

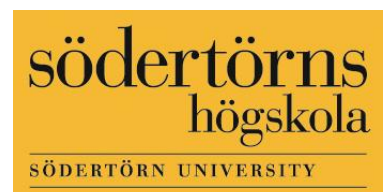
Södertörn University | School of Culture and Education  
Master Thesis 15 hp | Education with Intercultural Specialisation |  
Spring 2013

# English Medium Education

– Experiences from a school in the greater  
Stockholm area

Author: Pål Normark

Supervisor: Meeri Hellstén, Professor in Education



# Abstract

**Title:** English medium education – Experiences from a school in the greater Stockholm area

**Author:** Pål Normark

**Course:** Master's Programme in Education: Intercultural Specialisation

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore experiences of English medium schools in Sweden through the narratives of participants (students and parents), and the educational philosophy of one independent school organisation. The theoretical perspective of Knud Illeris' learning dimensions has been applied as an analytical tool to investigate the content, incentive and social/societal dimensions. As previous research on English medium education in Sweden have mainly investigated the content and incentive dimensions of learning, this study has a stronger focus on the social and societal dimension.

A phenomenological approach extracted the experiences from participants in English medium schooling as written or oral narratives. The perspective of an English medium school organisation was explored through their educational philosophy as described in their Ethos.

One of the main results of this study is that the positive influence of English is mentioned in all learning dimensions. English is not only described as an important learning content and incentive to learn, but also as an essential part of the school culture and an access to a global society.

Another result is the importance of the unique school atmosphere that has been created through consistent rules of conduct and high expectations of academic achievement.

The cultural diversity in the school and how this is described as a motivational factor and an opportunity to share and learn other perspectives is the final main result of the study.

**Keywords:** School equality, English medium, Content and Language Integrated Learning, second language learning, learning dimensions, intercultural education, school climate.

# Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank all the participants in this study. The students, who took their time to reflect and write about their experiences of their English school, and the parents who shared and discussed their experiences with me.

Secondly, I would like to thank my fellow students on the Master's programme; Angelina, Helena, Lina, Maruf and Rayen; for so many interesting and inspiring discussions during the year.

Finally, I thank my family for their patience during this long period when I have been so preoccupied with my study.

# Contents

Abstract .....	1
Acknowledgments .....	2
Contents .....	3
Background .....	6
Introduction .....	7
The school equity debate and English medium schools .....	7
Student background and school achievement .....	9
Other factors that influence achievement .....	11
Summary .....	12
Previous research .....	13
What is CLIL/SPRINT? .....	13
Reasons to offer CLIL/SPRINT .....	14
Reasons to attend CLIL/SPRINT .....	15
Effects on English .....	16
Effects on Swedish .....	18
The influence of motivation .....	18
Summary .....	19
Theoretical framework .....	21
The learning dimensions .....	21
The social and societal situation of the students .....	23
The social and societal situation of languages .....	24
The social situation in the school .....	26

Other approaches to diversity.....	29
Intercultural Education.....	29
Diversity in practice .....	30
Aim and research questions.....	32
Research design and methodology .....	34
Procedure.....	34
Narratives .....	35
Ethos of an English medium school organisation .....	36
Analysis .....	36
Validity and reliability .....	37
Research ethics.....	38
Results .....	39
Student narratives.....	39
Student A.....	39
Student B.....	40
Student C.....	40
Student D.....	41
Student E.....	41
Student F.....	42
Parent interviews .....	43
Parent A.....	43
Parents B .....	43
Parent C.....	44

Ethos of an English medium school organisation .....	44
Analysis .....	47
Content .....	47
Incentive .....	48
Social situation .....	48
Societal situation .....	49
Conclusions .....	50
Discussion .....	52
General findings .....	52
Descriptions of the social/societal dimension .....	53
Reasons behind high achievement .....	54
Learning in a second language .....	55
Limitations .....	55
English medium schools in Sweden.....	56
Concluding remarks .....	57
References .....	59

# Background

Education in English is spreading around the world, not only as a foreign language subject, but increasingly as a language of learning as both local and international schools implement English medium teaching across the curriculum. This development offers opportunities for students to develop academic English and facilitate studies abroad, but may also threaten national languages and cultures (Kirkpatrick 2011).

As I grew up in a small Swedish village where nobody seemed to have any visions other than a future working at the local factory, I was eager to leave and learn more about the people and countries I read about in *Biggles*, the *Count of Monte Cristo* or *Shogun*. I studied about East and Southeast Asia at university and then went to live and work in Bangkok. My personal experiences have made me understand the importance of language as the key to participate in another society.

Learning Thai at the university in Sweden, with four hours of lessons every week and no other exposure to the language, also made me appreciate the difficulties of language learning. I decided to spend the major part of my second year in a language school in Bangkok, which offered me five hours of lessons *every day*. From this perspective I understand parents who want their children to attend a school that teaches in a foreign language. This offers more exposure to the target language without extending school hours and, I think, a better command of the language.

Last summer I spent some time with my wife's childhood friend and her two children. Although the children have always lived in Thailand and been brought up by Thai parents, they have attended English school since they were very young and they switched seemingly effortlessly between English and Thai as we talked. They appeared to be completely bilingual, but soon I realised that they did not read and write very much in Thai and found it quite troublesome to do so. Where they have gained the advantages of fluency in a second language, they also appear to have lost a vital part of their cultural background. Unless they overcome their reluctance to read and write in their mother tongue, they may in some ways become excluded from their Thai society.

My personal experiences have left me torn between the diversity and challenge of the international setting and the familiarity and sense of belonging of the local. It is this dichotomy that has prompted me to research English medium education in Sweden. On one hand, I encourage the creation of a global community; promoting mutual understanding and respect. On the other hand, I value the local cultures and languages and am concerned that these might be endangered in the globalisation process.

## **Introduction**

In Sweden, schools offering education with another medium of instruction than Swedish started in the 1980's (John Nixon 2000), but only in the first decade of this century 32 new schools offering English medium education has been established. Most of the Swedish research uses the term CLIL, Content and Language Integrated Learning, or the Swedish equivalent SPRINT (språk- och innehållsintegrerad inläring och undervisning), which can refer to education in *any* language. In this study the term *English medium schools* will be used, which I define as schools that provide teaching in English for other subjects than the English language itself.

The dichotomy between an international and a local education is in Sweden further complicated by issues of increasing achievement gaps between schools and low academic achievement of certain student groups (Skolverket 2012). While English medium schools can be criticised for escalating school segregation, they also facilitate high academic achievement among these student groups (Skolverket 2010a, Skolverket 2010b). The topic of English medium schools will be introduced by showing their position in the current debate on school equity, and how they compare with other schools in terms of student achievement, both relating to background and other factors that influence achievement.

## **The school equity debate and English medium schools**

A recent report from the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2012) on school equity has during the spring of 2012 sparked a debate about the Swedish school system. The report compares student grades and results from national tests as well as from international tests such as TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA. The purpose of the report from Skolverket is to describe how equality in the Swedish school system has developed during the period of 1998-2011. The concept *equity* is explained as “*equal access to education, equal*



*quality* of education and that the education should be *compensating*”<sup>1</sup>, the latter meaning that the education should “compensate for unfavourable home conditions” (p11). The overall conclusion of the report is that “equity in Swedish schools has deteriorated” and due to the fact that differences between schools have increased, “which school a student attends has become more significant” (p85). One indicator of this is that the difference in the average merit rating<sup>2</sup> *between schools* has increased from 8.8 percent in 1998 to 18.2 percent in 2011 (p34), indicating today’s school system offers dramatically disparate opportunities for their students of achieving good grades.

Per Kornhall (2012) claims that Sweden has through decentralisation and the introduction of the *freedom of choice policy* deliberately created a system where some schools are good and some are poor. While some identify the freedom of choice policy as an opportunity only for Swedish families with high educational levels (Bo Malmberg, Eva Andersson & John Östh 2012), others claim that the policy is the only option for segregated citizens to assure that their children can access good schooling (Eva Cooper & Karin Svanborg-Sjövall 2012). The *freedom of choice policy* added the possibility for families to choose which compulsory school their children should attend and was introduced in the 1990s to supplement the *proximity policy* – the school within a defined residential area should prepare to accommodate the children living in the area (Skolverket 2003). During the same period a *school voucher system* was introduced, whereby the average cost of a student in the municipal school is distributed to whatever school the student attends, whether any of the municipal or independent schools, thus giving the latter opportunity to finance their school without fees. “The educational system was considered a market where municipalities offer different products (both independent and municipal schools), preferably with different profiles, that consumers (parents and students) then select and purchase” (p36).

English medium programmes or schools, representing active choices of parents and students, can within this debate either be seen as opportunities for the privileged or as alternatives for everyone. Skolverket (2010a) report that students who attend English medium education are more likely to have foreign background and parents with an education above secondary school than the average student. Table 1 compares student statistics between English medium

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Swedish references have been translated by myself.

<sup>2</sup> Merit rating is student grades translated into numerical values.

and independent schools with the national average in 2009. The group English medium schools include both municipal and independent schools with programmes in English. Students with foreign background born in Sweden are defined as having parents who were both born abroad.

**Table 1** Student distribution in percentage in English medium schools, independent schools and the national average, year 2009.

	Students in English medium education	Students in independent schools	Students, national average
Swedish background	64	83	84
Foreign background, born in Sweden	25	11	9
Foreign background, born abroad	11	6	7
Parents elementary education (1-9 yrs)	4	3	5
Parents secondary education (10-12 yrs)	28	34	45
Parents higher education	68	62	50

Sources: Skolverket 2010a, p34, and Skolverket 2010b

The statistics indicate that English medium schooling is a very attractive option for students with foreign background, especially so for the Swedish-born cohort which accounts for 25 percent of the students. 68 percent of the students have at least one parent with a higher education, which is 18 percent higher than the national average. Independent schools follow the national average in terms of ethnicity, but have statistics closer to English medium schools in terms of parents' education. The statistics support the claim that mainly tertiary educated parents make active choices, but not the claim that it is predominantly Swedish parents that do so. The families with students attending English medium schools come from close to 140 different countries (predominantly Iraq, Iran and Turkey), but only 7 percent have an English speaking background (Skolverket 2010a, p34-35).

## Student background and school achievement

Skolverket (2012) report that the positive effect of having one parent with higher education has been fluctuating from 35 to 40 merit points (the maximum being 320 points) during 1998-2011. The negative effect of having a foreign background has decreased from 13 points lower in 1998 to less than 5 points lower in 2011 for the group born in Sweden, but increased from 25 points lower in 1998 to 43 points lower in 2011 for the group born abroad. The report suggests that one reason for the declining results for this group is that the average age at the time of immigration to Sweden has increased from 7 to 9 years during the end of the period. A previous study (Skolverket 2004) divided the group *students born abroad* in those who immigrated to Sweden before and after starting school. Comparing the average merit rating of

the new subgroups, the report concludes that students who immigrate *before* they start school perform as well as students born in Sweden with foreign background. The average merit rating for students who immigrate *after* they start school decrease by 5.2 points for every year later they arrive, which mean that the increase in age from 7 to 9 years mentioned above would decrease the average merit rating by 10.4 points. The report suggests that the students “have had considerably shorter time to learn the Swedish language and adapt to the Swedish school system” (p35) which explains the lower achievement. This conclusion is supported by research in North America that reports that “at least five years is required for immigrant students to attain grade norms on academic aspects of English proficiency” (Jim Cummins 2001, p73).

As the statistics above have shown, most students in English medium schools have the benefit of having at least one parent with high educational level which should *increase* their average merit rating. The effect of learning in a second language should be a *decrease* (for all except the 7 percent with an English speaking background). Table 2 compares the average merit rating between students in English medium schools, independent schools and the national average.

