone. In a study Sigsgaard (2001) singled out certain patterns of behaviour that attract negative attention from adults. Sigsgaard studied how adults in the preschool/school scold pupils and suggest that the pupils who were scolded in preschool/school are those who are/have been scolded at home. The researcher identified three distinct groups among the pupils; pupils who act out, those who cling, and those who whine. Approximately 10 to 20 percent of these pupils receive far more scolding than other pupils. According to Sigsgaard (2001) part of the explanation is found in the pupils’ behaviour. The staff argues that pupils who act out, whine or cling are far more energy- and time-consuming, and it may happen that they neglect other pupils because of these demanding pupils. Sigsgaard (2001) also suggests another explanation to what he primarily describes as a behavioural pattern of the pupil. When teachers or educational experts do not recognize or understand the pupils’ actions, their reactions are often scolding. On the other hand, when the staff turn to the pupils as subjects and start to converse with them, they get a greater understanding of the pupils. With reference to this, Sigsgaard argues that the “lack of understanding of children’s actions gives rise to more scolding or vice versa; an understanding of their motives and intentions reduces the incidence of scolding” (Sigsgaard, 2001, p. 135, my translation).

In a classroom study, Davis et al. (2000), shed light on the relationship between interpretive background and interaction. They studied the interaction between intellectually disabled pupils and between pupils and teachers. The staff associated with the studied group of pupils gave various conditions of development to the pupils, depending on what meaning they saw in the
pupils’ behaviour. The staff’s perspective could also be linked to the staff’s own cultural background.

In an ethnographic study, Karlsson (2008) followed a remedial class with five boys and four teachers. The teachers explained the pupils’ school problems by “describing their shortcomings”, at the same time positioning themselves as those who had solutions and could help pupils. Karlsson (2008) linked the teachers’ descriptions to different discourses (moral/educational, medical, psychological, psychosocial, and discourse of uncertainty), all of which she placed under a compensatory discourse. The discourse of uncertainty involved teachers’ views of pupils’ agency. Karlsson (2008) assumes that there is a consistent uncertainty in the interviews and discussions about what constitutes the pupils’ difficulties. This uncertainty, the researcher argues, conceals a contradiction between pupils’ agency and the teachers’ interpretation of it. She found, in line with other researchers, that pupils describe themselves from the school’s perspective (Ljusberg, 2008). Karlsson (2008) indicates that this was not without resistance, as the pupils made themselves personally responsible for their difficulties in school. They used various resistance strategies to avoid problems and to be described as problems. The teachers found it difficult to interpret these various actions, and this made them uncertain.

In the school’s everyday operations the pupil’s agency is instead concealed by clinical concepts, definitions of problems and what I describe as the discourse of uncertainty. This make the pupils appear to be incomprehensible and incompetent with under-developed interactions, perceptions, and feelings (Karlsson, 2008, p. 169-170, my translation).

Karlsson (2008) points to the fact that it is important to meet pupils as subjects. Different cultures may result in giving pupils with diverging social backgrounds different interpretations of what is going on at school – of the social interplay, the meaning of education, and the level of knowledge and familiarity with respect to school subjects (Brembeck, 1997; Lareau, 2003). Lareau (2003) studied the interaction between children and adults of different social classes in the United States. Her findings are consistent with regard to internal and external control in the upbringing of children and the link between social classes as also Brembeck’s (1997) results show. Brembeck (1997), who studied the interaction patterns in the upbringing of children in Sweden in different social classes, means that the working class uses external control in the upbringing of children while the middle class and upper middle class use internal control. In a generalization of school control codes, the internal control predominates (Lareau, 2003). Studies where pupils diagnosed with AD/HD are included and the pupil’s socio-economic background and results are reported show that pupils from the working class are over-represented (Ljungberg, 2001). Several researchers (Grosin, 2004;
Groth, 2007; Hugo, 2007; Lundgren, 2007), point to the importance of the discourse with reference to the teacher’s expectations of the pupil. Groth (2007) interviewed six pupils in sixth and ninth grade in a segregated integrated setting and their three special teachers. By segregated integrated setting he means when the pupils leave the ordinary group in order to receive special support. The results show that this structure affects the pupils’ self-images and self-esteem in a negative way. Groth states that the pupils on the whole are positive to the help they receive in school. There may be a transfer from the remedial teachers' staff attitudes to the pupils, in this case an implied pathological view of reading and writing disabilities, with the result that the pupils may perceive that they have general problems with their learning.

Hellström (2004) uses the term “self-fulfilling prophecy” with reference to the teachers’ expectations and confidence in pupils’ learning abilities that have been shown to affect pupils’ performance in school. This phenomenon has also been called the Pygmalion effect (Jenner, 2004). Grosin (2004) argues that teachers who depart from the pattern of expecting worse results to expect good results of pupils from the working class may result in the pupils achieving improved results in school. His research is of interest since it points out that the school does not need to be conservative in relation to pupils' socioeconomic backgrounds and indicates that the school can play a role (Grosin, ibid.). He considers it important to have a focus on knowledge objectives. My interpretation of this is that he is talking about seeing pupils as subjects when he discusses responding to pupils on a humanitarian level and offering mutual respect:

Successful schools are characterized by the prioritizing of knowledge objectives and that pupils learn what they should know. However, for the pupils to be able to achieve knowledge objectives, they must also have positive response from the adults on a humanitarian plane. Another link between adults and children in successful schools consists of the common social rules of interplay that include a demand of mutual respect (Grosin, 2004, p. 37, my translation).

Hugo (2007) followed seven pupils and their three teachers for three years, in a small high school teaching class. He underlines that the teachers were very important for the pupils he studied. The pupil’s experience of the encounter with teachers is crucial to whether he/she even attends the class. These pupils have not previously felt that school was anything for them. In order to feel like agents, to be involved, to feel that schoolwork is meaningful – that it is real – they are dependent on teachers who can offer them this opportunity. Hugo means that the key to young people’s learning is their approach to learning. The pupils studied changed their view of themselves in relation to school subjects; they became receptive to learning what school offers. It is a matter of content and relationships. Hugo proposes an alterna-
tive concept of “pupils in need of special support”; instead they are “pupils in need of learning situations that are real”. “Real stands for the pupils’ mental attention what they experience practically are real both in terms of content and relationships” (Hugo, 2007, p. 157, my translation). This means that the pupil’s experiences are taken seriously, which in my interpretation is seeing the pupil’s perspective, seeing the pupil as co-actor as opposed to an object.

In a review, the authors made a long list of various shortcomings of social, behavioural as well academic skills often ascribed to children – especially boys – who are diagnosed with AD/HD (Owens, Goldfine, Evangelista, Hoza & Kaiser, 2007). When these children fill in a questionnaire of self-image evaluations, they receive relatively high results in relation to other measurements, such as how their teachers and parents evaluate them. According to these studies, there is a substantial risk that these children underestimate and do not report their problems. An increasing number of articles point to this phenomenon, which has been called a positive illusory bias (PIB). The authors discuss the dilemma which they believe this phenomenon may involve. On the one hand, if pupils think they know more than they actually do, there is an increased risk of failure since they do not see the need to continue working and do not absorb the negative feedback. On the other hand, if they do not realize their academic and social shortcomings, this may protect their self-esteem and thus fend off or prevent negative effects. An important question posed by the researchers in the article is why the pupils overestimate their self-image; what is the reason for this, what function does it have? Four hypotheses are discussed in the article: cognitive immaturity, neuropsychological deficits, ignorance of incompetence, and self-protection explanations (Owens et al., 2007). The authors’ conclusion is that the existing research is inadequate and that the most reliable hypothesis to date – the one with the most empirical support – is that of self-defence. So pupils diagnosed with AD/HD get higher results than what is to be expected in their self-image estimates if they have filled in the higher values to protect their self-esteem.

Hjörne (2004) studied a remedial class of six boys (six to nine years old) diagnosed with AD/HD and DAMP. She did not find any clear connection between diagnosis and teaching but she found a strong impact from the medical field on the teaching used in the studied classroom. The ratio of teachers to pupils was 5:6. Pupils were separated from each other by means of screens. The teachers motivated this with the pupils’ needs to be in an environment where they are not distracted by external stimuli. There was a schedule that was repeated every day. During the working periods, when pupils were working in five-minute sessions with each task, the teacher said that the pupils were practicing concentration and that they could not perform for longer periods. However, no extension was made during the study of these periods of concentration. This structuring of the work, argue the teach-
ers, reduces complexity for the pupils, promotes routine, and prevents them from ending up in situations where they need to make choices. Simultaneously, the pupils and teachers spent considerable time negotiating the social order in the classroom.

The educational content of a task was seldom discussed. The focus was on drill exercises with few pupils. To prepare the pupils for adaptation to ordinary classes, knowledge of concentration and of social skills were applied. The need to practice normal classroom behaviour to better adapt to regular classrooms was made explicit in the dialogue between pupils and teachers several times a day. The pupils were told what behaviour is unacceptable in an ordinary classroom or were informed that a particular activity such as raising their hands before they talk is something that has to be learned before they can return to an ordinary class. An additional element was that the teacher intervened and commented on the pupils’ shortcomings by pointing out a particular behaviour as characteristic of an AD/HD and DAMP diagnosis, and therefore was seen as something unacceptable in the class. These reminders of their shortcomings were looked upon by Hjörne as part of the construction of their identities as deviant pupils of a particular kind, specifically as AD/HD and DAMP pupils.