**Table 2** Student average merit rating in points (maximum 320) in English medium schools, independent schools and the national average, year 2009.

	Students in English medium education	Students in independent schools	Students, national average
Swedish background	246	229	213
Foreign background, born in Sweden	231	224	201
Foreign background, born abroad	232	221	174
Parents elementary education (1-9 yrs)	218	184	159
Parents secondary education (10-12 yrs)	222	205	194
Parents higher education	251	244	231

Sources: Skolverket 2010a, p56, and Skolverket 2010b

While it is no surprise that the average merit rating is higher for English medium and independent schools compared to the national average, other figures are more noticeable:

Although learning in English should be more difficult, the Swedish students achieve 17 points higher than their peers in independent schools.

Students with foreign background perform better in English medium schools than Swedish students in independent schools.

The achievement gap between the students with elementary and higher educational background decreases from a national average of 72 points, to 60 points in independent schools and 33 points in English medium schools.

One explanation for the good results in English medium schools for students born abroad is that they may already know some English upon arrival (Skolverket 2010a), but this does not explain the almost equally good results in independent schools. It is therefore interesting to examine what other factors make English medium schools so successful not only for Swedish students, but also for students with foreign or lower educational background.

### **Other factors that influence achievement**

Skolverket (2012) suggest that the widening gap between schools is not sufficiently explained by socio-economic factors or foreign background. As there is not enough research on school quality and teaching to account for the differences, Skolverket instead propose that “a hidden sorting of students has taken place [...] more students with high motivation and supportive parents attend certain schools to a higher degree than before” (p77). They also suggest that peer group effects<sup>3</sup> and teacher expectations add to the already existing differences between schools.

Skolverket (2010a) found that motivation was indeed of some influence: schools expressed the idea that education in English would attract motivated students and parents hoped that the choice in itself would increase motivation. In the interviews conducted at the schools “the good motivation of the students and the big commitment for the education with students [...] and their parents” (p58) was a common theme and the report proposes that this has created positive peer group effects.

While reports from Skolverket (2004, 2010a, 2012) suggest that student motivation, teacher expectations, peer group effects and socioeconomic status explain student achievement, research by John Hattie (2009) indicate they are not so important. Hattie has implemented a global and quantitative approach by synthesising over 800 meta-analyses of research relating to school achievement that has been produced between 1977 and 2008. He has used effect size<sup>4</sup> ( $d$ ) as a common scale to compare the different studies. Hattie argues that although any action with an effect size above 0.0 will bring positive results, we should focus on the things that really make a difference, the actions with the largest effect sizes or at least above 0.40. He ranks motivation ( $d = 0.48$ ) as the 51st most effective factor, teacher expectations ( $d = 0.43$ )

---

<sup>3</sup> *Peer groups effects* is described as students are likely to perform better in a school with better average results.

<sup>4</sup> For a full explanation see Hattie 2009, p7-9.

as the 58th, peer influences ( $d = 0.53$ ) as the 41st and socio-economic status ( $d = 0.57$ ) as the 45th.

## **Summary**

English medium schools seem to be a successful part of the freedom of choice policy as they facilitate increased achievement for all student groups as discussed above. They might also be seen as a part of a segregating social system, where privileged or at least committed parents and students congregate in certain schools (Skolverket 2012). The segregating consequences of the freedom of choice policy are being criticised and the increasing differences between schools may cause policy reform that can threaten English medium schools. More research is required to describe and explain the reasons behind their success to enable decision makers to understand the schools' role in the Swedish school system.

# Previous research

As CLIL and SPRINT is used in the research to be examined, these terms will initially be explained further and then used as in the research presented. Research on CLIL/SPRINT in Sweden has been carried out with different approaches and perspectives (Nixon 2000, Nixon 2001, Falk 2001, Nixon 2004, Sylvéén 2004, Kjellén Simes 2008, Skolverket 2010a). Some studies have investigated the reasons for offering CLIL/SPRINT programmes (schools and teachers) and for enrolling in it (parents and students). Others have examined the effects on language, English (target language) or Swedish, or how student motivation influences language proficiency. The findings of previous research will thus be presented along these perspectives.

## What is CLIL/SPRINT?

CLIL/SPRINT can be defined quite simply as “subject teaching through the medium of a foreign language” (John Nixon 2000, p9), or as “it can refer to content-based language teaching and it can also refer to subject teaching in a foreign language” (Maria Falk 2001, p7), the difference being if the language or the subject is prioritised. Falk suggests that there is no single way to describe or implement SPRINT. John Nixon (2004) describes on a similar note a continuum with *Total immersion*<sup>5</sup> on one end, with CLIL/SPRINT close by, and the *Study of target language as subject* on the other end, with content-based language learning<sup>6</sup> next to it (p226). Nixon also finds that there is no sharp border along the continuum, but suggests that “it is essential that study of the language as a subject in its own right should continue parallel with language and content integration” (p227). Within the context of language teaching, Liss Kerstin Sylvéén (2004) explores another continuum with language as a *Communicative tool* and language as a *Subject to be learned* on opposite sides and CLIL closely related to the communicative end (p2). Sylvéén suggests that CLIL is regarded as a natural way of vocabulary acquisition by using the target language for communication and learning. Although it is understandable that CLIL/SPRINT is complex and maybe even have to be

---

<sup>5</sup> *Total immersion* is a method where all instruction is carried out in a foreign language and the objective ”is for learners to achieve a native-speaker competence in two (sometimes more) languages” (Nixon 2004, p227).

<sup>6</sup> *Content-based language learning* refers to using a content such as 'African animals' to learn language.

different depending on the context of a specific school, at least some more accurate definitions are needed to assess if a programme is indeed a part of CLIL/SPRINT or not.

The lack of a common and elaborate definition of CLIL/SPRINT may be a reflection of its introduction in Sweden through initiatives from single schools or teachers (Nixon 2001) rather than as governmental policy. Historically, at a European level, interest in “teaching through the medium of more than one language” (David Marsh 2002, p51) was expressed by the European Commission as early as 1978 and the Council of Education Ministers Resolution of 1995 “explicitly refers to Content and Language Integrated Learning” (p53). The European Community has since then supported several projects that study CLIL, such as the CLIL Compendium (<http://www.clilcompendium.com/>) and Language in Content Instruction (<http://lici.utu.fi>). Through Eurydice (2006), it suggests an ambitious definition of CLIL:

*CLIL is the platform for an innovative methodological approach of far broader scope than language teaching. Accordingly, it advocates stress how it seeks to develop proficiency in both the non-language subject and the language in which this is taught, attaching the same importance to each. Furthermore, achieving this twofold aim calls for the development of a special approach to teaching in that the non-language subject is not taught in a foreign language but with and through a foreign language. This implies a more integrated approach to both teaching and learning, requiring that teachers should devote special thought not just to how languages should be taught, but to the educational process in general (p7).*

This definition firmly place subject and language as being *equally important*, not a matter of priority as suggested by Falk (2001). It also implies the *active use* of the target language, not only reading and listening, but also writing and speaking.

## **Reasons to offer CLIL/SPRINT**

Nixon (2004) suggests that the appeal of CLIL/SPRINT partly lies in the mathematics, allowing a teacher of Spanish and a teacher of Geography to increase the amount of time spent on both subjects by integrating Geography in the Spanish lesson and using Spanish in the Geography lesson (p231). Sylvén (2004) also proposes that as “students are exposed to the language to a much larger degree [...] the CLIL method is an efficient way of enhancing the learning of foreign languages” (p11).

Nixon (2001) presents a broader view of the rationale for CLIL/SPRINT programmes as expressed by the schools offering them (p19-25)<sup>7</sup>:

*Internationalisation.* Schools regard their CLIL/SPRINT programme to help them achieve the internationalisation goals expressed in the national curriculum.

*Language as a tool.* English is seen as an important tool both for communication and learning, offering a high degree of future mobility and competence needed for higher education.

*Increase learners' communicative competence.* Students have more opportunities to communicate in both spoken and written English.

*Raising the school's profile.* SPRINT can be used to make the school more interesting and attract more students.

*Widening of cultural horizons.* Learning other subjects in a foreign language can be a means to experience authentic material and give a deeper insight into the various cultures of the target language.

*Confidence building.* School staff and student find that being able to communicate in English increase confidence.

*Increased motivation and attention.* School management and teachers report an improvement in motivation and attention, but offer no research that explains the reasons behind this.

*To offer something for the more able students.* SPRINT programmes are offered within some schools as a challenge to more able students.

From Nixon's study it is evident that the schools have great expectations of their English programmes, trusting them to address a wide range of issues. The question is if the participants in the programmes share these expectations?

## **Reasons to attend CLIL/SPRINT**

Skolverket (2010a) have investigated the motives behind the choice of an English medium school of parents and students through group interviews in six schools, both municipal and independent. They find that most parents express that English is crucial in a globalised world and that English proficiency is needed for future opportunities to live and work abroad.

Several parents believe that it is important for the children to choose out of their own interest and think that "the active choice" is vital for school success and motivation (p30). Some

---

<sup>7</sup> Nixon includes two more reasons, *achieve a more equal gender balance* and *imposed by local authority*, but as these were only noted in solitary cases they have not been elaborated on here.



parents have also expectations that the schools environment should be “calm and stimulating” (p30), as they believe that well motivated student will choose the English profile. Some schools are multicultural with students from all over the world, which has also encouraged the parents to choose them. The parents have expectations of more rules and discipline in these schools.

The students express that “English is fun”, that it “will be useful for them whatever they choose to do in the future” and that it is “important to be able to manage future studies” (Skolverket 2010a, p31-32). The report describes that in several schools the students express a desire to improve their oral communication.

Comparing with Nixon’s study (2001) the parents share the schools’ expectations of internationalisation, English competence and motivation, while the students agree with the importance of English for future studies and as a communicative tool. However, can research show that these shared expectations have been met?

## Effects on English

Sylvén (2004) examines the acquisition of English vocabulary in upper secondary (year 10-12) students in four schools. All schools have CLIL programmes, ranging in intensity from 40 to 90 percent, parallel with their traditional (Swedish) programmes. Through a test battery of four different written tests, administered in August and May of year 10 and May of year 12, the English vocabulary of CLIL and control groups was assessed. The four tests consisted of a *self report test*, where the students themselves define how well they know a word; a *multiple choice test*, where the students should identify a synonym to a word in a sentence; a *word in context test*, in which the students were asked to translate, explain or give a synonym to words from an article; and a *cloze test*, in which the students were given sentences with an idiomatic expression and asked to fill in the missing word in that expression. The vocabulary chosen was words of *high frequency*, based on word lists by Thorén and COBUILD (see p62). At the first and last test period, the students were also given a questionnaire to provide some information on their personal background.

Sylvén finds that the CLIL groups initially outperform the control groups and the differences increases over the period measured. She concludes that “the students in the CLIL classes investigated have acquired a larger English vocabulary than their control group peers” (p228).

Males in both CLIL and control groups score better than the females, but the CLIL females improve the most, whereas the control group females actually regress. When comparing tests results with the questionnaires, Sylvén suggests that background factors such as English input outside school through books, computer games and role play; as well as attitude and motivation; may “be the decisive element in acquiring a rich vocabulary” (p117).

Marika Kjellén Simes (2008) investigates English proficiency of upper secondary (year 10-12) students in three schools. Two groups of students attend the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme<sup>8</sup> (IB, science programme) and two control groups attend a three-year national science programme (NP). It should be noted that the IB programme commence in year 11 and that during the two years of the programme all subjects (presumably with the exception of Swedish) are taught in English. Kjellén Simes had the participating students write three free compositions in English: one in the autumn of year 10, another in the autumn of year 11 and the final in the spring of year 11. The compositions were analysed in terms of *low frequency* vocabulary use and *tense shift*.

Kjellén Simes concludes that “the results showed that there was a positive relationship between English as the medium of instruction and the students’ proficiency in English. [...] in the final compositions, the IB students used significantly larger proportions of motivated tense shift as well as low-frequency vocabulary than the NP students” (p163). By dividing the students in different subgroups according to their proficiency as shown in their first composition, Kjellén Simes finds that “the final results for the IB students in subgroup III (the weakest IB students) were similar to those of the NP students in subgroup I (the most proficient NP students)” (p165). She suggests that one major difference between the IB and NP students is that “the IB students receive more English input, but they also produced more output in English, and grew accustomed to writing argumentative compositions in English” (p165). Kjellén Simes concludes that “as a way of promoting improved proficiency in a target language, immersion education yields good results, especially for less proficient but motivated learners” (p166).

---

<sup>8</sup> For more details about the IB programme, see [www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org).

## Effects on Swedish

Maria Lim Falk (2008) strives to determine how “SPRINT-teaching influences the linguistic competence in Swedish for students with Swedish as their mother tongue” (p22). She clarifies that she examines the students’ “subject-related communicative competence and language development” (p22) and does so mainly through writing tasks, interviews and classroom observation in a SPRINT school, year 10-12, where 50% of the classes are supposed to be in English. In reality, Lim Falk finds that the use of English is perceived as an obstacle to learning by many teachers and that they express the attitude that the subject comes first and the students’ increased experience in using English comes as a second priority.

Lim Falk finds that most teachers in the SPRINT school use both English and Swedish for teaching and small talk in the classroom. The students predominately use Swedish, both for talking and in written assignments. Her analysis of the classroom interaction is that “the SPRINT-students almost always use subject-related language to a higher degree when the teaching language is Swedish” (p152) and that it “does not in any greater measure encourage the SPRINT-students’ development of a subject-related language, in English or Swedish” (p154). Using theories of social communicative practices, she argues that the use of English inhibits student participation in classroom interaction and indeed establishes an environment where the teacher is active and the students are passive.

Lim Falk’s general conclusion is that the students in the control group “use an adequate subject related language, in speech as well as in writing, to a higher degree than the SPRINT students” (p281). She finds this remarkable as the control group is generally less motivated and have lower marks than the SPRINT students.

## The influence of motivation

While many researchers above describe the SPRINT/CLIL students as being more motivated (Lim Falk 2008, Skolverket 2010a, Sylvén 2004), only Marika Kjellén-Simes (2008) examines motivation in her study. The IB school and the control group students completed a questionnaire covering exposure and use of English as well as attitudes related to motivation and learning strategies (see p84) in the spring of year 10. Motivational variables investigated were:

*self-efficacy*: “refers to a person’s judgement of his/her ability to reach a specific goal” (p25).

*intrinsic motivation*: “a willingness to do something for its own sake, merely because one finds that activity enjoyable” (p26).

*mastery orientation*: suggests “that outcomes can be influenced by the amount of effort invested” and is “likely to result in persistence, deep processing and a use of comparatively effective learning strategies” (p27).

*affective factors*: “an innate feeling about oneself and one’s abilities, or the mood one is in” (p29).

*cultural and social context*: The orientation toward foreign language learning is especially important; “instrumental orientation, where the purpose of the language study is utilitarian, for instance better job opportunities, and integrative orientation, where the student is interested in the culture of the target language community and is willing to fit in as a member of that community” (p30).

The results from the questionnaires conclude that the IB students score significantly higher than NP students on *intrinsic motivation* and also show higher *mastery orientation*. They also show “a more positive attitude towards English-speaking people and cultures and a stronger willingness to become integrated in English-speaking societies” (p160).

## Summary

First of all, the various studies indicate that CLIL/SPRINT has been implemented very differently. While some programmes (Kjellén Simes 2008) apply an active use of English as implied in the Eurydice definition (2006), others view English as an obstacle for learning subject content and revert to using Swedish when they find it appropriate (Lim Falk 2008).

Secondly, while some studies show increased English competence (Sylvén 2004, Kjellén Simes 2008), others find that the communicative competence is not sufficient for active participation in the classroom (Lim Falk 2008).

Lim Falk (2008) argues that participants in CLIL/SPRINT programmes show less use of subject related language in Swedish than expected, implying that this might influence achievement in the subject.

Finally, Kjellén Simes (2008) finds that the CLIL/SPRINT programme she examined had positive effects on student motivation.

Returning to the exposed position of English medium schools in Sweden in the equity debate, as described in the introduction, the research presented above offers rather weak arguments supporting the schools, mainly improved English and motivation. Lim Falk (2008) actually

implies another argument against them; a negative influence on Swedish; which has previously been discussed by Hyltenstam (2002). The most convincing argument supporting English medium schools is still the achievement statistics (Skolverket 2010a, Skolverket 2010b), while issues such as internationalisation, widening of cultural horizons and confidence building (Nixon 2001) have not been discussed. Further studies exploring other perspectives are clearly needed.

# Theoretical framework

Previous research (Nixon 2000, Nixon 2001, Falk 2001, Nixon 2004, Sylvén 2004, Kjellén Simes 2008, Skolverket 2010a) has predominately focussed on the individual and the outcome, in terms of grade or competence, of his or her studies at an English medium school or the reasons of schools, parents and students to choose this form of education. As the data of this study suggest that the social perspective is given more emphasis by the participants of English medium education, a comprehensive theoretical framework that incorporates various perspectives on learning will be introduced. This study will provide a new approach by also applying a social/societal perspective on examining English medium education. The social/societal perspective is informed by theories on learning, school climate and diversity (Cummins 2001, Cummins et. al. 2011, Gorski 2008, Gay 2010, Grosin 2004, Hofstede et. al. 2010, Illeris 2007, Portera 2011, Skutnabb-Kangas 1981, Thomas & Collier 2002).

Initially, a theoretical model of learning dimensions will be presented to explain the rationale of this comprehensive framework. Then the social and societal positions of different groups of learners and different languages are discussed. Finally, as the diversity of the students at English medium schools in Sweden is higher than the average, approaches to this diversity will be examined.

## The learning dimensions

Knud Illeris (2007) argues that learning consists of three dimensions, “the content and the incentive, which have to do with the individual acquisition process, and the social and societal dimension, to do with the interaction process between the individual and the environment”

(p25). In this particular illustration of his model (figure 1), Illeris omitted the word *acquisition*, but it should be placed on the arrow connecting content and incentive. Illeris describes acquisition as a psychological processes that “can be of a predominantly cumulative

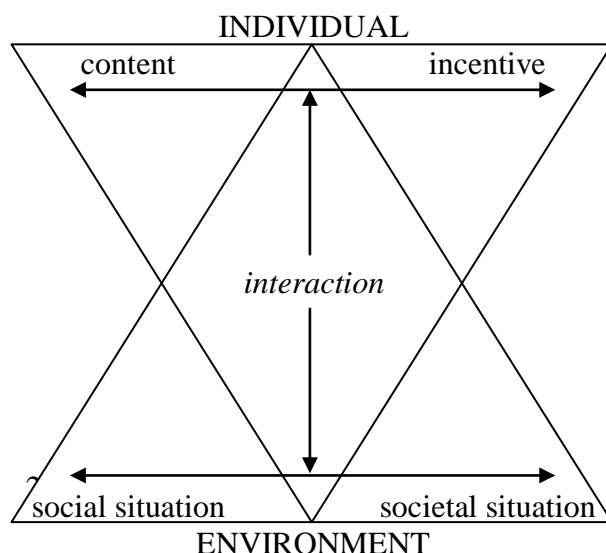


Figure 1: The complex learning model, Illeris 2007, p98

(mechanical), assimilative (additive), accommodative (transcendent) or transformative (personality changing) character” (p254). The interaction process connects the individual with the environment in which learning is taking place and Illeris suggests that this process includes rather passive forms as *perception* and *transmission*, as well as more active ones, as *experience*, *imitation*, *activity* and *participation* (see p100-101). The environment itself is described as “both the immediate situation that the learner or learners find themselves in, e.g. at a school, a workplace or leisure-time activity [...] and as a societal situation that is more generally influenced by the norms and structures of the society in question in the widest possible sense” (p97). Illeris argues that although learning is taking place through psychological processes in the individual, the individual is always situated in a social and societal context that influences learning. Learning is indeed taking place to “promote the individual’s *integration* in relevant social contexts and communities” (Illeris 2007, p27). Integration in a traditional, rural family is a social context that might promote learning of farming techniques, and a societal context that might promote traditions and ceremonies that strengthen the village or tribe. Integration in a modern, urban family is a social context that might promote learning of technological skills, and a societal context that might be influenced by many different cultures encountered physically or through media.

Illeris (2007) claims that the social and societal dimension of learning influences the content and the incentive dimensions. The social situation, which he describes as the direct context where learning is taking place, is influenced by the wider societal context. A personal example can illustrate how the dimensions of learning interact. The *societal* context of the village where I grew up was dominated by two large factories, where the majority of the population worked. In those days, the opportunities to find work at those factories were good and the knowledge and skills required were not so high. This influenced the *incentive* to learn the *content* included in the curriculum. The students that intended to work at the factories did not put much effort into learning subjects they found irrelevant or uninteresting, creating an *social* situation in school that was negative towards learning.

In the context of English medium schools in Sweden, the content dimension remains similar to other schools in the sense that they all follow the Swedish national curriculum. However, as English is used as the medium to access and learn the content, this presents a different challenge. Not learning in your first language can be an obstacle (Cummins 2001, Lim Falk

2008) in the content dimension, but also have a positive effect on the incentive dimension (Nixon 2001, Kjellén Simes 2008). English medium programmes might also affect the social and societal dimension of the schools, supporting issues of internationalisation and wider cultural horizons (Nixon 2001), as well as challenging Swedish as the norm; both as the dominant language and as the cultural norm.

As suggested above, previous research has not thoroughly investigated the environmental dimension of English medium education in Sweden. Therefore, theories concerning the social and societal situation for different student groups will be presented, followed by theories and practices suggesting approaches to student diversity.

### **The social and societal situation of the students**

Students in English Medium Schools are from very varied backgrounds and almost all of them have another first language (L1) than English, which means they are now learning in their second (or even third or fourth) language (Skolverket 2010a). Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) definition of second language (L2) learners describes the social and societal situation of different student groups:

1. elite bilinguals (voluntarily acquiring a local language when living abroad for a period of time)
2. children from linguistic majorities (learning a foreign language in school)
3. children from bilingual families (the mother and father speak different languages)
4. children from linguistic minorities (learning a minority language as their L1 and the majority language as L2)

Skutnabb-Kangas suggests that children from these groups experience different demands, conditions, methods and consequences for learning, or not learning, their L2. She argues that the group of children from linguistic minorities and also children from bilingual families, in the case that neither parent speaks the majority language as their L1, face “the strongest pressure to become bilingual and also the highest risks from failing” (p83). Skutnabb-Kangas explains that the consequences of success in L1, but not in L2, are that the children cannot access higher education, become disadvantaged on the labour market and also have limited possibilities to influence their society. If they instead succeed in mastering the L2 at the expense of their L1 they become distanced from their family and culture.