One problem shared by several of the studies mentioned above is that the reasons for difficulties arising in the encounter between the school and pupils are placed in the pupil. Several studies also indicate that pupils are not allowed to have a voice that they are not met as co-actors but rather are objectified (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007; Hjörne, 2004; Lundgren, 2006; Matsu-son, 2007; Mehan, 1993). Grosin (2004) underlines the importance of the school, and he and several other researchers point out how the teacher’s interpretive background shapes the expectations placed on the pupil.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The study of everyday practices

As a starting point from which to understand, interpret and communicate the data collected, I have chosen a socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1999; Säljö, 1999, 2000, 2005; Hundeide 2006). In such a perspective, we understand the world and our existence in the world through different discourses (Säljö, 2000). Discourse means normative context, coherent systems of meaning in which meaning is created, enclosed, and excluded, a “dialogic-interactive process in which the interpretive framework and 'stories' are conveyed and re-created” (Hundeide, 2006, my translation). With Bakhtin’s (1981) words, the socio-cultural perspective describes the process within the individual as “appropriation”;

i.e. that the collective patterns are actively reconstructed by guiding interactions with caregivers and through personal activity in the routines and daily (discursive) practices that are socio-culturally-based (Hundeide, 2006, p. 74, my translation).

We gain our knowledge of the world, of ourselves, and of our position in the world by appropriating different discourses. The content of the discourse is related to the environment, the tradition, and the social context. All parts – the social practice, the tools and the individual – are different components that are related and are equally necessary to understand the actions of human beings, as they determine each other (Säljö, 2005; Wertsch, 1991). Thus, the contents of our thinking processes have a social origin; the thought comes in contact with the outside world through artefacts (language is also seen as an artefact), and how we understand and think depends on the social practices in which we participate.

Knowledge is never neutral and is always mediated (pre-interpreted). Understood in this way, pupils and teachers will enter school with a variety of – sometimes similar – discursive backgrounds. Pupils and teachers will all give various – sometimes similar – meanings to what it means to be a human being, a pupil, and a teacher. They have, for instance, different senses of whether it is good or bad to go to school.
According to socio-cultural theory, we use our interpretive background when we talk to or interview someone (Hundeide, 2006). To understand something is then seen as “giving meaning to”; the meaning is not there to explore, but must be created (Ljusberg & Brodin, 2007). To “understand” is to interpret, which is seen as a creative process where the opinion/action is placed in a dramaturgic whole (Hundeide, 2006). People’s activities are addressed and situated and at the same time people act according to their own interpretive backgrounds. This also includes always acting from a given position, which is an interpretive position. This concept also includes the typical background conditions brought by different people (teachers, pupils, and researchers) to a situation (interview, lecture, or break) and their definitions, interpretations or negotiations of this situation. Another way to express this is “that we are always perspectivistically tied to the position we find ourselves in” (Hundeide, 2006, p. 184, my translation). At the same time, we are part of a constant process; the meaning is never fixed and it is impossible not to interpret. The world is diversified and each person has his/her own temporary “image” (his/her own perspective, his/her own interpretation, interpretive background, interpreting position). The consequence is that our view of reality is only partly shared, which means that we must interpret actions.

We are born into and grow up within a culture

Every child is born into and develops within a culture, i.e. “the set of ideas, values, knowledge, and other resources that we acquire through interaction with the outside world” (Säljö, 2000, p. 29, my translation). Culture is pre-interpreted (mediated), often without reflection, in action; it is a hidden fostering of the child (Hundeide, 2006). We appropriate our personal knowledge in interaction with others and this normatively tinted knowledge becomes embodied silent knowledge (Bakhtin, 1981). “We simply learn to pay attention, describe, and act in reality in the way the environment allows and encourages” (Säljö, 2000, p. 66, my translation). This does not necessarily mean only “good” learning (Groth, 2007; Hjörne, 2003; Hugo, 2007). We learn constantly. Form and content are intertwined; they are dependent on each other. In the study of everyday social practices, acts as well as routines such as language and discourses are studied. A concept that covers both of these approaches is “discursive practices” (Säljö, 2000).

Through our personal socio-cultural histories, our interpretive background, we interpret and give meaning to the present in various discursive practices. In that way, these various discursive practices in which we participate constitute obstacles and opportunities for learning and development; they influence what and how we learn. A particular behaviour never occurs alone, but is linked to a specific context; it is situated. Human behaviour and
interaction are, in some contexts, seen as the construct and reconstruct of socio-cultural practices. If we return to the Lareau (2003) study of children in the USA, she could show how children from different social classes learn different interaction patterns when interacting with their parents. When children start school, the encounter with the school is seen differently depending on what interaction patterns the child brings to school.

Discourses are expressed materially

Discourses are expressed materially in different social or socio-cultural practices such as remedial class, dental practice, or food stores. Discourses “are material in nature and in consequences – they are ingredients in the practices that constructed and reconstructed our world” (Säljö, 1999, p. 85, my translation). In remedial class, it can take physical expression by separating pupils with screens or by facing the pupil’s desks toward a bare wall. Nordin-Hultman (2004) points out how an alternate discourse can give meaning to the solution of situations gaining concentration problems in another way, by a variety of impressions. The material expression has several orientations; on one hand the discursive significance things have, and on the other hand the discourse’s creation of the physical environment. In every society there are myriads of different discourses constructed and reconstructed in various socio-cultural practices. In a social practice such as, a remedial class, the actors together construct and reconstruct the content from the current discourse. The reasons, the orientation, and the quality of our actions are steered by the practice in which it takes place. Every social practice or “environment” contains/invites certain types of actions and interaction. This has been called the situation “affordance” (Reed, 1993). It emerges clearly in several studies (Groth, 2007; Hjörne, 2004; Karlsson, 2008). However, when people meet in school, for example, their discussions do not necessarily refer to math or language. Conversely, it is not only in school that discussions take place about things that belong to this specific practice.

The interpretive background with which the teachers meet the pupils is crucial to their approach, which makes up the framework within which the pupils have freedom to act. Here they have room for manoeuvring, partly on what the encounter looks like and what standards are applied but also on how the classroom is planned and decorated and what other artefacts have been acquired.
Language as action – the significance of different types of language

As previously stated, discourses are built in and around the artefacts, and from a socio-cultural perspective language is also seen as an artefact. Language does not function as a neutral representation of reality since our view of reality and the language we use to describe it is dependent on the interpretive background and is also discursively tinted (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1991; Säljö 1999). Therefore it is of interest to discuss discourse in the study of remedial classes. Describing the world linguistically is seen as an active function, a way to take a stand and make some claims over others. The content of the discourse is, as stated above, related to the environment, tradition, and social context. The language constitutes or creates the objects and the reality language describes. Since language is action, different ways to use language constitute the world differently (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1991; Säljö 1999; Mehan, 1993). Pupils are formed by and also form themselves in the interaction with the context depending on the various discourses they encounter. What does the discourse around the remedial class look like? Earlier in this work I have highlighted two different perspectives, the compensatory and the socio-cultural and pointed out how these different discourses may have different significance in the encounter between the pupil and school.

Interpretive background – interpretative position

The frame of reference and understanding used when interpreting the world are referred to as the interpretative background. It consists of a variety of prototypes derived from repeated experiences in our everyday lives. Our socio-culturally appropriated interpretation represents our historical and situated background of knowledge. To understand something means to “give meaning to” and is a constructivistic, a discursive as well as a dramaturgic action. We usually take our interpretive background for granted and the act is “interpreted, read into, and filled in” as we put the opinion and/or action in the dramaturgic whole. Hjörne (2004) interprets this by saying that once the AD/HD diagnosis has been introduced and adopted as relevant it is included in the staff understanding and becomes active in the creation of meaning. What is important is that the teachers’ interpretive background is in place, controlling the creation of meaning which comprises what I would call “our outlook”, how we look upon children. We are taking positions with our interpretive background. Our actions are situated, which in this situation means that we act both from the basis of the interpretive background as well as the context. This also includes that we always act from a position, our interpretative position (Hundeide, 2006). This concept means the typical back-
ground conditions that different people bring with them into a situation, their
definition, interpretation or negotiation of the situation. At the same time we
are in a constant process; the meaning is never fixed and it is always possible
to make different interpretations.

Social Contracts

One thing children learn while growing up are the standards of how social
contracts are established and maintained. Social contracts refer to a set of
expectations and mutual obligations (Hundeide, 2006). The agreement, the
social contract, is initially a part of the pupil’s understanding of him/herself
built on interaction with caregivers – later also on others, for example friends
and teachers – and their normative expectations embedded in a discursive
practice, in this case a remedial class. The agreement may be seen as a recipro-
cal process of definition; people are in a state of change and to some extent
negotiate constantly with each other about the appearance of their relation-
ships and what constitutes different offers for each other (Ljusberg, 2008).
They are dependent on intention, situation, practice, discourse, and previous
experiences; they test each other’s limits, they open or close them, renegoti-
ate and so on.