In the context of this study, students with Swedish as L1 (group 2 and some from group 3) have voluntarily undertaken a greater challenge by learning in a foreign language, English. They are however under less pressure to succeed in the English medium school as they can always return to the Swedish school. The students with another L1 than Swedish (group 3 and 4) were already learning in their L2, Swedish, and simply changed to learning in another L2, English. The pressure to succeed has neither been increased nor reduced, but the social situation in the classroom is completely different. All groups are now learning in their L2, which means no group has the advantage of learning in their L1. One of the teachers in Falk's (2008) study argues that minority children choose SPRINT as they feel that they are disadvantaged in the Swedish classroom, where their classmates are much better at the language of tuition. In a situation where all students are learning in their L2, majority and minority students compete on more equal terms (p253).

Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) also discuss the conditions for successful L2 learning by defining the learning situation as either *additive* or *subtractive*. In the *additive* situation the children are taught by a bilingual teacher (who knows the L1 of the children as well as the L2 being taught), are learning with other L2 students, are being taught as L2 learners and do not have to be ashamed of their L1 or their background. In the *subtractive* situation the children are taught by a teacher that does not understand their L1, are learning with both L1 and L2 students, are being taught as if the teaching language (their L2) were their L1 and receive no appreciation for their L1 ability, thus becoming ashamed of their L1 and their background (see p137).

The English medium classroom can be described as an *additive* situation as it mainly consists of L2 learners, being taught as L2 learners. The teachers' ability to speak the L1 of the students varies from Swedish teachers teaching in both in their L1, Swedish, and in their L2, English (Falk 2008), to native English teachers with no knowledge of Swedish (Skolverket 2010a). The first case contributes to the *additive* situation for Swedish L1 students, but can create a *subtractive* situation for Swedish L2 students. In the second case, it would add a *subtractive* element to the classroom situation for all learners.

## **The social and societal situation of languages**

The social situation for the individuals in the English medium schools is not only affected by their background, but also by the societal status of different languages. Inger Lindberg (2009) points out that the relation between minority and majority languages is also a question of power and dominance. The relative strength between languages is dependent on historical,

economical, social and political factors and change according to the historical and socio-political context. Swedish is a majority language in Sweden, but a small and insignificant language in a global perspective. Students with first languages that are considerably larger than Swedish (Arab, Persian, Spanish) are considered speaking minority languages in the Swedish context. Lindberg finds that although the Swedish Language Act of 2009 offers all residents the opportunity to use and develop their mother tongue; regardless if it is Swedish, one of the official minority languages or any other language; “in the socio-political climate that dominates large parts of the Western world today, standardised national languages, monolingualism and monoculturalism are being idealised” (p17). In this climate, the value of multilingual competence is neglected and the focus is shifted to making children with minority languages master Swedish. As Ann Runfors (2009) describes, teachers in the Swedish schools she examined had the ambition that all children should have equal future opportunities and deliberately ignored the diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of immigrant children to see everyone as individuals. “An effect was that the ethnically, religiously and in other ways heterogeneous group of students was defined as a unit deviant from the norm” (p111). The individuals were categorized in two groups, Swedes and immigrants, the first being the norm and the latter in need of additional resources and support to acquire Swedish cultural competence and a good Swedish. Runfors reports that the teachers saw the Swedish language “as a synthetisation and concretisation of Swedish culture” (p108) and that teaching of the students’ first languages were primarily seen as a support for learning Swedish. When Runfors interviews young adults from the schools ten years later, they all mention proficiency in European languages with high status in school and society, when asked if they are multilingual. They then say they speak Swedish, but almost all of the participants apologise for their poor Swedish during the interviews. Finally, they mention the language of their home, their first language. Runfors remarks that they describe their linguistic competence in an order that reflects the value and status given to different languages in contemporary society.

The choice of an English medium school can from these perspectives be seen as a rational reaction to the societal positions of languages, giving higher priority to a language with higher status.

## **The social situation in the school**

In the section above, a description of the social situation in schools for different groups of students, speaking different first languages begin to emerge. René León Rosales (2010) claims that the Swedish national curriculum describes the ideal student as being “a good democrat, independent, well-informed, inquisitive, expressive, and culturally competent” (2010, p302). Many of the students that he observed had difficulties to adapt to this role model. One of the obstacles was the language of instruction, Swedish, as these student had another first language and very often did not understand what they were supposed to do in class. León Rosales also points out that statistics and reports from the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) identify these students as underachieving, belonging both to the male and the foreign background group. Pirjo Lahdenperä (2002) finds that in the same curriculum, “The desirable teacher role is described as a mentor – the teacher supervises the student in his or her own search for knowledge. Students are ascribed with the ability and competence to know what they need to learn and how” (p301). This, she claims, favours students from well-educated homes at the expense of children with immigrant and blue-collar working backgrounds.

As Lahdenperä suggests, the Swedish national curriculum reflects Swedish cultural norms and can be difficult to understand and accept for people with different norms. Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov (2010) define four basic problem areas with different cultural solutions that generate four cultural dimensions: “power distance (from small to large), collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (from weak to strong)” (p31). The cultural dimensions affect the social situation in school in various ways:

Where the power distance is large, the education is teacher centred, there is a strict order in the classroom and the teachers are treated with respect. With a small power distance, the education is student centred, the students interrupt to ask questions or disagree, and teachers and students are considered equal.

In collectivistic societies, the students try to avoid conflicts in class and will not offer opposing opinions if it makes another student lose face. Subgroups are formed along ethnic or other backgrounds. In individualistic societies, students are more eager to offer their own opinions even if they contradict another student and subgroups emerge because of friendships or skills.

Feminine cultures evaluate teachers based on friendliness and social skills and students on social adaptation. Teachers encourage weak students by praising their efforts.

Masculine cultures evaluate teachers based on academic reputation and students on academic performance. Teachers praise good students for their results. “In more feminine cultures the *average* student is the norm, while in more masculine countries the *best* students are the norm” (p160).

Students with strong uncertainty avoidance prefer clear structures with objectives and deadlines. Students with weak uncertainty avoidance prefer less structure with vague objectives and no deadlines.

Although it is important to remember that culture is not homogenous within a country and also in constant change, it is interesting to note that Sweden is ranked as a country with low power distance, high individualism, high femininity and weak uncertainty avoidance. If the school creates a social climate following these cultural traits, it is easy to understand how students with different cultural perspectives find it difficult to adapt. Lahdenperä (2002) refers to several studies finding that “students and parents from countries with high power distance [...] complained about insufficient discipline and structure in Nordic schools” and adult immigrants from the Middle East “were unaccustomed to and irritated by teaching methods based on active seeking of knowledge, personal planning, and responsibility for their own studies” (p300).

Examples of how teachers of the same cultural background still can provide very different social situations in their classroom are discussed by Ingrid Carlgren and Ference Morton (2004). They observed and interviewed six teachers at the same school (year 4-6) and found that their teaching methods and approaches diverged to an extent that Carlgren and Morton describe as “the students in the different classrooms actually find themselves in different curricula” (p67). The *traditional* classrooms they describe can be said to include much of the discipline and structure desired by participants from cultures with high power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance.

The social situation in schools is not only affected by national culture and individual teachers’ approaches, but also by the conscious efforts of school management and teachers together. Lennart Grosin (2004) describes how the pedagogical and social climate (PESOK) influences students’ “attendance, performance, norms and behaviour in school” (p8) and how this is transferred through the values and expectations of the adults. Important aspects of PESOK in successful schools include (see p8-9):

- a clear and democratic, yet powerful, leadership from the principal with a focus on knowledge targets;

- teacher participation in defining the culture and structure of the school;
- cooperation between teachers regarding targets and content in teaching and student development;
- high expectations of the students, based on the perspective that all are capable learners and that their results depend on the quality of the school and its teaching, not on their background;
- encouragement and reward for good work;
- focus on a limited number of themes during a lesson;
- flexibility in teaching methods and interactive teaching;
- clear norms regarding rights and obligations in social interaction;
- order and decisive but moderate sanctions against bad behaviour;
- positive interest in the students from the teachers;
- teachers acting as role models;
- regular evaluation;
- cooperation with parents regarding the individual student.

It should be noted that some of these aspects do not correspond to the cultural values ascribed to Sweden by Hofstede et al (2010); *reward for good work* is for instance an indication of a masculine culture rather than a feminine. Grosin's study (2004) indicate that expectations are a significant factor influencing school results, explaining 51% of the difference in marks and 34% of mathematics results between middle-schools, year 4-6 (p18). Hattie (2009) ranks teacher expectations only as the 58th most important factor, although the effect sizes vary considerably between different researchers (see p122-123).

Wayne Thomas & Virginia Collier (2002) reflect on school environment from second language learners' perspective, claiming that it is "crucial that educators provide a socioculturally supportive school environment for language minority students that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to flourish in both L1 and L2" (p324). Their argument is that language is only one among four major development processes during school-age and that a focus on English language acquirement must not lead us to disregard the role of sociocultural, cognitive and academic processes for second language learners.

The above shows that the social situation in schools are influenced by the Swedish national curriculum and its' interpretation, the dominant cultural values, and the school's conscious efforts of creating a positive working climate. In English medium schools, an Anglo-Saxon perspective can influence these factors, especially so in independent schools where half of the teachers might have an English education (Skolverket 2010a).

### **Other approaches to diversity**

The social and societal dimensions that influence the individual student in English medium schools are in some ways reflections of the diversity and social structure of Swedish society in general. However, these structures are also challenged as English has replaced Swedish as the normative language and Anglo-Saxon cultural perspectives are more influential. The diversity among the students is also a challenge to social and societal structures in all Swedish schools, not only the English medium.

The challenge is indeed global as Andy Green (2006) argues that while education has historically been an instrument to create national identities with the purpose of forming strong social bonds within a country, the postmodern era of globalisation has lead to a greater diversity within nations and more intimate relations with cultures around the globe. He suggests that Singapore has an alternative approach in education where the aim is to create a single, but diverse, national identity. Green predicts that education will be called upon to facilitate “the forging of notions of civic national identity which are both inclusive and mobilizing, which reconstitute the legitimacy of the public domain and the primacy of the public good” (p197).

### **Intercultural Education**

One theory that addresses these changes is Intercultural Education, which according to Agostino Portera:

*refers at an Education which takes in to account and tries to face with all manner of diversity which may be present in the classroom: Not only linguistic, cultural, ethnic or somatic, but also, for example, gender, political, social status or economic differences (2011, p21).*

This diversity is not only acknowledged, but ideas are exchanged through interaction allowing them to influence each other. Portera dismisses a static view of culture as this often constrains the individual to traditional behavioural patterns. “Intercultural Education rejects immobility

and cultural or human hierarchy, and is meant to encourage dialogue and relationship on equal terms” (p20).

Paul Gorski (2008) is critical to an approach that ignores the power relations in the social order. Intercultural education with goals such as “the facilitation of intercultural dialogue, an appreciation for diversity, and cultural exchange” (p520) might increase awareness of other ideas and values, but while attitudes might change - the system remains. Gorski’s key question is: “if we are not battling explicitly against the prevailing social order with intercultural education, are we not, by inaction, supporting it?” (p516). He argues that we must shift the focus from cultural awareness and understanding, toward systems of power and access to them. We need to reveal the power structures and oppressive conditions of our society and develop a critical consciousness rather than just cultural understanding.

### **Diversity in practice**

Incorporating both views presented above, Jim Cummins (2001) describes the process of creating a social climate as an *identity negotiation* that is taking place in the classroom. He suggests that the interaction between teacher and student is never neutral; it “either reinforce coercive relations of power or promote collaborative relations of power” (p19). Cummins presents a framework for academic language learning with teacher-student interaction in the centre, together with cognitive engagement and identity investment (see p125). The students become cognitive engaged by developing their academic self-concept as they learn more. To support their identity investment Cummins suggests that teachers create a collaborative social climate by activating the students’ prior knowledge in their first language and sharing it in the common classroom language. Cummins et al support Norton’s view that “investment is a sociological construct which views the language learner as having a complex identity which changes over time and space and is directly affected by patterns of social interaction and societal power relations” (2011, p32). Cummins et al propose the use of *identity texts* where students use their first language to create texts or multimodal presentations about themselves. Allowing the student to use their first language is a powerful message that it is viewed as a resource, not an obstacle. The *identity texts* build on the students’ backgrounds, it affirms their identity and extends their language competence as they also work with their presentation in the classroom language. By acknowledging and promoting the students’ identity they are encouraged to invest it in their academic achievement.

Cummins (2001) also explores the relationship between language and power. He argues that students should not only develop language skills, but also *critical language awareness*. They should be encouraged to explore different varieties of language and when they are used, but also discuss why some forms of language, or indeed entire languages, are considered *better* than others.

Closer to Portera's view of interaction and exchange, Geneva Gay (2010) argues that the first principle for teaching diversity is for the teachers to reflect on their own beliefs as these will influence instructional behaviour. Positive beliefs on diversity offer an opportunity to include work on diversity in the classroom, whereas negative beliefs or ignorance can cause dismissive or anxious behaviour. Another principle suggested by Gay is to allow your curriculum, pedagogy and relationships to be influenced by the multiple perspectives of your students. She argues that student's backgrounds and experiences are not only important when planning how to teach, but also an educational content for the students to share. Applying multiple instructional strategies is a third principle, suggesting that different socialisation and experience create different learning styles that have to be acknowledged. This principle is not only concerned with matching teaching and learning styles, but also extends to issues such as classroom climate, relationships and behaviour management. The last principle presented by Gay is crossing cultural borders, where the diversity is used as a resource to create bridges across cultural borders. Students are encouraged to maintain their language and culture, but also to learn the mainstream language and culture of the country they reside in, thus being able to shift between the different code systems. Learning other languages and cultures will also develop mainstream students' competence to adapt and function in diverse settings.



# Aim and research questions

One of my major concerns in presenting a picture of English medium schools in Sweden is that the voices of the participants should be heard as much as possible. The rationale behind this is that I believe we understand our social world through our experiences, a view that Edmund Husserl calls “the phenomenology of the experiences of thinking and knowing” (1970, p66). He argues that phenomenology must find the *essence* of our experiences and “go back to the things themselves” (p67). In other words, “phenomenology stresses the need to present matters as closely as possible to the way that those concerned understand them” (Martyn Denscombe 2010, p95). Denscombe explains that a phenomenologist regards the participants of social life as active agents that interpret their experiences and make sense of their world through those experiences. Listening to those agents and shedding my own assumptions is the way I have chosen to explore and understand the perspectives of participants in English medium schooling. Denscombe suggests that the phenomenological researchers are also a part of the social world that we are investigating and thus must be aware of our own assumptions of this world. The solution is that we “adopt the stance of ‘the stranger’... naïve about how things work” (p99). Rather than claiming to be *objective*, I acknowledge that I might be *subjective*, but trying very hard to be just *curious*.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore experiences of English medium schools in Sweden through the narratives of participants (students and parents), and the educational philosophy of one independent school organisation. The study is limited to participants from an English medium school in the greater Stockholm area and the independent school organisation managing this school.

The theory of *learning dimensions*, derived from Illeris (2007), is applied as an analytical framework to structure the data along the three dimensions of learning he defines: content, incentive and social/societal. Previous research on English medium education in Sweden have investigated the content dimension of learning by studying the impact on English (Kjellén-Simes 2008, Sylvén 2004), Swedish (Lim Falk 2008) or average merit rating (Skolverket 2010a). The incentive dimension has also been explored (Kjellén-Simes 2008, Skolverket 2010a), and some aspects of the social situation of the English medium classroom have been

discussed (Lim Falk 2008). As none of the reports have focussed on the social/societal dimension of learning, one of the research questions in this study is:

How do the participants in (students and parents) and providers of (schools) English medium schooling in Sweden describe the social/societal dimension?

Students in English medium schools have shown higher average grades than students in Swedish schools (Skolverket 2010a), the difference being remarkable especially for student groups with foreign background and/or from low educational background. Previous research has not been able to explain the higher achievement which generates a second research question:

How do the participants in and providers of English medium schooling in Sweden describe the reasons for the high achievement of the students?

Finally, the issue of learning in another language than your mother tongue has been shown to be of significance, both in providing opportunities (Nixon 2004, Sylvén 2004) and as an obstacle (Cummins 2001, Lim Falk 2008, Runfors 2009). This dichotomy motivates the final research question:

How do the participants in and providers of English medium schooling in Sweden describe learning in a second language?

# Research design and methodology

As I prepared to study English medium schools, I already had experiences and knowledge about the difficulties to study in a second language, but also some examples of students performing well when doing so. The theoretical framework I intended to use was already decided and my intent was to perform a deductive study to confirm or reject my hypothesis (Alan Bryman 2004). However, as the theories on second language learners (Cummins 2001), statistical data on student performance (Skolverket 2010a) and data collected in this study provided diverging arguments on the issue of English medium schools, I found it impossible to define any hypothesis and the study turned inductive. I now investigated the previous research and the data I collected in search for theories that could be useful to explore the discrepancy found. I concluded that the theoretical framework of Illeris (2007) offered a comprehensive view of learning that could illustrate how both previous studies and this study inform on different aspects of learning. Of this reason, issues of achievement and learning in a second language that were prominent in previous research were kept as research questions in this study.

## Procedure

I approached students that had attended an English medium school in the Stockholm area. I selected students that had already finished year 9 in an English medium school and moved on to other schools, as I predicted that it would be easier to reflect upon something that had already been completed and assess what kind of impact it has made. The parents I approached had also had children in the same school. The majority of the participants have Swedish background, but none have an English speaking background. Two students have both Swedish and another language as their mother tongue and a third student has another first language. Two of the students and one of the parents were born abroad. One of the students with Swedish background had previously lived abroad and attended an English medium school there.

To obtain a school perspective, I approached several English medium schools in the greater Stockholm area, but none of them found that they could allocate time to participate in this study. I therefore chose to analyse the ethos of Internationella Engelska Skolan, IES, an

independent school organisation with more than 13 000 students at 19 different schools (IES 2013). The students participating in this study had attended one of the IES schools.

## **Narratives**

To explore the experiences of students and parents, I have adopted a narrative inquiry, as this is described by Ivor Goodson & Ulf Numan (2003) as a method that allows the participants to be *agents* instead of *objects*. They suggest that narratives “connect the story with the outer (perhaps also inner) context that was valid when the events of the story took place” (p100-101).

The students in this study were asked to write about their school experiences and elaborate on topics such as expectations, learning in English versus in Swedish, success factors and general impact of their schooling. They were given the task in person or through written contact over internet. For the students, *written* narratives were chosen to give the participants a greater freedom of expression as they can take their time to reflect upon their experiences. In an interview they will have to answer immediately and there is a risk that the interviewer will guide the participants along the path that that is considered the most interesting. Students can also be well attuned to the intentions of adults asking questions (teachers) and may try to please the interviewer rather than giving their perspective. All students have responded in Swedish and written 1-2 pages about their experiences of an English medium school.

With the parents, interviews were chosen as it can “enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regards situations from their own point of view” (Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion & Keith Morrison 2000, p267). The interviews were conducted in person or, in one case, as a telephone interview. All parents were given a choice between being recorded or having notes taken and all preferred notes. During the interview, I thus took notes and at the conclusion of a specific topic I read a summary of my notes to ascertain that I had recorder the main points of their narratives. I several cases, the parents clarified their statements or added new information. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, although one parent occasionally used some English vocabulary and expressions.

## **Ethos of an English medium school organisation**

To include the perspective of a provider of English medium schooling, I have explored an English medium school organisation, Internationella Engelska Skolan (IES), through their *Ethos* presented on their webpage. The Ethos is presented as their “educational philosophy” (2013), and although it can arguably be seen as their vision rather than an expression of their experiences, I have regarded and analysed the text using the same method as with the narratives from students and parents. One argument for doing so is that all texts should be processed similarly and the other is that a vision can be seen as built on experiences, setting a framework for future experiences.

### **Analysis**

Husserl argues that the objects of phenomenological investigations are the expressions of the experiences we have and that they are presented to us through language (1970). He recognises the difficulty in disclosing the essence of these expressions as the phenomenological analysis he describes requires an “unnatural direction of intuition and thought” (p69). Husserl explains that we must reflect on the acts that constitute the experiences behind the expressions and make these acts our object of investigation. Denscombe (2010) describes how the more recent version on phenomenology emanating from Alfred Schutz “is less concerned with revealing the essence of experience, and more concerned with describing the ways in which humans give meaning to their experiences” (p101). Concerned that my attempts to reveal the essence may cause misinterpretations, I have followed Schutz rather than Husserl, and regarded the participants’ statements as valid data expressing the meaning they have given their experiences. I have also been influenced by narrative epistemology, applying *thematic analysis*, where “content is the exclusive focus” (Kohler Riessman 2008, p53), and have thus kept the narratives intact and searched for common or disparate themes. In my analysis I have explored the expressions of the participants, compared them to each other and to the theoretical frameworks presented, keeping the statements intact.

The first step in my analysis was to read the texts obtain from students, parents and the IES. During the second reading, I started to mark similarities in the texts with different colours, indicating themes such as language, discipline, the world and so on. At this point I found that the data acquired presented a very different picture of English medium schools when compared with the previous research (Nixon 2000, Nixon 2001, Falk 2001, Nixon 2004,

Sylvén 2004, Kjellén Simes 2008, Skolverket 2010a). After several readings of the data, I concluded that the theoretical framework of Illeris (2007) could be applied to present a more comprehensive overview of English medium schooling. The data was then analysed again applying the framework of Illeris' learning dimensions, but still keeping the statements intact.

## **Validity and reliability**

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) suggest different definitions of *validity* for qualitative and quantitative data:

*In qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher. In quantitative data validity might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatment of data (p104).*

In this study, the honesty, depth and richness is dependent on what the participants chose to share and how well they describe their experiences. The Ethos of IES can arguably be regarded as a sales tool to attract more students, which might influence the honesty. The scope of data is limited by the number and volume of narratives, where more and longer narratives would have improved validity. Triangulation has been applied by allowing the voices of different actors in English medium schooling to be heard and my objectivity has already been described above. The objectivity could have been further ensured by having *auditors* (Bryman 2004) examine the process of data collection and analysis.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) also distinguish between *reliability* of qualitative and quantitative data:

*Quantitative research assumes the possibility of replication; if the same methods are used with the same sample then the results should be the same. In qualitative research reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched (p119).*

Observations could have been included to evaluate the fit between data and occurrences, but in a phenomenological sense, these observations would amount to the researcher's experience and not the participants'. With a phenomenological perspective the narratives of the participants have to be regarded as a valid description of their experiences.

## **Research ethics**

The Swedish Research Council offers ethical rules and guidelines for research with four principal requirements concerning information, consent, confidentiality and utilisation (2011).

The participants in the narrative have been informed that their texts will be used in a university paper and have written their contributions voluntarily. Confidentiality is ensured as there are several English schools and I do not reveal which they attended. The information gathered for this paper will not be sold.

# Results

## Student narratives

### Student A

Student A writes about how bored she was in the Swedish school, where she was not given any challenging tasks. It did not seem to matter how well she performed, as she could not move up a class. Through travels with her parents she had also come to long for an international dimension in her schooling. Her reasons for choosing an English medium education was: “I wanted to master the English language and at the same time take part in a multicultural sphere that valued the academic”.