Teachers as well as pupils test their own and each other’s limits. Within
different discursive practices, in an ecological and complex and complicated
interaction, we offer each other different opportunities of development. Peo-
ple are constantly developing, which among other things means that pupils
and teachers together construct and reconstruct the remedial class. The per-
son I am right now is partially dependent on you and vice versa – how you
present yourself and how I interpret you and react to your presentation – and
on the discursive practice in which our activities are embedded. There may
be numerous, though not infinite, contracts between people (von Wright,
2000; Mead, 1976). The contracts have varying degrees of stability and even
if they have become very stable, they can be renegotiated.

The reciprocity in the construction of identity can be compared with Bak-
htin’s (1986) “addressivity”, which means that an opinion is adjusted, di-
rected, and addressed, and thus belongs to both the speaker and the recipient.
When a pupil “presents” him/herself it is in relation to the recipient – the
teacher – which means that the presentation is of both the pupil and the tea-
cher. Upbringing is thus a dialogic meeting where education concerns to all
involved. An implication of this is that the zone of proximal development
should be sought in the adult’s opinion of the pupil (Vygotsky, 1999). Tea-
chers have great responsibility and even though the ultimate responsibility
for pupils is the teachers’, it is important to emphasize that there is always an
encounter.
Although we are constantly developing, the social contract has a certain stability which usually means that we have common expectations of the interaction. In every culture, the cultural patterns of interaction are mediated and appropriated while growing up. As time passes, these patterns are transformed into mutual actions and at that time much has already been finally negotiated. They become appropriated and established patterns of standards that control and educate the individual and his/her behaviour. The negotiated pattern has been called a meta-contract, a draft of an institutional contract (Hundeide, 2006). They constitute culturally bound standards of how we should conduct ourselves in relation to different people with different statuses and in different situations – both formal and informal – to family and friends. Being a pupil has and has had variations in significance and hence different practices. Since childhood changes in relation to economic, social, historical and cultural conditions in society, children’s upbringing depends on cultural meta-contracts of upbringing, the normative image of the child that is prevalent in a society during a certain period of time.
METHODS

Different studies and designs

The focus of this thesis is on the pupils, their circumstances and how they describe why they attend remedial class. To study this, classroom observations, interviews with ten pupils and ten of their teachers, a self-concept test, a parental questionnaire, and a teacher questionnaire were used. Sociocultural perspectives claim that it is impossible to understand and describe mental processes independent of their social, situational, and communicative context. What people say, write and do are linked to a particular situation that is contextually bound and therefore it is not only the observed person’s way of thinking and conceptual understanding that is shown. Highlighting the pupil’s perspective and the conditions is not simply a matter of highlighting what they say, but also of trying to interpret it and put it in context. Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley (2000) stress that the researcher’s mind contains at least two languages and cultures; the academic and the everyday language and culture. One way to understand the various activities I have studied is to apply multiple perspectives set against each other in order to shed light on the data. This could be called a form of theory and perspective triangulation.

Being able to use a perspective and to observe from different angles is a way to gain stronger understandings in research. Building several different perspectives on issues is a fruitful way to gain a better understanding of what guides events in the classroom. The starting point is that pupils have their own opinions and can be sources of knowledge; they can make contributions in both clarifying and challenging ways that researchers, teachers, and parents take for granted. As previously stated it’s all about a choice of methods of constructing data. Different methods give different answers to questions about events and phenomena; different actors give different answers and various perspectives may generate diverse answers. Christensen and Prout (2005) suggest that adults still look at children as non-adults and thereby as not to be taken into consideration, and certainly not as co-actors. To see pupils as co-actors is to ask not only teachers but also the pupils how it is to be a pupil in remedial class. There are many reasons e.g. pragmatic, moral, political or scientific, for using the pupil’s perspective in research (Greene &
Hill, 2005). One reason is trying to understand the world as seen with the pupils’ perspectives on themselves, other people, things, and conditions in their environment and on what it means to be a pupil (Hogan, 2005). A second reason is that the use of the pupil’s perspective means that we may learn something about the world as such (Qvarsell, 2003). Based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), the concept of pupil’s perspective can be seen as a way to protect the interests of a formerly underprivileged group and/or to get better tools for practical teaching and social work. A third reason is the formation of scientific knowledge; it concerns seeing the phenomenon from different perspectives, from the viewpoints of many actors, and it thereby provides fuller and deeper understanding of central phenomena (ibid).

To claim that one’s research is done from someone else’s perspective is a paradox. You cannot actually change places with someone else. On the other hand, doing research with someone else’s perspective means something else, to see “the other” as an individual, a co-researcher, to listen and try to understand the other person’s interpretive position. If you want to understand the actions of the actors – here the pupils in remedial class – in a given situation, you must explore their interpretive positions. One way is to talk with pupils about their everyday school situations. If we did not try to understand other people’s interpretive positions, we would not be able to understand others. It would be impossible tocommunicate, impossible to do research, and we would not be able to respond to each other. We would not be able to encounter each other as individuals but would treat each other as objects. An important consideration is that I have chosen to interview the pupils. I see conversations as a feasible way to get knowledge. The starting point is that the researcher has his/her own interpretive position, and can shift between different discourses and interpret the material with different perspectives. In this thesis the shift is between the pupil perspective, the pupils’ perspective, the socio-cultural perspective and the compensatory perspective.

According to Halldén (2003), researchers may, using the child’s perspective, analyze the conditions under which the child lives. This means highlighting an aspect of the impact of remedial class i.e. the pupils’ circumstances and perspectives.

The BASTA project – an empirical viewpoint

The five articles in the dissertation are based on four different studies. The studies are conducted within the longitudinal BASTA project (Basic skills, social interaction and training of the working memory). The empirical data were collected between 2004 and 2005 in ten remedial classes in nine different schools in a big city area. Selection of schools and pupils in the studies were made from the larger project (BASTA). The targeted group consisted
of normally gifted pupils with concentration difficulties, with or without a
diagnosis and aged 9-12 years. All pupils were in remedial classes in study
year three to five in the beginning of the study. Excluded from the study
were pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish, pupils with intellec-
tual disabilities, and pupils with autism or loss of hearing. The study in-
cludes data collected from the pupils’ parents and teachers.

Headmasters in schools that according to the Local Education Authority
(2002) used teaching in small groups of pupils, who were determined to have
difficulties concentrating, were contacted by telephone. Schools not inter-
ested in participating did not call back and thereby fell away. A letter of
information was sent to the headmasters showing interest in participating in
the study. Then, interested headmasters and teachers sent a written expres-
sion of interest.

Personal contact was made with interested teachers from the schools that
signed up to obtain additional information about the ages of the pupils and
why they were in remedial classes, and also to explore opportunities to or-
ganize training in school. Overall, nine schools were contacted and a total of
45 pupils fitted the target group requirements. Three schools from this initial
selection were contacted in first and second term as well as in third term of
the school year.

All persons involved (headmaster, teacher, parents and pupils) who were
interested in participating in the study were called for two separate briefings
held in the school. The briefing was led by two PhD students and a psy-
chologist from the project, and in some cases the headmaster also attended.
All school staff and parents involved had the opportunity to receive informa-
tion and opportunities to ask questions.

The psychologist involved in the project telephoned the families whose
children had agreed to participate and performed a screening interview with
one of the parents. With the help of this interview – along with a teacher’s
estimation – it was settled whether working memory training was appropri-
ate, based on the project’s eligibility criteria. Forty-two pupils (35 boys, 7
girls, one boy dropped out) were selected to participate in the project.

Design of the different parts of the study

In order to answer various questions both quantitative and qualitative meth-
ods were used. The data collection includes 41 pupils’ self-concept tests,
about 300 hours of classroom observations, 21 teachers’ and 40 parents’
questionnaires, and interviews with ten pupils and ten of their teachers.
The studies included these issues;

- What self-concepts do pupils in remedial classes have?
- How do teachers and parents view the school setting and education of children with AD/HD?
- How do pupils between nine and twelve years of age describe why they attend remedial classes and what it means to be a pupil in that setting?
- How are the remedial classrooms and teaching structured?
- The ethical issues of all studies resulted in a separate article with focus on ethical considerations.
Two overview tables

Tables 1 and 2 give are compilations of the studied groups and studies.