In the English medium school, student A became motivated partly because of the challenges and encouragement she received from the teachers, but also due to the global perspective in the school. This perspective made her feel that she was part of a “global education, reaching outside the four walls of the classroom”. Teachers from different countries shared their experiences, describing how it was to grow up somewhere else in the world. This and the multicultural backgrounds of her classmates, made her thoughts and identity include a global perspective.

Student A describes the school culture of the English medium school as completely different from her old school. Here “extra help was not only given to those who were behind, but reward and further challenges were also given to those who were ahead”. The social climate at the school was also completely different, with stricter rules and more respect between teachers and students. Student A finds that “this created a safe environment where students could learn and teachers teach without being disturbed by less motivated students”.

Student A also reflects on her language abilities, concluding that “I would have great difficulties for several months, maybe more, in a Swedish school if I choose to study at a Swedish university”. This is because she has learned the concepts of some subjects in English only. She also notes that some English words and expressions sometimes mix in her Swedish, but that she always notices this when she reads her texts. Otherwise, she expresses the idea



that learning new languages also enhance your abilities in the languages you already master as you gain a deeper understanding of grammar.

### **Student B**

Student B writes that school felt more important when being taught in English and derive this from the English values that were reflected in teaching, school rules and behaviour in the classroom and in test situations. She reports that the teachers had higher expectations of the students and she express that this made her perform better than she would have in a Swedish school. The school culture has influenced her to “dream big, made me see possibilities in the world and not only in Sweden”.

Student B expresses that she has attained a “self-confidence in an international language which I feel give me freedom and possibilities in the world”. Comparing with friends who have attended Swedish schools, she finds that they have mainly studied English vocabulary and everyday language, whereas she has practiced using the formal language. This she thinks is important for the future and her career options.

Again comparing herself with friends in Swedish schools, student B does not think she has lost too much of her Swedish and in some ways have received a more well structured education also in that subject. She reflects that in her everyday language she blends Swedish and English expressions, but also that when writing formal Swedish she finds her knowledge of English to be very helpful.

### **Student C**

Student C describes that her old school was boring and she changed to a school that “showed ambition towards itself and the students”. The international perspective also appealed to her, as her “dream in life was to study and work abroad, learn a new culture and another way of living”. Her most valuable experience is the contacts with different cultures in the school: “That the teachers and students come from or have their roots all over the world contributes to a dynamic that is truly invaluable”. Student C finds that she has become more open to languages and cultures, feeling that they are not so important. She feels that she can hide beneath an international identity and is not afraid of trying different languages to communicate.

Student C is critical to the school culture of discipline and respect, influenced by the English school system. She argues that respect is important, but that in her school the respect was for teachers only. The teachers could show appreciation and respect to well achieving students, but it did not extend to all.

A bilingual education is in student C's view positive, not only because it creates future opportunities, but also because you process information differently when it is not in your mother tongue. She believes that it forces you to think more about the content, which makes you learn more. She admits that she sometimes loses the Swedish word, but also sees the possibility to think in two different languages as a sign that her patterns of thinking have changed.

### **Student D**

After two years in an English medium school while living abroad, Student D thinks it was a natural choice to continue with schooling in English. She was not surprised at the high level of English or of the discipline in the school, but remarks that this is the kind of system she likes. When she compares to the Swedish school she used to attend, she finds it noisy and lacking in respect, both towards teachers and between students. The discipline in the English medium school has made her take her education seriously and meeting other motivated students has made her more ambitious.

Student D finds it very negative that her Swedish has become poorer. She prefers to use English words and expressions, as it is sometimes difficult to find the Swedish ones. In a conversation she finds it difficult to express herself in Swedish, when she knows there is a much better way of saying it in English. On the other hand, she feels so confident in her English that she is considering university studies abroad.

Student D also finds that "I have met teachers and students from different countries, which has given me great cultural insights".

### **Student E**

The choice of an English medium school was for student E both a consequence of events in his old school and a relative's experience of education in English. In year 5, parents at his old school started to enrol their children in other schools, mainly to avoid ending up in the year 7-

9-school in the area. Student E concludes that the result was that he found himself with classmates that were not very motivated to study and his parents then also started looking for something else. A relative had attended an English medium school and recommended it, so they applied.

Student E felt a bit nervous about learning in English, but to his surprise he found that very few of his new classmates had grown up with English. Regarding motivation to study, he was a bit disappointed to find that it was not as high as he had expected. He reflects that this feeling may be due to the fact that he found some subjects easy and perhaps felt that the others did not show the same commitment.

After four years in an English medium school, student E thinks that he has very good English skills. He does not comment more on that than: “Both mum and dad are very future oriented and believe in a globalised world, and then it is not so strange that they praise bilingualism”.

## **Student F**

It was the parents of student F that decided she should attend an English medium school. She explains that in her family English is highly valued and her relatives have attended this school. She recalls that the first year was very difficult as she could not understand the tasks properly, but as she developed her English in the years that followed, her performance and grades improved. She thinks that the reasons for her success were “the high level of teaching and the discipline”.

Student F finds that attending an English medium school has helped her to understand how schools work abroad, something she thinks is very important as her goal is to study abroad.

When changing to a Swedish school for year 10-12, student F was surprised to find that her Swedish had worsened considerably and she became very insecure when expressing herself. As she has now attended a Swedish education the last years, she “no longer feels comfortable in the Swedish or the English language which can be very frustrating”.

## **Parent interviews**

### **Parent A**

Parent A describes that they were looking for a school with a language profile, as both parents think that it is positive to know many languages. The English medium school was “evidently very positive to languages”, although from her point of view, Parent A thought it was important to have a balance between English and Swedish: “English only would not have been positive”.

Parent A is satisfied with the choice of school. She finds that her child has gained “more perspectives on the world” and is “open for other ways of thinking”. She feels that her child has enjoyed the major challenges that the students have been trusted with and the fact that they have been taken seriously.

On the negative side, Parent A remarks that her child has lost some of her ability in her mother tongue and that English vocabulary have entered her child’s Swedish.

### **Parents B**

As their child was not enjoying her old school, which Parents B describe as “a good school”, they looked at several other options. A colleague recommended an English medium school, claiming it had “a clear structure and an international foundation”. Their child was good at English as the family had travelled extensively and they also had English speaking friends. After an open house day at the school their child was very positive and that school became her first choice. Parents B describe how they found the school to be caring and wanted that English should feel natural for their child.

Parents B’s experiences from the school are mainly positive. They feel that their child has gained an English competence, not only in a language but also a “cultural, Anglo-Saxon competence”. They assess that their child is now bilingual, but also that she finds it difficult to learn science in Swedish at her new school. Parents B also find that the attitude to the school was more positive to begin with, but that frequent changes of teachers and high demands made school become more negative.

## **Parent C**

The choice to apply to an English medium school was the daughter's own, but Parent C supported it as she considered it valuable to become good at English as it is a language that can be used globally. Parent C also remarks that an English education offers wider possibilities; for instance, if the family would decide to move abroad, it would be easier to continue the education there. Another factor that she finds positive is that an international school should have students from different countries, enabling "the exchange of cultures, ways of talking and acting, languages and traditions".

Parent C expected the teachers at an independent school to be more structured and strict, although she would expect other renowned schools to also be able to convince students and parents to conform to their values due to their reputation.

Parent C is satisfied with the schooling provided and the achievements of her child, and reflects that it is difficult to assert how much depends on the school and on the individual. Her child "has been raised to understand and appreciate education" and has always been responsible and done well in school.

In addition to the school achievement, Parent C finds that her child has developed a deeper understanding of other cultures and how they can live together, although she notes that her daughter's closest friends are all Swedish.

## **Ethos of an English medium school organisation**

On their webpage, Internationella Engelska Skolan, IES, (2013) present their school and include an Ethos to describe that they believe in:

- Performance-based learning,
- Support for every child to reach his or her potential,
- Professional teacher commitment,
- Internationalism,
- 'Tough love',
- Bilingualism.

In the text about performance-based learning, IES emphasise how assessment is a continuous process and that different methods are used, including teachers' notes and observations. They

also show how feedback is presented regularly: “students in all years are given comprehensive feedback on the development of their knowledge four times in any given academic year” (ibid.).

In terms of support for every child, IES explain that subject teachers inform when a student fails to reach goals. The student is given an Academic Notice which “states specifically what the student needs to do to meet the learning goals, where/whom they can obtain help from and by what date this is expected to be done by” (IES 2013). Parents, mentors and the Academic Coordinator of the school are also informed and a remedial program to help the student is established. IES find that academic progress and character development go hand in hand, which is why they have a program teaching the students “the arts of respect and communication” (ibid.).

IES describe professional teacher commitment as the quality of their teachers: “We strive to recruit certified and highly qualified teachers. Our teachers are counted on to have exceptional knowledge in their specific subject areas, as well as having teaching qualification from their native countries” (IES 2013). IES also present how subject teachers offer extra lesson support. In their Junior schools (year 4-5), IES “implement a system of class teachers and home rooms, where extra supported English and the development of bilingualism are focused upon” (ibid.).

The topic of internationalism is presented with the statement that IES “believe in internationalism” and that “The English language is the key to the modern world; therefore all our schools prioritise English instruction” (IES 2013). IES inform that “half of our teaching staff is recruited from English speaking countries. The international background of our staff contributes to the unique character of our schools” (ibid.). They also mention their contacts and exchanges with schools abroad.

Under the rubric Tough Love, IES describe how they “strive to create a calm working environment where the precepts of discipline and respect are foremost and upheld” (2013). This is implemented through written school rules and expectation agreement, promoting polite manners, holding students accountable and quickly dealing with disturbances, involving the parents in the process. IES claim that “Students learn very quickly that they are rewarded for following the rules and working hard” (ibid.).

Finally, bilingualism is promoted by half of the teaching being in English, with teachers mainly being native speakers. In younger years, more Swedish might be used if the students' level of English is not good enough to use for learning a subject. IES claim that "Students in year 9 are capable of fully utilizing the English language in their learning. We therefore work with vocabulary lists in the Sciences and in other key subjects to ensure that the subject is fully absorbed in both English and Swedish" (IES 2013).

# Analysis

I have applied a phenomenological approach to this study, exploring the experiences of the participants in and providers of English medium schooling, thus considering the narratives collected as valid data. In my analysis, the themes of the data have been structured based on the theoretical framework of Illeris (2007), thus describing how the results inform on the content, the incentive and the social/societal dimensions of learning.

## Content

The results show that it is mainly the Ethos of IES that focuses on the learning of content, by expressing their concern with continuous assessment, regular feedback, clear goal orientation, remedial programs, teacher subject knowledge, creating bilingual students and the fact that “All schools have an Academic Coordinator whose job is to oversee academic success” (IES 2013).

When the parents talk about the learning content, they only mention languages; the English competence that was both a reason for choosing English medium schooling and which they now are satisfied with. Parent A shows concern of a decrease in competence of the mother tongue and that English vocabulary is used when talking Swedish. Parents B note that it is now difficult to learn science in Swedish.

The students also almost exclusively mention languages in their narratives and express satisfaction with the development of their English competence. Even when Student A reflects that learning at a Swedish university might be difficult, the reason is that the content of various subjects has been studied in English. She concludes that she has acquired the knowledge and the concepts, but need to translate it to Swedish terminology. All students agree that their English have improved considerably, student F expressing frustration that in her new, Swedish, school the English is on the same level as in year 7 in her English school. Student D and F express concern that they have lost some of their competence in Swedish, but the other students do not regard the English influence in their Swedish as an obstacle.



## **Incentive**

All student narratives include the incentive dimension, and some of them relate it to using English in school: Student A found it “exciting to study in a new language”; Student B claims that “school felt more important when being taught in English”; while Student C “truly enjoyed that the teaching was in English”, but struggled to understand the first year. Student D enjoyed the discipline and suggests that it has made her take her education seriously, while Student C is critical to a discipline where respect was not given to the students. Student A argues that respect is essential to motivate high achieving students. Students A, B and C mention the international aspect as motivating, as they all have the ambition to study abroad. High expectations from the teachers are suggested as an incentive by Students A and B, Student A also concludes that the challenge of the tasks made her motivated. Student C and D express that it was positive to interact with so many well motivated students, while Student E finds that “the motivation to study was not particularly higher than elsewhere”.

Some parents also mention the incentive dimension; Parent A finding that the challenges given and the impression that students have been taken seriously have been motivating; Parents B expressing that the caring environment was a motivating factor.

In the ethos of IES, incentive is not mentioned, although one might argue that statements regarding academic support, feedback, teacher commitment and promotion of good manners might include an ambition to motivate the students.

## **Social situation**

The Ethos of IES provides a clear picture of their vision of the school climate: a calm working environment with high academic standards, and rules and discipline that promote character development and good manners. IES also explain that the “international background of our staff contributes to the unique character of our schools” (2013).

Almost all students have mentioned rules and discipline, and described them as contributing to a positive atmosphere, except Student C who, as already noted, found that the sense of respect that was promoted was unequally distributed. Students A, B, C and D all emphasise the positive importance of the multicultural backgrounds of teachers and students through statements as: “most valuable” (Student C), “has given me great cultural insights” (Student D), “made me see possibilities in the world” (Student D) and it “has influenced my identity”

(Student A). Student B finds that “the culture within the English school has influenced what I want to do in the future”, and concludes that this is partly due to the established confidence in an international language and partly due to the expectations of her and her school work.

Parent A suggests that through a different school culture, more perspectives on education are offered and other ways of thinking are opened up. Parents B find the school climate to be clearly structured and providing an international background. Parent C stresses both the clear structure and the positive aspects of the diversity of cultures at school.

Applying the cultural dimensions of Hofstede et. al. (2010), the Ethos and the narratives describe a school culture that promotes high power distance, with strict order and respect for teachers. This structure could also be interpreted as positive for students with high uncertainty avoidance. The emphasis on and praise for academic achievement, for students and teachers, indicate a more masculine culture, the difference being expressed by Student A: “infinite more appreciation [...] was given to successful students”. Parent C notes that the group of close friends to her daughter has exclusively Swedish background, but it is not clear if their subgroup is formed due to ethnic background (as in collectivistic cultures) or because of friendships and skills (individualistic).

Several of the aspects for successful schools as defined by Grosin (2004) are mentioned in the narratives: high expectations, encouragement for good work and clear norms of social interaction. The Ethos of IES include the above and also promote other aspects from Grosin: focus on knowledge targets, order and sanctions against bad behaviour, regular evaluation and cooperation with parents.

## **Societal situation**

The importance of English also relates to the societal situation of students or languages, and it confirms the superior status of English. Parent A is alone to express the idea that education in “any language would have been fine”, a concern that a balance between the languages is needed and the negative aspect of loss of mother tongue, despite the fact that more participants have other first languages than Swedish or English. None of the aspects of belonging to a certain group of second language learners (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981) or the relative status of different languages (Lindberg 2009, Runfors 2009) are mentioned in the narratives or addressed in the Ethos of IES. Any critical language awareness, discussing the

relationship between language and power or the status of different languages (Cummins 2001) has not been discovered, all data emphasise the importance of English as a global language.

The diversity of the teachers of IES is promoted in the Ethos, but internationalism is described as “The English language is the key to the modern world” (IES 2013) and the goal of bilingualism is limited to knowledge of English and Swedish. As presented above, several of the students celebrate the cultural diversity of the school; both Student A and D finds that it has affected their identity. The exchange of ideas through interaction according to the theory of intercultural education (Portera 2011) can be perceived, but the students seem to be enacting them on their own account, as the school appears to be focussed on English and Swedish. Any critical consciousness of power structures (Gorski 2008), is not evident in the data, but the focus from students and parents is rather on the positive competence of shifting between code systems and functioning in diverse settings (Gay 2010).

## **Conclusions**

Having analysed the results using the theoretical framework of Illeris’ learning dimension (2007), I find that some particular conclusions become evident.

First of all, the positive influence of the English language is mentioned in *all* learning dimensions. In the content dimension, students and parents express appreciation of the English competence developed. In the incentive dimension, several students find it stimulating and motivating to be taught in English. In the social and societal dimension, English is praised as an important part of creating a unique school culture and for awarding future opportunities in a global society.

Secondly, a very special school atmosphere has been created through consistent rules of conduct and high expectations of academic achievement, implementing many of the aspects of successful schools mentioned by Grosin (2004). Although not all students are unilaterally positive of the behavioural rules, almost all of them conclude that they have created a peaceful environment, where they could focus on learning.

Finally, the cultural diversity in the school is by students and parents considered a positive and motivational factor, which has also enabled the students to develop cultural understanding and competence. Student C goes as far as claiming that “the most valuable I brought with me was also the different cultures”. It is also interesting to note that the diversity so appreciated

by students and parents is only mentioned by IES when they describe the international background of their teachers.

# Discussion

## General findings

I find that this study has explored and described the experiences of an English medium school, as was the intention expressed in the purpose statement. The descriptions illustrate both a vision of an English medium school organisation and the experiences of students and parents that have participated in the schooling they offer. Given the high merit grades of English medium schools (Skolverket 2010a), I anticipated a greater emphasis on the content dimension, and was quite surprised to find that most of the content discussed was the English and Swedish languages. The language issue was in fact included in all learning dimensions, an evidence of the importance placed especially in English competence, which is one of the major conclusions of this study.

As many previous researchers indicated that student motivation is an important success factor (Kjellén-Simes 2008, Lim Falk 2008, Skolverket 2010a, Sylvén 2004), I assumed that the incentive dimension would be shown much greater interest in the narratives and the Ethos. As suggested earlier, my theoretical frameworks were initially more related to the content and incentive dimensions, but the data compelled me to introduce Illeris' (2007) theory of learning dimensions, as he also includes the environment; the social and societal situation.

The environmental dimension proved essential as another of the major conclusions of this study is the importance of the school environment, which some participants find has indeed been crucial both for their content and incentive dimension. All participants in the study; school, parents and students; emphasise that the creation of a calm learning environment with a focus on academic achievement was a positive and decisive factor, both for learning content and as an incentive to learn. As noted, many of the aspects of the social climate recommended by Grosin (2004) are evident in the Ethos of IES and in the narratives of students and parents. The additional factors of learning in a foreign language and interacting with teachers from different parts of the world, appear to have created a school culture deviating from the Swedish cultural norm (Lahdenperä 2002) and which might be more acceptable to students and parents from other backgrounds. When comparing with the cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede et. al. (2010), there is a greater focus on clear structures (high uncertainty

avoidance), respect (large power distance) and academic achievement (masculine). As some students express how this environment has affected their identity, one might be tempted to conclude that IES has succeeded in providing the kind of education that Green (2006) finds necessary for the postmodern era, promoting an inclusive identity.

The final major conclusion informs both on the social situation in the school and on the societal situation in contemporary Sweden. Students, parents and the school describe a societal situation where the opportunities for future studies and work in a global community are given importance. Some students also express interest in learning other ways of life or that they have gained freedom. The data describe the importance students and parents ascribe to the diversity of both students and teachers. It becomes evident that the students have found this interaction between cultures (Portera 2011) stimulating and has given them both a cultural competence and, as expressed by some students, shaped their identity.

## **Descriptions of the social/societal dimension**

As I found that previous research had not given the social and societal dimension of learning enough attention, one of my research questions addressed how this is described by the participants in the study. My conclusion confirms that all participants describe the importance of the social situation as crucial, as described in more detail above, but give a rather vague picture of the societal situation. It can be argued that the societal situation in the modern globalised society is the very reason that English medium schools in Sweden exist at all. Previously, parents and students have been satisfied with learning English and other languages as separate subjects, and they have reached levels where they have been able to study or work abroad. Why do they now find it necessary to attend an English medium school? I would like to suggest that the global connectedness and interdependence that we are presently experiencing, is creating a societal situation that encourage schooling in a global language.

Still, it is interesting to discuss why so little information was received regarding the societal situation and why it did not relate very closely to the theories presented? It is obvious that all participants value the international competence gained through their improved English skills, and the narratives include appreciation for learning to shift between cultural systems and function in diverse settings (Gay 2010). Still, the students can be identified as belonging to three of the second language learning groups (excluding elite bilinguals) defined by

Skutnabb-Kangas (1981), but nothing regarding these societal positions are mentioned in their narratives. The critical approach to power relations discussed by Gorski (2008) is also nonexistent, despite the diversity of the participants. Likewise, many languages are represented in the IES schools and among the participants in the study, but issues of language status (Cummins 2001) are not addressed in the data. The Ethos of IES and several narratives emphasise bilingualism, which of course can be seen as contradicting theories showing that monolingualism is promoted in Western society (Lindberg 2009). Only one parent shows concern about the mother tongue, all other sources discuss proficiency in English and Swedish only.

One answer might be that the participants of this study are unaware of these relations and positions. The students might be unaware due to their young age, but surely the parents and the school are not naive enough not to reflect on these issues? Another alternative is that it quite simply does not feel important, which is why it is not discussed. One reason could be that the appreciation of diversity which is evident among the students could make minority groups feel more comfortable than in other schools. Another reason could be that many of the teachers are from abroad and share having Swedish as their second language with minority students. This could broaden the scope of normality, making Swedish students more tolerant of lacking Swedish skills and minority students feeling more accepted. Finally, there is of course the possibility that I have not presented a theory that better explains the societal dimension or that no such theory exists.

## **Reasons behind high achievement**

Another research question was to find reasons for the high achievement of students at English medium schools (Skolverket 2010a). This can arguably be seen as the very objective of the IES Ethos, where so much emphasis is put on learning goals, assessment, feedback, remedial programs, extra lesson support, teacher competence, and “a calm working environment” (IES 2013). Applying the theories of Hattie (2009), one can argue that *providing formative evaluation* (ranked as No. 3), *classroom behavioural* (No. 6) and *comprehensive interventions* (No. 7), seems to be employed. Teacher expectations also seem high, which Grosin (2004) has found important for student achievement.

Only two student narratives include reasons behind high achievement; one finds that the high expectations made her perform better and the other that the challenges given and appreciation

shown contributed to a higher level of achievement. Other narratives show satisfaction with achievement levels, especially in English, but offer no reasons. The participants in this study do however describe that the school environment facilitated a focus on learning, which could be implying a factor resulting in high academic achievement.

## **Learning in a second language**

The very simple answer to my last research question is that participants in and providers of English medium schooling hardly make mention of the notion that learning in your second language might be more difficult (Cummins 2001, Skutnabb-Kangas 1981). The prevailing impression is that bilingualism is described as something positive, although several narratives mention that students mix English and Swedish, and one student feels insecure in both languages after a few years in a Swedish school. One could assume that the school would address this issue when describing their methodology, and how teachers are prepared for second language acquisition, as recommended by Nixon (2001). Are student, parents and indeed schools taking for granted that subject teaching in English is adapted to second language learners as almost every student is one? Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on these issues.

## **Limitations**

The choice of doing a phenomenological study and allowing the participants to so independently describe their experiences, has the advantage of making them active agents (Denscombe 2010, Goodson & Numan 2003) and access their thinking and knowing (Husserl 1970). A limitation of this study that I find important and regrettable is that the experiences of teachers and other staff in English medium schools has not been possible to access, despite contacts with several schools. Another limitation is the number and length of narratives collected. More variations of experiences might become evident with more data.