**Table 1. Overview of the pupils and teachers in the study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of pupils in class/number of pupils in study</th>
<th>Number of boys in target group</th>
<th>Number of girls in target group</th>
<th>Pupils with diagnoses in target group</th>
<th>Teachers in the class</th>
<th>Number of teachers per pupil in entire class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 DAMP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6/4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11/4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1/2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6/3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1AD/HD</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 AD/HD</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 AD/HD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 AD/HD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7/4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1AD/HD, DAMP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Dyslexia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 AD/HD</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1AD/HD, DAMP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6-7/6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 AD/HD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Asperger’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot</td>
<td>67-68/42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1/2,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1 it can be deduced that the classes are small compared with regular classes. The number of pupils in each class ranged from four to eleven among which three to six pupils were included in the target group. The number of the pupils in the classes ranged from all too approximately 36 percent. There were fewer girls than boys in the study. It included 7 girls and 35
boys; i.e. about 20 percent girls. This gender difference is in line with the
differences between the genders in children diagnosed with AD/HD; it is
three times more common among boys in the USA (DuPaul & White, 2006)
and two to three times more common in Sweden (The National Board of

In Sweden, pupils may be placed in remedial class without having a diag-
nosis. The pupils included in the study have all been considered to have con-
centration difficulties. Of the pupils studied, 22 (55 percent) had not been
diagnosed. Of the 19 pupils (45 percent) had a diagnosis; one had Asperger’s
disease, one had dyslexia, one had been diagnosed with DAMP, 14 were
diagnosed with AD/HD, and two pupils were diagnosed with AD/HD and
DAMP.

Nine schools and ten classes were included in the study. The total number
of pupils in the studied classes was 67, while the total number of pupils in
the target group was 42. Furthermore, the number of teachers in each class
ranged from one to six, and the number of pupils per class ranged from four
to eleven. The number of pupils per teacher ranged from one to three, on
average a little more than two pupils per teacher.

Table 2. Overview of methods, participants and hours used in different
studies and articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>No. of participants (p)/hours(h)</th>
<th>Article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils’ self-concept questionnaire</td>
<td>41 p</td>
<td>I, II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with pupils</td>
<td>10 p</td>
<td>II, IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>300 h</td>
<td>IV, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with teachers</td>
<td>10 p</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ questionnaire</td>
<td>21 p</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ questionnaire</td>
<td>40 p</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II shows the methods used in the various studies and the number of
participants or the number of observation hours. Finally, the number of the
article based on the results from the different studies is reported.
Design of study I

What self-concept do pupils in remedial classes have?

The aim of this study was twofold; one aim was to examine the self-concept of pupils with attention deficits, who enter remedial classes in compulsory schools. The second aim was to study if the pupils’ self-concept should change after working with the working memory training program. I wanted to know about the pupils’ situations and thoughts about the school situation, and believed that a self-concept questionnaire should give us some of the answers.

The study included 41 pupils from all ten groups, with a drop-out of one pupil. To measure the pupils’ self-image, a self-concept test called “This is me” (Taube, Torneus & Lundberg, 1984) was applied. The estimation scale contained 30 questions divided into four groups; academic self-concept, social self-concept, human self-concept and global self-concept in the analysis. There were four different reply alternatives to the questions. These were: YES, yes, no, and NO and the instruction to the pupils was that they should choose the statement that they thought corresponded best with the sentence that had just been read to them. The pupils completed the estimation form in three sessions; before working memory training, immediately after, and six months after completion of working memory training.

The form was mainly filled in, in a group together with me. The activity was carried out in school, either in the classroom or in an adjacent meeting room during school hours. The pupils placed themselves so that they could write in peace and quiet without feeling watched. Before each session I read a predetermined information text, “Guidelines for mapping” (Taube, Torneus & Lundberg, 1984b). The text told how to fill out the form, and stated that it “is about what you think about different things and what you believe or think about yourself” and that “there is no answer that is right and no answer that is wrong. It is what you think that is the right answer” (Taube et al. 1984b, p. 16-17, my translation).

I read each question out loud. On three occasions, when a pupil was sick, this pupil filled in a self-estimation alone with me, and on five other occasions, with a teacher. Filling in the form with the teacher may have an impact on the outcome – on how the pupil assessed the answers – that may lead to a restriction, a distortion of the material. Despite the fact that the teacher used the same manual as the researcher did, it may have been used in a different way. In addition, pupils may fill in the form differently, depending on whether it is a researcher or their teachers that reads out the questions. However, the differences in the collected data were small to nonexistent. The effects of the booster training that took place six months after the training ended seemed not to show any differences compared with the main data.
The questionnaire used in the project has previously been used by Taube et al. (1984) with 690 typical pupils from 44 classes, measured on one occasion. We consider their study as a control group based on the normal curve. The data available allows us to compare the means (M) on all three scales and the global scale, but we do not have access to the standard deviations and standard errors for the scales in the comparison data. The dominating pattern is that the differences between the BASTA data and the comparison data are small to nonexistent.

The results show that there are minor differences concerning the results of the measurements on the three different occasions, before, directly after, and six months after the training was finished.

The form has, as previously said, been tested on a representative sample of pupils (690 pupils from 44 schools) in Umeå. It was concluded that the test was reliable. The reliability calculations were made using the split-half method, which gave a reliability coefficient of 69 (Taube et al., 1984b).

Design of study II

How do teachers and parents view the school settings and instruction of children with AD/HD?

Focus in this study was on teachers’ and parents’ views on the school and instruction of pupils with AD/HD. The aim was to increase the knowledge of the teachers’ and parents’ thoughts on the meaning of the school context for pupils with attention disorders. A questionnaire was distributed to 21 teachers and school staff working with pupils in the studied remedial classes, and to 41 parents with pupils attending the same classes. The class teachers and other school staff who work in the remedial class on a daily basis answered the questionnaire. Forty-one pupils were involved (six girls and thirty-four boys) and their parents answered the questionnaire. One parent dropped out for unknown reasons, but we do not think this influenced the outcome significantly. The questions included information about the school, the class, and the pupils’ instruction, in-service training and supervision, and finally about resources.

Questionnaires were distributed at the briefing held in each school before the beginning of the project. We distributed one questionnaire per family and one questionnaire to each teacher. We asked them to fill in the survey, not at the meeting but before the pupils began working with the working memory training program. One envelope, stamped and addressed to our department, was attached to each survey form. Answers were processed and data was compiled and reported in running text. The questions included information
about the school and class, the pupils’ instruction, in-service training and supervision, and finally about resources. Data were reported in running text in the above headlines. Subsequently, the results were discussed in combination with previous research.

Design of study III

How do pupils between nine and twelve years of age describe why they attend remedial classes and what it means to be a pupil in that setting?

The aim of this empirical study was to find out how pupils between ten and twelve years of age describe why they attend remedial classes and what it means to be a pupil in that setting. The study was based on ten interviews. One pupil from each class included in the main study was randomly selected. Eight boys and two girls were interviewed. The interviews took place in the school in a room supplied by the staff, and were implemented as the final stage of data collection. One reason for this was that I wanted to gain as much cultural competence as possible, since an important part in asking for the children’s perspective is to be aware that it is the researcher who designs data on interaction with the pupil (Christensen & James, 2000; Davis, Watson, & Cunningham-Burley, 2000; Eide & Winger, 2005).

Here, I see it as important that the pupils and I know each other, and that I had a certain amount of cultural competence. The interviews were semi-structured, i.e. the questions were predefined, designed in line with the aim, but with open, transparent answers and supplementary questions as described by Kvale (1997). The fact that I had participated in the classroom had the consequence that we could talk about specific events, which made the interview more like a dialogue (Aronsson, 1996; Doverborg & Pramling, 2000), an inter-subjective meeting. Most pupils could easily describe their normal school days, while others had more difficulties, but for most it seemed that they thought it was important and fun. The fact that most pupils thought it was important made it easier for me to avoid distortion and to help the pupils to formulate answers. I focused on listening to each pupil’s responses, which also gave greater opportunity to adapt the supplementary questions. Listening also involves challenging one’s own pre-understanding (Aronsson, 1996; Moss, Clark & Kjørholt, 2005; Rinaldi, 2005).

One of the stumbling blocks in interviewing children is the asymmetric relationship between children and adults (Alderson, 2000; Eide & Winger 2005; Johansson, 2003). Part of this means being aware that pupils, like most informants, are sensitive to the interviewer’s intentions, and may respond
with what the interviewer appears to want to hear. For pupils in remedial class the asymmetric relationship between teacher and pupil is significant. I put much effort into seeing to it that the pupils feel comfortable. It is difficult to tell if I spent more effort on this than I would have if it had been interviews with pupils from regular classes. I was very distinct in describing how an interview takes place, stating: “we shall talk about how it is to attend school”, “I ask questions and you may ask too”, and “it is not about right and wrong answers”. Most people want to be helpful and accommodating, and children do too (Eide & Winger, 2005; Tiller, 1988). On the other hand, an interview is, as stated before, always a co-creation. It is not the only respondent that adapts; this is something mutual and the interviewer is at the mercy of the pupils’ willingness to share their thoughts (Kolrud, 1999). Reciprocity in the creation of sense can be compared with Bakhtin’s (1986) “addressivity” – that an opinion is adapted and directed; it is addressed and thus belongs to both the speaker and the recipient.

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and lasted about 30 minutes. After transcription, the data material was read through a number of times. Statements are situated; when an interview is transcribed, it becomes de-contextualized and reinterpreted, which is part of the analysis. The researchers’ subjectivity can never be ignored; it is the researchers’ project, the researcher asks the questions, does the analysis and presents the results (Warming, 2005). Aware of this, my research colleagues at the department have read and commented on the text.

My intention with the first step of the analysis was to stay as close to the pupils' statements and narratives about themselves and their everyday lives as possible. This makes the performance report essentially descriptive. My research is close to the empirical data, and it can be said that this stage of the analysis is to some extent inspired by grounded theory. In the analysis I have sought patterns and discrepancies between the different individuals' statements. I found paths in the different interviews that could lead to different themes. After finding themes I tried them out by reading the interviews again. When I thought I had found a theme it was about what the different pupils had conveyed about just this phenomenon I traced statements that could fit under the different themes. After that I searched the various interviews and headings, not just for patterns but also for contradictions and errors. I wanted to find themes that could cover all the pupils' similarities and differences, and I was also looking for statements I had not covered.

Finally I presented the material under the different headlines: the pupils' views on ordinary classes, relations with classmates, the pupils' views of the teachers, and the reason for attending a remedial class. The results of the ten interviews have been compiled and presented as short summaries under each heading. All responses are reported although some of the pupils did not answer all questions.
Performance reporting is work that is close to the empirical data; when I approach the pupils' perspective, the focus has been on listening. In the final analysis phase, the focus has shifted to interpret and understand the results with the help of a socio-cultural grid and with the help of previous research. My starting point was relational, as opposed to essential. Subjects participating in a social context, a social practice, such as remedial class, construct and reconstruct the knowledge; together they form and are shaped by the discourse (Säljö, 2000). By using a socio-cultural grid different discourses became clearer. In this study, I believe that the socio-cultural grid made it possible to visualize a compensatory perspective and the consequences of that.

Design of study IV

How are the remedial classroom and teaching structured?
The aim of this study was to examine the physical and mental environment in the remedial classroom. The questions were: how are the classrooms organized in the remedial class?, and how do the teachers report that the teaching is organized? This study was based on interviews with ten teachers and on 300 hours of classroom observations. Over a period of two years the everyday activity in the classroom in ten different remedial classes in nine different schools was observed. Each class was followed for approximately 30 hours over a period of eight months. Both field notes and structured observations were used but the structured observations are not included in the thesis. The observations were mostly made before lunchtime. I was seated in the classroom taking notes that I later typed out and read through.

Semi-structured interviews with ten teachers, one per class, were also carried out. The interviews were conducted in the school; they were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the interviews, I relied on the knowledge of interviewing that I had used in the interviews with the pupils. This included the knowledge that in informing about the research ethical rules, the interviews are a co-creation. I was careful not to interrupt the informant and to focus on the answers and not on the questions.

After transcription, the data material was read through a number of times. As described earlier, statements are situated in a context, and a part of the analysis is to de-contextualize and reinterpret. In this work, the researchers’ subjectivity is one part, it is the researchers' project, the researcher asks the questions, does the analysis, and presents the results. One way to address this problem is to do the analysis along with the informants. This did not happen here. On the other hand, my research colleagues in the department had read and commented on the text. Interviews can be interpreted in different ways
and from many different perspectives. I analyzed the interviews after I took part in what happened in the classroom. This meant that I had insight into the organization of space and time. There were patterns in how the classrooms were organized, the sizes of the classes and classrooms, where the pupils and teachers were placed, how the day was structured, what was said and how it was said, and how the pupils and teachers seemed to interact.

To analyze this, I used different perspectives – pupil perspective, socio-cultural perspective, and compensatory perspective. These different perspectives formed different grids. The perspectives were not used as categories, but as interpretation grids parallel with the categorizing work close to the empirical data, which initially meant searching for patterns. When I found patterns in several interviews that could lead to a different heading I tried them out. When I found a suitable heading I read the interviews again, tracing statements that could fit under that heading. Then it concerned what the different teachers had conveyed about just this phenomenon. After that I searched the various interviews and headings, not just for patterns but also for contradictions and errors. I wanted to find headings that could cover all the teachers’ similarities and differences, and I was also looking for statements I had not covered. Finally I found some headings that covered the interviews. These were: a compensatory perspective, criticism of the regular school, structuring the classroom, social competence through structure, limits and clarity, structuring for good self-confidence, and subject knowledge. After that I gathered all the different statements from all the different interviews under the different headings. The results were interpreted using previous research and through the different perspectives that, in the analysis, were contrasted with each other.

**Ethical issues**

The ethical stance that forms the basis for all the studies in this thesis is presented here. Even though both parents and teachers were involved and ethical considerations are taken in relation to them, there is a general question of how to study the pupil’s reality with the pupil’s perspective, using the least possible intervention. When research involves children several ethical difficulties occur, as opposed to when the focus is on adults. Children constitute a particular risk group; they are minors and are in a dependent relationship with adults, i.e. parents and teachers (Eide & Winger, 2005; Ljusberg; Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007; Mayall, 2002). Furthermore, this project is about children who can be seen as particularly vulnerable.

In the studies on which this work is based, the Swedish Research Council’s research ethics (2002) have been followed. Requirements of personal protection apply to information, consent, confidentiality, and utilization. Each researcher has to consider the research requirements for individual
protection requirements in the planning of a study, during data collection, in the debriefing, and in the storage of collected data. Such general rules are part of a common view of the person as entitled to universal moral respect. The encounter with others is always involved with the researcher's ethical or moral position (Benhabib, 1992).

When the selection of schools was finished, written information about the project was sent to the headmasters, class teachers and parents. The information letter included, in addition to a description of the project, information about the Karolinska Institute's ethics council. It stated that the project was examined ethically and that the Swedish Research Council’s (2002) ethical principles would be followed (Swedish Research Council, Principle 1). The letter contained certain clarifications of the facts that participation was voluntary, that participants had the right to withdraw their participation in the project if and whenever they wished (Principle 2), that data would be handled with utmost confidentiality (Principle 3), and that data was only to be used for research purposes (Principle 4). It also stated that participation in the project required written consent from the parents because of the project participants’ low ages (Principle 2).

Asking for parents' permission to involve their children in a research project may have a negative impact; the parents may say no despite the child’s willingness to participate, or the researcher may forget to ask the child for permission (Morrow & Richards, 1996). All pupils were asked for permission and one pupil declined. However, no parents declined. The pupil who refused seemed to feel satisfied with his decision. One reason for this attitude – that the pupil seemed to be satisfied – may be that we initially and during the study talked with pupils about the opportunity to decline participation.

It is important in research involving children to inform them of all research requirements. This was done repeatedly in this project. Parents and teachers gave the initial information to the pupils about the research project. This can be seen as both an asset and a shortcoming. Teachers and parents can be seen as most suitable because they know the children better, but this also means that the researchers do not have control over the information. In this project, talking to the pupils counteracted this, both on a general level about what research can be, and on a more specific level about what this project could entail. The first contact with the pupils was in school during regular school time. In all groups, I had to take a moment to introduce myself, my role in the project, what I would do in the classroom, why I did it, and what it could mean to them. The interviews were carried out by the end of the study and before each interview, I talked with each pupil about the ethical rules, and reminded them that they were the experts and that they therefore could not answer any questions wrong.

You may question how my presence and questions have influenced the outcome. Another ethical issue arises: has my presence affected their self-
images in a negative way? The pupils responded to me in a friendly way and showed appreciation of my presence several times. At the same time, they are in a vulnerable position. Many of the pupils feel separated from their regular classes by participating in the project, which could mean a verification of a stigmatization. I received no signals, however, that my presence caused this.

Thoughts about various ethical issues have been discussed continuously over the years I worked on my thesis, and the experiences from the different studies can be said to be summarized in this text.
SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLES

This dissertation is based on five articles emanating from the interdisciplinary BASTA project (Basic skills, social interaction and training of the working memory).

My contribution contains four studies, which have resulted in five articles. The first article covers a study on self-concept, with a rating scale completed by the children. In the second article ethical issues related to the methodology when interviewing children are stressed. The third article focuses on teaching children in remedial classes, and is based on questionnaires completed by the teachers and parents. The fourth article is based on interviews with the pupils. The fifth article is based on interviews with the teachers and classroom observations, and focuses on the classroom climate. One of the purposes was to study the children in their regular school settings in order to get their points of view on their daily school situations in remedial class. Another was to study the circumstances of children in the remedial class.

In this section the following articles will be summarized. The articles are attached in full in Appendix X in this dissertation, and in this chapter I will give only a brief summary of the main results.


I am the sole author of Articles IV and V. Articles I, II and III are written with co-authors.
Article I. Self-concept in children with attention deficits

The aim of this study was to examine the self-concept of pupils who had attention deficits, and were entering remedial classes in compulsory schools. We also wanted to study if the pupils’ self-concept should change after working with the working memory training program. We wanted to know about the children’s situations and thoughts about the school situation and determined that a self-concept questionnaire should give us some of the answers. The article is based on the results of a self-concept questionnaire, “This is me” (Taube et al., 1984). The questionnaire on self-concept consisted of 30 questions and was answered by 41 pupils in nine different schools before, directly after and six months after training with the RoboMemo working memory program.

The questionnaire used in the project has been used by Taube et al. (1984) with 690 typical children from 44 classes, measured on one occasion. We consider their study as a control group based on the normal curve.

The dominating pattern is that the differences are small to non-existent between the BASTA data and the comparison data. The results also showed that the difference is almost nonexistent concerning the results of the measurements on the three different occasions.

The results indicated that the children have, despite many defeats, good self-concepts. However, prior research on self-concept suggests that pupils who have attention deficits, e.g. AD/HD or other cognitive disabilities, sometimes overestimate their abilities. One point that needs to be highlighted is that boys diagnosed with AD/HD can relax their self-protective position once they know it is not needed, and from a pedagogical point of view this is interesting.

For several reasons it is important to consider whether children diagnosed with AD/HD overestimate their self-concepts. Inflated self-concepts might serve a self-protective role for children with AD/HD, allowing them to cope on an ongoing basis despite experiences of failure.

Article II. Ethical issues when interviewing children in remedial classes

Listening to the children’s voices is of great importance in child research and to find out what they want to say and how they feel about issues related to their lives. There are many ethical dilemmas involved in research and most researchers have adopted national and international research policies in this respect. Different individuals, populations and groups of people are more vulnerable than others, and here the researcher needs to take extra care. This article is a contribution to the dialogue in this field. Our research focuses on pupils entering remedial classes and this article deals with ethical aspects
when interviewing them. Ten pupils between ten and twelve years were inter-
viewed. The ethical questions were: how should one inform the pupils about the research process? How will the researcher effect a balance between the social contract and protection of the pupil’s integrity? How will the researcher handle professional secrecy against the demand of report obligation? How will the project be conducted?

The interviewer informed the pupils about the purpose of the project and discussed the research process with them. The information was given – we talked about it – several times and on different occasions in order to be sure that the pupils understood. The pupils were informed by the interviewer about their right to influence decision-making concerning their own everyday lives and about each pupil’s right to have control by having a voice in the decisions. Our idea was that the ethical issues needed to be on the agenda in all contexts where children are involved, and many dilemmas could be eliminated if the questions were highlighted at an early stage. We also took steps to protect the pupil’s integrity in order for the pupil to trust the research team and the ambition to ensure the pupil’s anonymity. This was important with regard to parents and teachers, as the pupils sometimes reported issues that were sensitive from an ethical point of view. We also tried to make a social contract with the pupil in order to balance proximity and distance in the research process. We found it necessary to keep the pupil’s confidence and only use information that could not harm the pupil in the future. One negative consequence from the viewpoint of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – of the ethical principle number two (VR), stating that one has to ask for the guardian’s permission if one wants to do research with a child – is that if the guardian’s answer is negative the child does not have the opportunity to have a voice. This was one reason why it was of great importance to inform not just the pupils, but also the parents and other gatekeepers of the study.

It happens that children give information that is ethically sensitive. There is a dilemma in the intersection of professional secrecy and the report obligation. Whatever a child reports, as long as there has been no abuse, the researcher will have to stick to professional secrecy; however, if the child reports being abused, then report obligation must take priority.

Article III. Teaching children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in remedial classes

Focus in this article is on teachers’ and parents’ views on the school and education of children with AD/HD. The aim was to increase the knowledge of the teachers’ and parents’ opinions on the meaning of the school context for children with attention disorders. Twenty-one teachers and school staff
and 41 parents (one dropped out) answered a questionnaire. The results showed that the problems sometimes exceed the real tasks of the school, which are teaching and learning. A majority of the pupils from the remedial class participated in activities organized for all pupils, i.e. also for pupils from the regular classes, but in theoretical subjects only seven teachers reported that the pupils with AD/HD were included. Six of the teachers are below the age of 40, and nine are older than 50 years. The teachers’ rather high ages constitutes a well-recognized situation in education all over Europe as the professionals in school are often old, and have teacher training from many years ago. However, almost all the parents (34) answered that they were satisfied with the teachers and regarded them as competent for the job; this might be contradictory, as some parents also pointed out that younger teachers ought to be recruited.

It appears that the teachers sometimes find it difficult to teach in a remedial class as the classroom setting is sometimes very noisy and the pupils restless. According to the teachers the pupils have difficulties in sitting at their desks and often move around in the room. Although the pupils work by themselves they often disturb each other. The pupils’ attention span is low and they have trouble paying attention to instructions. The parents seem to be satisfied, and one reason for this may be that their child is now expected to get help and the parents will hopefully no longer receive any complaints from the school about their disorderly child’s behaviour. They also realized that although the teachers do not have adequate education they are aware of the fact that complaints will have little effect as it is quite difficult to get educated teachers for these classes. The teachers and school staff also seem to be satisfied with the present solutions and do not put any demands on the school.

There are still many questions to be asked with regard to these pupils. School is supposed to give pupils knowledge and education, and the main question is what these children are supposed to learn in school and what they really learn. Social interaction is an important issue in school and it appears from the teachers’ answers that they train the children to behave in a proper way in order to be accepted in a regular class in the future. Another question is whether these children learn more in a remedial class than in a regular class or if the small class is chosen as an emergency solution used only in order to facilitate the teachers’ work.

Article IV. Pupil’s views on attending a remedial class

The aim of this empirical study was to find out how pupils between ten and twelve years of age describe why they attend remedial classes and what it means to be a pupil in that setting. Ten pupils were selected for interviews. The data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews. The pupils high-
lighted the difficulties they supposed to have caused their placement in the remedial class.

From the interviews it appeared that focus was mainly on the individual in such a way that the problems were situated within the individual and not on the individual in context. The triggering factor was often a difficult situation in the regular class, both from a social point of view and from an educational perspective. It also appeared from the interviews with the pupils that the reasons for placement in the remedial classes were not only that the pupils needed extra support but also that the teachers did not like them and/or could not handle them. One pupil said that the other guys in the class wanted to get rid of him because he was bullying. All pupils stated that the main reason why they were placed in the remedial class derived from themselves – they were responsible for the placement. In four of the interviews the pupils talked about who was responsible for the placement and said that it was an adult decision, and three of the pupils referred to their mothers, but stated that they themselves were the reason. Some of the pupils said that they could not listen or had difficulties in speech but most of them said that they were bullying, restless and had concentration problems. For some it also had consequences on their schoolwork.

Some of the pupils said that they believed that they would be transferred to regular classes in the future and regarded it as a goal. The pupils pointed out that teachers are important and a good teacher should be kind, fair, good at listening and helpful. They appreciated the high teacher density and the low number of pupils in the class as they could easily get help. Some pupils felt that they were interrupted and that the environment was turbulent and disturbing. The pupils often lost their friends when they were placed in the remedial class and many felt lonely. To sum up, the school focused on the pupil’s shortcomings instead of on the pupil in context and the majority of the pupils regarded the remedial class as a temporary solution. The pupils in the remedial classes felt excluded, and felt that the situation made them lose their friends.

**Article V. The structured classroom**

The aim of this article is to study the physical and emotional environment in the remedial classroom. Through teacher interviews the environment and the climate in which the pupils are co-actors are highlighted. The questions are: How are the classrooms organised in the remedial class? How do the teachers report that the teaching is organised? Over a period of two years the everyday activity in the classroom in ten different remedial classes in nine different schools was observed. Each class was followed for approximately 30 hours for approximately eight months. Both field notes and structured obser-
Semi-structured interviews with ten teachers were carried out, one per class.

In the ten studied remedial classes there was not often any explicit problematizing of speech and conduct. People do not just communicate with words, though; discourses are also expressed in material form (Säljö, 1999). Something that appears both in the interviews and in the organization of the classroom is the structured classroom. The studied pupils were assumed to have had deficits which must be compensated for, which is the main reason why they were put into remedial class in the first place. The purposes of the structured classroom are to help the pupils’ concentration, to improve their social competence, self-perception and subject knowledge, and make them school-adapted. In the remedial class, the physical expression of the structuring could take the form of dividing the pupils’ desks with screens or turning the pupils’ desks toward a bare wall and structuring the instruction strongly. Creating a positive climate is about content and relationships and about taking the pupils’ experiences seriously, and this involves looking at things from the pupils’ perspective and seeing the pupil as a co-actor, not an object. By pointing out the pupils’ social deficits the schools reduce their agency. Several of the teachers talk about this as a danger; when they – the teachers – take over responsibility for the pupils they can take the responsibility from the pupils, who then lose their agency.

The last question in the data material is whether the goal of the pupils in the remedial class is to learn to be a school-adapted pupil. From a socio-cultural perspective, learning is seen as being part of different discourses where interactions are seen as a part of learning and development. From this perspective, what pupils in remedial classes learn primarily is to be pupils in remedial classes.
Common for the pupils included in the various studies is that they were placed in remedial classes because they had or have been attributed with having concentration difficulties. Almost half of the pupils were diagnosed, 40 percent with AD/HD and the rest were determined to have similar difficulties but had not been diagnosed. On what grounds the pupils had been determined to have concentration difficulties is not expressed. In the initial phase of this work I studied the research from the psychological and medical fields, both based on the individual. My studies are also based on the individual, but on the individual in a context. The intention was to examine both the pupils’ creation of meaning and their conditions in the remedial class. From a socio-cultural perspective, the pupils are studied in a context that forms the basis for my choice of this perspective.

The studies of the remedial class have, as the work progressed, shown a picture of a practice with a compensatory discourse having an essentialistic approach. As I initially acquainted myself with literature from the compensatory field, this meant that I used compensatory terms and concepts. Thus in the first three articles I talk about pupils with concentration difficulties, and then in the fourth and fifth articles and in the thesis I talk about pupils who acquire concentration difficulties or are considered to have concentration difficulties.

Using different perspectives means highlighting phenomena from different angles. It also means understanding in different ways. From the various studies I conducted, I will in this chapter discuss the teachers' views on remedial class, based on questionnaires and interviews, and on the parents' approach. The focus of the thesis is, however, on the pupils' perspective and on how they experience their situations. My research spotlights the pupil’s creation of meaning in a school context. By detaching the child from developmental psychology's internal development of identity (the essentialistic child) to a socially discursive child in constant evolution that includes the adult and the environment the adult is co-responsible for, focus can be placed on the pupils' creation of personality in a context. In this thesis the shift is between the pupil perspective, the socio-cultural perspective and the compensatory perspective.
Parents’ views on remedial classes

Placing pupils in a remedial class can be regarded as a special solution. The pupils are excluded from their usual classes and placed in small groups of children who have been determined to have similar difficulties. Approximately three to six percent of all schoolchildren, according to international studies (Forness & Kavale, 2002; Gillberg, 2005), are calculated to have AD/HD or similar difficulties. The parental survey showed that the parents are pleased that their children are placed in a remedial class. One reason for this is that they believe that their children will get improved support in school. Another reason may be that the parents believe that they will no longer get complaints from the school about their children’s behaviour. In the teacher interviews, several teachers indicate that teachers in regular classes do not establish a partnership with parents and that contact between school and home is negative in the sense that teachers contact parents to inform them of their child’s incompetence and shortcomings. Even if the parents are satisfied that their children are placed in remedial classes, they know that the child’s teachers often lack sufficient knowledge about the child’s difficulties. However, they argue that they do not want to complain because they know that it is difficult to recruit teachers for the remedial class. From the answers given by the parents it can also be seen that there are some fear and uncertainty about “daring” to complain to the headmaster that their child’s teachers are not trained to work with children with concentration difficulties. Consequently, the parents do not express complaints about their children’s teachers, but seem satisfied with what they do for their children. The parents’ situation is not easy and it is likely that the most important issue for them is that their child feels happy and that they do not have to worry so much about the child.

Teachers’ expectations

The teachers’ positive expectations of the pupils are important and fundamental in the socio-cultural perspective. We learn about the world and being in the world by appropriating different discourses. The encounter between teachers and pupils is based on an interpretive background. They can have different ways of giving meaning to such crucial issues as what is important in school and whether it is good or bad to go to school. The local discourse of the school’s situation is expressed in the encounter between the teachers (even the teacher can have or not have local connections) and the parents, colleagues, and pupils. In the case of teachers’ interpretive backgrounds, they are crucial to their approach, which makes up the framework within which the pupils have freedom to act. In the literature there are various indications of the influence exerted by teachers’ interpretive backgrounds and
expectations. Hjörne (2004) states that once the AD/HD diagnosis has been introduced and adopted as relevant, it is included in the staff interpretive background and becomes active in the creation of meaning. Regards to the pupils meaning-making Hellström (2004), for example, uses the term "self-fulfilling prophecy", while Jenner (2004) talks about the “Pygmalion effect”. What is important is that the teachers’ interpretive background is in place, controlling the creation of meaning, which comprises what I would call "our outlook" or our view of children. Although pupils give meaning to what is happening and are co-actors, they do not have as much power as the teachers. This frequently means that they depend on a teacher who shares power and control with them, as pointed out by Grosin (2004) and Hugo (2007).

What expectations do the teachers have of pupils in their ways of organizing the teaching and the classroom? The compensatory perspective can be seen in the remedial class in the design of the classrooms as well as in the teaching. Being transferred to a remedial class means to be declared incompetent and to receive expectations of a low grade of obedience and discipline and a narrow negotiating space, while the teacher’s control and power is comprehensive. The school uses descriptions for addressing and individualizing the pupil’s problems that are in conflict with the aim to strengthen children’s agency, competence, and participation. Here the discourse adopts physical expressions such as screens that separate the pupils, school desks that face bare walls, and firmly structured days. In that kind of classroom, the scholastic expectations of the pupil are minor. The social and material designs of such classrooms indicate low expectations of cooperation between the pupils and high expectations of incompetence. In both the teacher survey and the teacher interviews, it is clearly expressed that teachers are focused on pupils’ shortcomings. The discrepancy between my interpretation and the teachers’ interpretations of the classroom climate is interesting. My compiled picture of the climate in the studied remedial classes is presented under the collective term “calm” in Article IV. The teachers’ view, particularly that in the survey, is summarized and presented in Article III as the opposite. These different interpretations may possibly be linked to different discourses. However, the shortcomings the teachers address in the pupils are directly linked to the school’s discourse and to adaptation to it. These shortcomings are categorized in Article IV under three headings: social skills, subject knowledge, and self-confidence.

The objective is that pupils must adapt to school, and the purpose of the remedial class is to return to regular teaching. To learn this, the teachers state that they are required to provide structure and boundaries, and make sure that they are understood clearly. From a socio-cultural perspective, learning is seen as becoming involved in different discourses, where interaction is seen as part of learning and development. What pupils in remedial class primarily learn, in the end, is to be pupils in remedial class.
Discourses in schools with remedial classes

A difficult situation in the classroom can be explained in several ways. For example, it might be explained by the teacher not having the necessary skills, the school suffering from lack of resources, or to one or more pupils not being sufficiently adapted to school. Schools with a compensatory discourse attribute the difficulties to the pupils, as opposed to attributing them to the organization, the teacher, or the pupil in a context. Our actions are situated; we act both from the basis of the interpretative background and from a context. When the difficulties are placed within the pupil and categorized as concentration difficulties or AD/HD, it is possible to speak of pupils with difficulties such as inability to sit still at their desks, difficulties in following instructions and rules, in maintaining attention, listening and completing tasks, and in exhibiting opposition to rules and disturbing behaviour (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2004). All the skills mentioned above are directly linked to the school’s requirements. A pupil adapted to school may not fail to a major degree in responding to these requirements. The teacher and the organization are not without responsibility, but the logic of a compensatory discourse and the implications of this means that the ultimate responsibility rests on the pupil.

Discourses govern the way we act, which might lead to teachers in a school with a compensatory discourse not contextualizing what happens in the classroom. This means that the reasons for difficulties in the classroom are located outside the classroom – within the child – and are thus almost unsolvable in any other terms than compensatory. Difficulties may, for example, be explained by a congenital or acquired disability, or have social or cultural backgrounds. In a contextualization of what is happening, questions are asked about what – materials, activities, or situations – causes concentration difficulties, or better yet what promotes concentration. We can of course also ask how they are caused, and how we can promote concentration.

Another way to contextualize is to reflect on and problematise in what way the various actors give meaning to different processes and what standards are governing. Thus, one consequence of not contextualizing a school problem is that this brings a restriction of the actors’ options.

If a pupil in a compensatory discourse does not live up to what the standard requires, he or she risks becoming the target of reprimands given in the belief that they will lead to adaptation to school.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the studied discursive practices create a school for the children who have cracked the code. Different pupils have variations in their prospects for code-cracking. As the child grows up, he or she learns standards for how social contracts are established and maintained. In every culture, a pattern of interaction is mediated and appropriated during upbringing. These patterns can look very different in different social classes/groups, and this has consequences for children in their encounters.
with others outside the home, such as health services and education (Brembeck, 1997; Lareau, 2003).

The meaning of being a pupil varies and has always varied in importance and practice. Childhood and the pupil’s role change in relation to economic, social, historical, and cultural conditions in society. Therefore, children’s upbringing is dependent on the cultural meta-contracts on education, on the normative image of the child that is prevalent in a society during a given period. When the pupil becomes bearer of the problem and a target of reprimands, transfer to remedial class may mean that a difficult situation is interrupted. When pupils and teachers in the remedial class talk about what the situation in the regular school may look like for these pupils, it can be about teaching in corridors, under the supervision of assistants who often lack training, and about insulting and degrading treatment. This can be teachers justifying the remedial class. However, you cannot blame abuse directly on a compensatory discourse, but I argue that such a discourse enables these actions.

**Self-concept and context adjustment**

In a compensatory organization, it is possible to distinguish pupils who do not fit into the norm. Being transferred to remedial class means being determined to have shortcomings; every pupil that I interviewed told me this. Pupils give different explanations for why they attend the remedial class, and this can be linked to the school’s discourse. In the interviews they describe themselves from the school compensatory perspective and talk about difficulties, of not being able to listen to others, of having difficulties with speech, of being rowdy and restless, and of having concentration difficulties (Ljusberg & Brodin, 2007). The compensatory perspective also shows itself when they talk about returning to the regular class. The aim of the remedial class is that the pupils should return to a regular class; pupils share this goal, and most see their potential for this as limited. The meaning of this can be interpreted, as they do not see themselves as fully adapted to school yet. For example, a boy told me that before he can start in a regular class he must first learn to control himself, while another said that his long-term goal is to move to a regular class.

In the analysis of the self-concept questionnaire in Study I, data from the BASTA project was compared with data based on a normal curve (Ljusberg & Brodin, 2007). A study by Taube et al. (1984) was used as a control group. The predominant pattern was that the differences between BASTA data and data from the above study were small to nonexistent. It also turned out that the differences were small to nonexistent between the results in terms of pupils' self-concepts before the pupils used the working memory training program, immediately after, and six months after.
How should the answers to the self-concept questionnaire be understood?

Does the pupil have a relatively good self-concept? Do the results show that the working memory training program RoboMemo has been good or bad or has not played any role at all in relation to their self-concepts?

The reasonable interpretation of the small to nonexistent differences between the three different measurements before, immediately after, and six months after the working memory training is that it did not affect the pupil’s self-concept. Regarding the second result, that the pupils would have relatively good self-concepts, this did not appear from the meeting with them to be a reasonable interpretation. The pupils did not give, either in the classroom situation or in the interviews, any support for such an explanation. An interpretation of Article III, that pupils are aware of their shortcomings, now link to a compensatory perspective and to a part in the construction of an identity as a deviant pupil. An interpretation made in Article I is that the results indicate that the studied pupils have an “overstated” self-concept, that the result is better than might be expected because the pupils had overestimated their self-concepts. This interpretation is done in dialogue with a number of studies with similar results in self-concept questionnaires in which pupils diagnosed with AD/HD estimated their self-concepts. These studies show that in self-concept questionnaires pupils with AD/HD tend to overestimate their self-images. There is some discussion about this being a form of defence for managing a difficult situation (Owens, Gold Fine, Evangelista, Hoza & Kaiser, 2007). Interestingly, experimental studies show that positive reinforcement can make pupils “lower their guard” and show lower self-concepts (Diener & Milich, 1997).

Based on this discussion, we could expect, when the pupils in the study made progress in the working memory training program and received wide attention through the BASTA project, that pupils would “lower their guard”, as Diener and Milich’s (1997) reasoned, and have lower performance on the self-concept questionnaire. This was not the case. One interpretation of this is that the pupils did not experience that they received a positive reinforcement. Another interpretation, in both cases, based on a socio-cultural perspective, is to link results to the fact that the environment is otherwise unchanged. Placement in remedial class means that the pupil alone is the bearer of school failure, academically and/or socially, and that the school’s responsibility is rendered invisible. One of the findings of the thesis is that the pupils become bearers of the school’s perspective and that they place the reason for the referral to remedial class to shortcomings in themselves. This is supported by other research (Karlsson, 2008). Owens et al. (2007) argue that an “overstated” self-concept would constitute a form of defence for dealing with a difficult situation. With this approach, in a context where the pupil is the sole bearer of the difficulties arising in the encounter with the school, an overestimated self-concept seems reasonable. Owens et al. (2007) use an individual perspective as their starting point, meaning that they assume that
the pupil has difficulties due to shortcomings located within him-/herself. I would like to add a more contextual approach to this, specifically a contextualization of the phenomenon in itself and a transfer of the difficulties from the pupil as an individual to the pupil in a context.

The working memory training performed in the BASTA project also had the pupil's shortcomings in focus, and had as a starting point that it is possible for a pupil/individual to change in an otherwise intact situation in life. Pupils in the study remain in the same discourse, i.e. in a context where everything else is the same, where only the pupil is to be changed. This is a solution that fits into a practice with a compensatory perspective. What from a critical perspective is considered a failure for the school can be expressed, from a compensatory perspective, as the pupil being qualified to enter a remain unexamined. The sustainability of this argument could be examined in a future study of pupils diagnosed with AD/HD attending an inclusive school with a diversity perspective.

Relationship to teachers
When pupils talk about difficulties in school, it is about adults who do not listen and about lack of friends. Adults who do not listen belong to a school world where pupils are objectified and not seen as co-actors. When pupils describe qualities of a good teacher, they talk about the opposite of objectification and categorization. They want teachers who see them, listen to them, and to be kind and supportive. Other statements from the pupils, for instance about teachers sometimes getting too irritated, also originate from a discourse in which disruption of the school discursive practice is seen as caused by pupils’ shortcomings. If teachers structure their understanding on a more socio-cultural or relational perspective, the irritation shifts more easily to other phenomena such as shortcomings in the task, the material, or the instructions. Something the pupils think is good about the remedial class is that it is teacher-intensive and has few pupils, which makes it easier to get help when they need it. This is not a surprising finding, as it is positive for all people to get a direct response. My interpretation here is that the pupil’s gratitude is part of the compensatory discourse; the pupils have been identified as having shortcomings and they are in great need of help. This is also reflected when pupils who are about to return to regular classes give meaning to the help. They argue that they do not need as much help and they say that it can sometimes even be distracting when they feel that they are being watched. This can be seen as a declaration of competence, a liberation from the need to be compensated. From a compensatory perspective, it is positive that pupils see their difficulties, as they then have the opportunity to do something about them. From a socio-cultural perspective, the compensatory
discourse is seen as a declaration of the pupil’s incompetence and an offer to construct an identity as deviant.

To be a pupil in remedial class and loneliness

Half of the studied pupils did not have specific diagnoses but were nevertheless placed in a remedial class. Being transferred to a remedial class is stigmatizing in itself. In the light of my studies, which show that it is a major intervention in pupils’ lives to be placed in a remedial class, it is remarkable that remedial classes are increasing, and that as many as 55 percent of the pupils placed there have not had a specific diagnosis. When the reason for a problematic situation in the classroom is determined to be the pupil, he or she becomes the bearer of the failure. He or she has not had enough skills to live up to the standard. The pupil brings this failure to the remedial class, as he or she is placed in a social position for “those who are unsuccessful”.

Being transferred to remedial class is a social categorization of the pupil that affects and will continue to affect the social environment and the pupil’s own perception of him-/herself and his/her opportunities. In the observations and the interviews, pupils expressed that it was because of their difficulties that they were placed in remedial class. They also expressed that others in the group had difficulties and expressed concerns that others – outside the remedial class - saw them as being different in a negative way. They said that others saw them as failures, as DAMP kids, as idiots and as stupid. The teachers also talked about this, one of them stated that nobody else liked these pupils and that nobody wanted to work with them or have anything to do with them. This as earlier proposed can be a way for legitimizing the remedial class and the special teachers as Nilholm (2003) and Karlsson (2008) stated.

Clearly, the remedial class brings limited ability to choose friends and social interaction. A compensatory discourse may also have the effect that these pupils do not see themselves in a context where they can identify with others who have faced similar difficulties and thereby receive support from each other. On the contrary, it may signify that they are part of a group with which they do not want to identify themselves. They have not encountered problems, but instead caused them, and thus constitute a group of failed individuals. Factors that reinforce this construction of being a failure as a pupil are the corrections from the teachers and the teaching and organization of the classroom. The basic approach in the context of which the pupil is a part is that he/she is not seen as a competent co-actor. This applies both to pupils and to teachers' views of pupils. The pupil accounting for failures is not as capable as other pupils and therefore has difficulties participating (Ljusberg, 2008, submitted). This may hinder the pupils both in terms of friendship and in learning of subject knowledge.
Pupils shape and are shaped by daily life in the remedial class in their interaction with the organization of classrooms and teaching and the different language forms they encounter. Both teachers and pupils test their own and each other's limits. They are in a constant state of becoming and offer various opportunities for change. Together, teachers and pupils construct and reconstruct everyday situations in remedial class.

Nearly half of the interviewed pupils had been diagnosed with AD/HD. In the compensatory perspective, it is customary to give a picture of these pupils as having difficulties with relations with friends. This is partly shown in my studies, but in the interviews it is also shown that friends are important. This is supported by Karlsson (2008), where the observed pupils in remedial class make social contacts both inside and outside the group.

One of the most important findings in the studies is that there are pupils who lose their friends when they are transferred from their regular class to the smaller group; they miss them and feel lonely. They tell of loneliness and of grief because they no longer belong to the class. Half of the pupils interviewed had experienced loneliness, and they had either been moved from their class or been forced to change school. Another important finding is the hidden loneliness; pupils report that they have schoolmates to play with in the breaks but that they miss their friends from the regular class. This way of giving meaning can be seen as a glossing over, designed in a discourse where the classmates are failures in contrast to friends outside the remedial class. However, a consequence of this is that the remedial class creates social problems for pupils.

Future research

Man is in a constant state of becoming in a changing world; the meaning is never fixed and it is always possible to make different interpretations. This gives hope. Although the remedial class may for many be a temporary good solution in an untenable situation, it is crucially necessary to find other solutions. We are in urgent need of developing a school that can meet the diversity of pupils as a reality. Pupils have different backgrounds in terms of class, ethnicity, gender, and disability, and thus different ways of interacting and giving meaning. It is important to develop a school that is based on diversity and that focuses on a situated learning. Research should, rather than focusing on the shortcomings, but should focus on progressive solutions to provide all pupils with a good, developing school with learning opportunities for all pupils. There is an urgent need to study what situations, materials, and activities promote concentration. Concerning self-concept in pupils diagnosed with AD/HD, more research is needed on the links between an overestimated self-concept, context, and self-defence.
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