One disadvantage of the method chosen is of course that I do not direct the participants' thoughts to the learning dimensions that previous research have found important. With another approach, more data concerning the content and incentive dimension, as well as the societal situation, might have been collected. This would have required a more structured questioning during the interviews and a detailed instruction for the written narratives. Data



could also have been collected at other schools, independent or municipal, to provide a comparative view.

However, more structure may also limit the expressions of the participant to such a degree that the study would no longer be phenomenological. To explore the experiences of people, they must be able to express themselves with as few restrictions as possible.

To fully explore reasons behind high achievement and strategies towards second language learning, more direct questions and instructions would have been needed. A mixed research approach including tests, observations and questionnaires, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data might inform better on these research questions.

## **English medium schools in Sweden**

As discussed in the introduction, independent schools, including many English medium schools, receive criticism for creating unequal opportunities between students of those schools and other students (Kornhall 2012, Malmberg et. al. 2012, Skolverket 2003 and 2012). The quality of the education provided is also discussed (Lim Falk 2008, Nixon 2000 and 2001). Some assert the opportunities provided (Cooper & Svanborg-Sjövall 2012, Nixon 2004), while others show the positive results (Sylvén 2004), especially for students with low results when entering (Kjellén-Simes 2008) or for student groups with low results in other schools (Skolverket 2010a and 2010b). The findings of this study support the legitimacy of English medium schools in Sweden, showing that they can contribute to student development, not only in English competence and high merit grades, but also by creating a school environment where diversity is appreciated, and interaction and learning between cultures take place.

While this study concludes that the English medium schools of IES has created a positive school environment that facilitates high achievement, it does not provide any indications that “an innovative methodological approach” (Eurydice 2006, p.7) has been developed; IES refer to “vocabulary lists [...] to ensure that the subject is fully absorbed in both English and Swedish” (IES 2013). Several of the narratives presented in this study suggest that this approach has failed as students find that they lack such vocabulary. IES are consistent in that they appear to teach half of the subjects in English only, and require the students to actively use English for communication, which conforms to a weaker definition of CLIL/SPRINT (Nixon 2004, Sylvén 2004). Other schools claiming to provide CLIL/SPRINT programmes

abandon the language target, when communication becomes difficult, and prioritise subject knowledge (Lim Falk 2008).

To improve CLIL/SPRINT and English medium schools in Sweden, a common definition and common targets for the education should be agreed upon. I argue that aspects of second language acquisition (Cummins 2001, Skutnabb-Kangas 1981) should be included in the teaching methodology to further improve results. Intercultural education, with its focus on facing the diverse background of the students (Portera 2011) and its practical implementation (Cummins 2001, Gay 2010) can widen the scope of the content dimension of learning, improve the incentive dimension for all student groups by making them feel appreciated and facilitate a positive social and societal learning dimension in the schools.

## **Concluding remarks**

I argue that this study has revealed some important and interesting perspectives on English medium education in Sweden and how it is experienced by the participants in a school in the Stockholm area. Although some suggestions for future research have already been implied, I would like to conclude by suggesting studies that can be done to further explore the major findings.

English language has been indicated as an essential part of all learning dimensions and in my opinion it would be interesting to explore if another language could be perceived as equally important. Schools using other global languages, such as Spanish or French, or languages that might be regarded as important in the future, Chinese or Hindi, could be researched. Other schools aiming at bilingualism in the students' first language, be it Finnish or Romanes, as well as in Swedish, could also be examined. How is the importance of language expressed by participants in and providers of these school programmes?

The school climate has also been described as a decisive factor both for learning content and as an incentive factor. Studies at other schools can further explore strategies to create a positive school environment. Further research on how the school environment influences academic achievement would also be of interest and could be implemented as action research to facilitate changes in schools that struggle with low student performance.

Finally, I would like to see studies on how the student diversity can be developed to such a positive learning experience as described by the participants of this study. Can this diversity

be used to open the walls of the classroom and let the students engage in a global society? I believe that the approach to student diversity is crucial when creating better learning opportunities for *all* students, regardless of ethnic or socio-economic background. Is it sufficient to apply methodologies supporting second language learners across the curriculum to improve achievement? Will the implementation of the theories of intercultural education be enough to provide a positive perspective on diversity or is teacher diversity equally important?

This study concludes that an English medium school, with a focus on the English language and a challenging academic environment, together with the intercultural atmosphere created by the cultural diversity of the teachers and students, can be the door to the world that the students of this study seem so eager to step out into.

# References

- Bryman, Alan (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Carlgren, Ingrid & Marton, Ference (2004). *Lärare av imorgon*. Stockholm, Sweden: Lärarförbundets förlag.
- Cohen, Louis, Manion, Lawrence & Morrison, Keith (2000). *Research Methods in Education*. London, England: Routledge Falmer.
- Cooper, Eva & Svanborg-Sjövall, Karin (2012). Utan fritt skolval stannar klassresan i klassrummet. *Dagens nyheter* [online] 22 May. Available at: < <http://www.dn.se/debatt/utan-fritt-skolval-stannar-klassresan-i-klassrummet> > [Accessed 25 May 2012].
- Cummins, Jim (2001). *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. Los Angeles, US: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, Jim, Early, Margaret & Stille, Saskia (2011). Frames of Reference: Identity Texts in Perspective. In: Jim Cummins & Margaret Early (ed.), *Identity Texts: the Collaborative Creation of Power in Multilingual Schools* (p21-43). Stoke on Trent, England: Trentham Books Limited.
- Denscombe, Martyn (2010). *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. Maidenhead, England : McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.
- Eurydice (2006). *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at School in Europe*. Brussels, Belgium: Eurydice.
- Falk, Maria (2001). *SPRINT – hot eller möjlighet?* Stockholm, Sweden: Skolverket.
- Gay, Geneva (2010). Classroom practices for teaching diversity: an example from Washington State (United States). In OECD, *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge* (p257-279) [pdf]. Available at at: < <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org> > [Accessed 3 February 2012].
- Goodson, Ivor F. & Numan, Ulf (2003). *Livshistoria och professionsutveckling. Berättelser om lärares liv och arbete*. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.

- Gorski, Paul C. (2008). Good intentions are not enough: a decolonizing intercultural education. *Intercultural education, Vol 19, No 6*, p515-525.
- Green, Andy (2006). Education, Globalization and the Nation State. In: Hugh Lauder, Phillip Brown, Jo-Anne Dillabough och A.H. Halsey (ed.), *Education, Globalization and Social Change* (p192-197). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Grosin, Lennart (2004). *Skolklimat, prestation och anpassning i 21 mellan- och högstadieskolor* (Forskningsrapport 71). Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholms universitet, Pedagogiska institutionen.
- Hattie, John A. C. (2009). *Visible Learning. A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hofstede, Geert H., Hofstede, Gert Jan & Minkov, Michael (2010). *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the mind*. New York, US: McGraw-Hill.
- Husserl, Edmund (1970). Introduction to the Logical Investigations. In: Moran, Dermot & Mooney, Timothy (2002). *The Phenomenology Reader* (p65-77). New York, US: Routledge.
- Hyltenstam, Kenneth (2002). Engelskundervisning i Sverige. In: Kommittén för svenska språket. *Mål i mun: förslag till handlingsplan för svenska språket. Bilagor* (p45-71). Stockholm, Sweden: Fritzes.
- Illeris, Knud (2007). *How We Learn. Learning and non-learning in school and beyond*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Internationella Engelska Skolan (2013). *Ethos*. [online] Available at: <<http://engelska.se/en/ethos>> [Accessed 6 April 2013].
- Kirkpatrick, Andy (2011). English as a medium of instruction in Asian education (from primary to tertiary): Implications for local languages and local scholarship. *Applied Linguistics Review*, Vol. 2011, p99-119.
- Kjellén Simes, Marika (2008). *Room for Improvement? A comparative study of Swedish learners' free written production in English in the foreign language classroom and in immersion education*. PhD Dissertation. Karlstad, Sweden: Karlstad University.

- Kohler Riessmann, Catherine (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Kornhall, Per (2012). Principen om en bra skola för alla gäller inte längre. *Dagens Nyheter*, [online] 17 March. Available at: < <http://www.dn.se/debatt/principen-om-en-bra-skola-for-alla-galler-inte-langre>> [Accessed 25 May 2012].
- Ladhenperä, Pirjo (2002). Developing Multicultural Schools and Intercultural Education. In: Nadia Banno Gomes, Aina Bigestans, Leif Magnusson and Ingrid Ramberg (ed.), *Reflections on Diversity and Change in Modern Society. A Festschrift for Annick Sjögren* (p 293-308). Tumba, Sweden: Mångkulturellt centrum.
- León Rosales, René (2010). *Vid framtidens hitersta gräns: om maskulina elevpositioner i en multietnisk skola*. Botkyrka, Sweden: Mångkulturellt centrum.
- Lim Falk, Maria (2008). *Svenska i engelskspråkig skolmiljö: ämnesrelaterat språkbruk i två gymnasieklasser*. PhD Dissertation. Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University.
- Lindberg, Inger (2009). I det nya mångspråkiga Sverige, *Utbildning och demokrati 2009, vol 18, nr 2*, 9-37.
- Malmberg, Bo, Andersson, Eva & Östh, John (2012). Skolvalet används för att undvika underprivilegierade. *Dagens Nyheter* [online] 20 May. Available at: < <http://www.dn.se/debatt/skolvalet-anvands-for-att-undvika-underprivilegierade>> [Accessed 25 May 2012].
- Marsh, David (2002). *CLIL/EMILE – The European Dimension. Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential*. Strasbourg, France: European Commission.
- Nixon, John (2000). *SPRINT: Content and Language Integrated Learning and Teaching in Sweden*. Stockholm, Sweden: Skolverket.
- Nixon, John (2001). *Quality in SPRINT. Towards quality assessment and assurance in content and language integrated education*. Stockholm, Sweden: Skolverket.
- Nixon, John (2004). Integrating the teaching of language with the teaching of content. In: Rolf Ferm and Per Malmberg (ed.), *Språkboken* (p225-234). Stockholm, Sweden: Liber Distribution.

Portera, Agostino (2011). Intercultural and Multicultural Education. In: Carl A. Grant and Agostino Portera (ed.), *Intercultural and Multicultural Education: Enhancing Global Interconnectedness* (p12-30). New York, US: Routledge.

Runfors, Ann (2009). Modersmålssvenskar och vi andra, *Utbildning och demokrati 2009, vol 18, nr 2*, 105-126.

Skolverket (2003). *Valfrihet och dess effekter inom skolområdet*. Rapport 230. Stockholm, Sweden: Skolverket.

Skolverket (2010a). *Undervisning på engelska*. Rapport 351. Stockholm, Sweden: Skolverket.

Skolverket (2010b). *Siris – kvalitet och resultat i skolan*. [online] Available at: <<http://siris.skolverket.se>> [Accessed 12 May 2012].

Skolverket (2012). *Likvärdig utbildning i svensk grundskola?* Rapport 374. Stockholm, Sweden: Skolverket.

Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (1981). *Tvåspråkighet*. Lund, Sweden: LiberLäromedel.

Swedish Research Council (2011). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*. [pdf] Available at <<http://codex.vr.se/>> [Accessed 28 February 2011].

Sylvén, Liss Kerstin (2004). *Teaching in English or English Teaching? On the effects of content and language integrated learning on Swedish learners' incidental vocabulary acquisition*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Göteborgs University.

Thomas, Wayne & Collier, Virginia (2002). *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority students' Long-Term Academic Achievement*. Berkeley, US: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence.