Problem-based learning
– A study of suggestions for solving learning difficulties presented during English lessons in the school context

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to connect problem-based learning with the problematic aspects during English lessons in school. In this way, suggestions for solutions to these problems could be generated. The study took place at an upper secondary school located in the middle regions of Sweden. In this school six unstructured observations were done during the English lessons in order to locate the problematic aspects. The students who participated in this study were in the ages of sixteen to eighteen years old. The theoretical framework was based on literature on problem-based learning and learning in general. The essential features of problem-based learning have been summarized and connected with the problematic aspects and classroom activities from the observations. In this way, it has been possible to come up with suggestions for solutions to some problems, such as unwillingness to speak and lack of motivation among students. The conclusions in this essay are that the problematic aspects dealt with features, such as unwillingness to speak as well as that the students did not understand the learning materials and that the teacher was not supportive. The solutions for these problems dealt mostly with triggering motivation by presenting problem-solving tasks, working with interaction and metacognition and planning the tasks in accordance with the students’ zone of proximal development. Furthermore, the teacher should work as a guide in the classroom to help the students along the way. The students should also receive positive and constructive feedback from the teacher, which will improve the learning among the students.

Keywords: Problem-based learning, English, solutions, classroom problems.
1. Introduction

The topic for this degree paper is problematic aspects on English teaching. Learning is never uncomplicated and, for this reason, various kinds of difficulties tend to appear during lessons when the learning process takes place. Common aspects of this nature are, for example, lack of motivation due to difficulties in understanding why something is to be learned. Furthermore, the teacher does not always meet the students at their individual level of development. The latter will most likely lead to lack of understanding the course materials in school and thereby decrease the learning. Research also reveals that activity in the classroom is one of the keys to successful learning. Most successful are tasks that involve problem solving, critical thinking and interpretation (Crawford et al., 2005:1). In the school context these aspects are related to the method of problem-based learning. This method was initially used in medical school for solving health problems among patients. Since solving problems is valuable for the development of future citizens, this method was adopted by other areas of the school system as well (Delisle, 1997:7).

More often than not schools utilize teaching methods that make students passive. Examples of this are the “display questions”, for which there are correct answers to be found sometimes directly expressed in the passages of a certain text (Delisle, 1997:9; Tornberg, 2009:61). Furthermore, the methods in school often make the students dependent on the teacher (Barth, 2001:3). This is not the case when using the problem-based method, since this method makes the students active during the lessons. The students need to collect information themselves, analyze it and then draw conclusions to be able to solve the presented problem. In this way, the students will have control over their learning materials due to the fact that they have gathered the information themselves. Thus, the students will be able to understand the information more efficiently (Delisle, 1997:9).

As a teacher trainee in upper secondary school, I have found that one of the more complex aspects of learning deals with students’ unwillingness to strive for improving their progress. This is one reason why I started to think about the reasons behind it, and how the teachers can improve the students’ motivation. Several teachers I have spoken to expressed the difficulty in knowing how to motivate their students. These teachers also expressed the problematic aspect of improving the learning amongst all the students in the classroom. This, since the teachers’ helping hands tend to reach only a few of the students. Some of these teachers even showed
fatigue to some extent, when they explained that there is not much that a teacher can do if the students are not motivated to do their school work. These problems might be possible to solve by utilizing and adding features from the method of problem-based learning. According to Banner (1999), problem-based learning assists students in relating information with their own lives. In this way, students often get more eager to work. Due to the logic connection that appears between the students and the data the information becomes easier to comprehend (Banner, 1999:29). By providing a visible link between students’ lives and students’ school work, this method has the ability to motivate students to reach progress (Torp & Sage, 2002:23). This is important, since humans learn by doing as Dewey (2005) puts it (Dewey, 2005:231), as well as from interaction with others (Säljö, 2000:115). Moreover, problem-based learning creates education in accordance to the Zone of Proximal Development. It also makes the students responsible for their learning, since they become the holders of the information they are working with (Delisle, 1997:7).

In my point of view, student motivation is crucial. If some students are motivated while others are not, a gap between the students’ efforts are likely to appear. This will lead to a distinction between students who are considered to be either “weak” or “strong”. This study might facilitate learning materials for a solution to this dilemma. By connecting this method with the problems in school, I intend to come up with suggestions as to improve English teaching methods.

When researching the collected materials of this topic I found that most of the published methods of learning in general are decontextualized with little or no relation neither to real life nor to schools where the learning takes place. This is yet another reason why I decided to examine the existing teaching methods within school and relate them to the problem-based learning.

This essay might assist teachers as well as teacher trainees in their work. The study will function as an aid and a basis for further clarification of problematic teaching aspects in English and perhaps even in other subjects. In my opinion, problem-based learning is a method worth trying in all schools, since research reveals the efficiency of the method to such aspects as motivating the students. However, problem-based learning might not necessarily be used alone, but as a combination with more traditional ways of teaching. As I see it, the method is most valuable to use when problems with learning occur. The reason for this is that problem-based learning increases motivation, which will make learning valuable for the
students. This is important, since humans will not learn if they do not find the learning materials meaningful (Tornberg, 2009:16-18).

1.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to summarize the method of problem-based learning and relate it to the difficulties in teaching English that appear in the school context. In this way, solutions for the discovery of difficulties within school will be possible to generate through the method of problem-based learning.

Research questions:

1) What problematic features can be found during the observed English lessons?
2) What are the essential characteristics of the method of problem-based learning?
3) In what way might the essential characteristics of problem-based learning be utilized to solve the problematic features during the observed English lessons?

Limitation:
Since this is a small study, the observations were limited to take place only in one school. The theoretical framework consists of school documents and literature concerning human learning in general, problem-based learning, and language didactics.

1.2 Disposition

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction, in which the aim, the questions, the limitations, the disposition, and the ethical considerations are described. In chapter 2 the theoretical framework is presented. In this chapter, facts about the curriculum and other school documents, human learning and problem-based learning are presented. This part explains what problem-based learning is, why it should be taken into practice and how to work it. Furthermore, language didactics is presented to provide information about problem-based learning in relation to language teaching. In chapter 3, the method and materials are presented along with the reliability and validity for this study. In chapter 4, the six observations from the English lessons are presented. To make this part easier to overview it is followed by three types of tables; the first one shows what the lessons dealt with, such as discussing a TV-
programme and preparing for a test. The second table presents the reader with the tasks during the lessons, such as repetition and group work. The third table deals with the problematic aspects found during the observations, such as unwillingness to speak English and inability to understand the tasks. In this way, this part is easier to check as the subject of these problematic aspects is discussed in the next part, which is chapter 5. The discussion in chapter 5 summarizes the problematic aspects that were found in the classroom and relates them to the problem-based learning. In this way, suggestions for solving the difficulties that appeared during the observations are described. This leads up to the last part, chapter 6, in which the conclusions are drawn in order to answers the research questions of this study.

1.3 Ethical considerations

The four ethical issues for humanistic and social research have been acknowledged and considered throughout this study. Firstly, the ethical dilemma concerning permission to collect data has been respected since the study was organized according to an agreement with the teachers in charge of the lessons involved. Secondly, the teachers and the students participating in this study were notified about the aim and interests of the study. Thirdly, the participants were informed about their right to end their involvement at any time during the observations if they would consider it necessary. Fourthly, the usage of collected information and the disclosure of sensitive materials have been considered, since all the participants in this study are anonymous to people not involved. All the students in this study are between sixteen and eighteen years old and are considered as a group. Thus, the information collected during the observations will not deal with certain students that might be recognized by anyone not involved. For this reason, it was not necessary to have the parents’ permission for the students to participate in the study. The materials collected will be utilized for scientific purposes only and will be dealt with confidentially. The materials will not be used in any commercial contexts (Vetenskapsrådet, 2004:7, 9, 12, 14).
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Curriculum and other school documents

In the school documents for upper secondary school there are no specific methods mentioned for how English is to be learned in school. The documents considering the English courses state that students should learn to master a varied language when speaking and writing. Students should also be able to instruct others and be able to discuss and become fluent in their language. According to the course plans for the B- and C-courses, students should also be familiar with the cultures in English speaking countries from a historical point of view, as well as from a contemporary perspective (Skolverket, 2000a:1; Skolverket, 2000b:1; Skolverket, 2000c:1). The Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school (Lpf94), emphasizes that students should learn about culture and be aware of international perspectives to facilitate cultural meetings in the future. Moreover, the students should be stimulated to understand and master skills. Students should take initiatives and believe in themselves, which is a goal to strive for (Skolverket, 1994:6, 13). The Common European Framework (CEF) contains tables, which state what the students should be able to master in accordance to different levels of development (Skolverket, 2007:24). These tables could support the teacher when designing the lessons in the school context.

Second language learning includes several competences that the students should learn to master. The linguistic competence deals with the mastering of grammatical aspects, pronunciation and vocabulary. The socio-linguistic competence emphasizes the acquisition of English according to situation and the receiver of the language. The discursive competence is about the usage of words that connects sentences as the students describe and explain aspects to others. The connecting words, used in these situations, facilitate the receiver’s understanding as well as the explanation itself. The strategic competence helps the students to explain themselves in situations where they do not master all the required words. This competence thereby deals with the usage of body language and describes the meaning of words, in order to fill the gaps of missing words. By learning about the culture in English speaking countries the socio-cultural competence is developed. This competence facilitates cultural meetings and prevents cultural misunderstandings. CEF suggests that the socio-cultural aspect is used in the classroom by letting the students work with projects. This, since the socio-cultural aspect contains many inter-related components that should not be separated.
The last competence that is to be developed by the students is the social linguistics, which deals with getting in touch with and interacting with other people in different social situations. When working with this competence it is valuable to let the students communicate with different classmates in the classroom, rather than always letting them work with the same friends (Ferm & Malmberg, 2004:29, 39-40). This competence might also be facilitated by unprepared discussions among the students, which the English course plans emphasize (Skolverket, 2000a:1; Skolverket, 2000b:1; Skolverket, 2000c:1).

2.2 The method of problem-based learning

In short, problem-based learning can be said to carry features of behaviourism, constructivism as well as features from the socio-cultural perspective. The method involves metacognition, in which the students become aware of their own learning process. Thus, the students will understand the reason for learning and what individual way that is most suitable for them to practise in order to reach further progress in school. Furthermore, problem-based learning deals with problem solving for which the students collect their own learning materials. The method emphasizes interpretation, analyze and reflection among the students, while the teacher has a guiding role in the classroom and helps the students through their learning difficulties without making them independent of this help. The method of problem-based learning will be presented more thoroughly and provide more details about this in the text below.

2.2.1 Explaining the method of problem-based learning

Problem-based learning can be described as a method, in which the students explain their own understanding of their working materials. In this way, the students’ own interpretation of the learning materials will be expressed (Delisle, 1997:1). When an individual reflects on his/her own learning it is called “metacognition”. The awareness of the questions “how”, “what” and “why” the learning should take place are important in the metacognitive perspective. Furthermore, metacognition seems to function as a key element for making students participate in school activities. Metacognition includes such aspects as doing school work without letting oneself be distracted, to correct one’s own work and to evaluate oneself in accordance to the goals for the task (Tornberg, 2009:23, 28-29, 92). This is a preferable way
of creating learning, according to Delisle (1997), rather than only letting the students repeat information. The teacher should have a guiding role in the classroom, while the students handle most of the learning activities independently solving problems, which the name of the method also suggests. Problem solving might be done in different ways. Within literature, the problem to be solved might consist of the meaning of a certain text or, if it deals with a historical aspect, the focus might be on why something happened in a certain way (Delisle, 1997:1, 5). These are vital facts to know about in order to understand what problem-based learning is.

An account of the essential features of problem-based learning requires an explanation of why the method was created. According to Savin-Baden (2004) problem-based learning is considered to derive from behaviourism (Savin-Baden, 2004:24), which is said to have been developed by John B. Watson (1876-1958). Behaviourism is considered to be one of the most utilized theories within pedagogy and deals with responses to different stimuli related to learning (Askew & Carnell, 1998:14). Moreover, B. F. Skinner (1904-1990) continued the development of behaviourism later on. The recognizable features of the method are, according to Tornberg (2009), repetition and imitation. Individuals tend to repeat their own behaviour if they receive positive feedback from the environment (Tornberg, 2009:45, 52). The problem-based method is also influenced by constructivism. According to this theory, the students are not seen as passive receivers of information. Instead, the students create their own understanding by thinking and reflecting on their own. Another influence is the socio-cultural perspective, which focuses on interaction between people. In this perspective thinking, acting and the usage of resources among individuals become important (Säljö, 2000:18, 56).

Originally, the method of problem-based learning was created for medical students to help solving medical disorders among patients. Due to the successful learning that came from this method within the medical area, the method was later on adopted by other areas as well within the school system. Problem solving is furthermore considered to be crucial for becoming an effective worker and a functional citizen. The method of problem-based learning helps students to take responsibility, to find individual challenges and to learn independently of the teacher (Delisle, 1997:7). This reveals the importance of this method. The essential features will hereby be valuable to find, in order to create suggestions for solving the difficulties which will be shown in the school context further on.
The willingness to struggle to achieve goals and the receiving of positive and constructive feedback are important features for successful learning. The feedback that the students receive for their accomplishments should also be helpful and not devastate them (Brandt, 1998:9, 11, 36, 40). Students need to find a good reason for studying to be motivated (Banner, 1999:14). Motivation should come together with positive feedback when the students do as they are told and show willingness to work hard on their tasks (Ogden, 2008:56).

Learning from experience is a common way of picking up new information in everyday life. Dewey (2005) states that the learner needs to be involved in the learning process if authentic learning is to be created (Dewey, 2005:231-232). When introducing a new topic to the students, it is therefore significant that the students are allowed to discuss what they already know about this topic as well as to ask further questions about it (Crawford et al., 2005:2).

2.3 The reason for utilizing problem-based learning

As the method of problem-based learning has been introduced it becomes vital to learn about the reasons for utilizing this method. The text below will reveal what learning deals with and what it requires, as well as what the traditional teaching method leads to.

2.3.1 Traditional teaching creates dependency

Barth (2001) claims that the traditional school tends to teach dependency. Traditional teaching makes the students dependent on the teacher and the teacher’s instructions and decisions. Thus, the students will not be able to work on their own, without constantly being in need of the teachers help and support. The activities in school often make the students rely on the teacher and thereby the students only tend to do what the teacher has told them (Barth, 2001:3-4).

Even knowledge itself can lead to dependency, since students receive knowledge in accordance to their own progression. Even though knowledge often is considered to be good, Säljö (2000) claims that knowledge could be negative as well. Negative knowledge facilitates dependency and appears as the students do not master enough skills to work on their own (Säljö, 2000:102).
2.3.2 Learning requires curiosity

The learning environment and the relationships within the classroom play an important role for students’ achievements. Learning requires a good relationship between the teacher and the students (Kernell, 2002:13). If the environment is stressful the learning often decreases. Emotions, such as curiosity, pleasure and enthusiasm, are essential for learning since these feelings help the learner to memorize information. Learning can thus be encouraged by triggering strong feelings of this kind related to the subjects that are to be learned (Brandt, 1998:10). Students need to be guided by the teacher. Thus, the teacher should focus on the students during the lessons and not leave the classroom in order to collect more learning materials or to speak with other teachers. The learning materials should be prepared before the lessons begin and speaking with other teachers or leaving messages need to wait until the lesson is over (Ogden, 2008:169). These are features valuable to consider when the problematic aspects in the school context are to be dealt with.

2.3.3 Enthusiasm and activity are important

The best way of learning is, according to Crawford et al. (2005), to be active and to use activities that deal with solving, creating, interpreting and examining. Moreover, the tasks should require critical thinking and enable the students to ask questions (Crawford et al., 2005:1). Furthermore, Ogden brings up “the emotional learning climate”. This climate expresses the teacher’s thoughts about the students, and if the teacher thinks that every student is able to learn and to adjust to the school context or not. If the teachers do not believe in their students this will, most likely, result in students that will fail their education (Ogden, 2008:94).

In the detection of essential characteristics, it is also worth looking into the students’ focus on their studies. To focus on studies is not an easy thing to do if the students find the task unexciting. This, since the human mind tends to think of other more interesting things when focusing on something boring. Enthusiasm is thereby important and one way of gaining it might be if the student is able to relate the content of the subject to his/her own life (Banner, 1999:15, 28-29). The methods of traditional learning mostly deal with passivity. The students might read a text and answer questions about it. All these answers can often be found directly in the text and the teacher already knows the answers by heart (Delisle, 1997:9).
2.3.4 Learning is not only about memorizing

As a contrast to this, problem-based learning requires the students to participate more in the learning activities. Students are required to scrutinize problems, do research to come up with background information and analyze the learning materials to find solutions for the problem. Furthermore, the students should work out a solution and then come up with a final result. This method provides an understanding of the learning materials that the students are using (Delisle, 1997:9). To memorize and repeat facts, writing and rewriting, reading and rereading to recall facts are learned by utilizing “Low-level questions” (Crawford et al., 2005:5). Learning is not simply about remembering the facts. Instead, it is also about how to use the facts when facing the more complex questions, which are called “Higher order questions” (Crawford et al., 2005:5). Higher order questions, which should be used when working with problem-based learning, emphasize how and why something happened, what the causes might have been and how a situation was related to other aspects. These questions might have more than one answer and enable the usage of follow-up questions (Crawford et al., 2005:5-6). Furthermore, problem-based learning motivates the students, since it shows why the information is needful and how it might be utilized in real life (Torp & Sage, 2002:23).

Although the memorizing of facts might be utilized in some parts of education, it is important to remember not to use it as the only method. This, since learning also requires students’ reflection and metacognition. These are valuable ideas that might be useful when trying to generate suggestions for solutions to classroom problems further on.

2.4 How to work with problem-based learning

In the search for the essential characteristics of problem-based learning, it is vital to understand how it is possible to work with this method in the school context. According to Delisle (1997:17), the teacher’s job is to help the students by evaluating their work, make sure that the students’ work methods are efficient and to help the students with finding more learning materials if needed. The problem that should be solved has to fit the students’ level of development, which means that the problem must neither be too easy nor too difficult. This is important, since the students need to be challenged on their individual level in order to develop.
One way of letting the students meet the problem is to put them in a situation, in which they need to act through another role than students, for instance by pretending that they are worried citizens or engineers (Torp & Sage, 2002:36). Learning has to be connected to the student’s established knowledge (Kernell, 2002:146). The teacher needs to think about connections between the problem and the students’ lives and point it out for them. If the students recognize the problem they will work harder to write about it and to solve it (Delisle, 1997:24). This provides us with clues about how to work with this method in different situations. This will be useful information to keep in mind when creating the suggestions for solutions to the problematic aspects in the classrooms.

When working with problem-based learning it is furthermore valuable to know how to evaluate the students’ accomplishments. The evaluation could take place by using a test or by letting the students participate in a debate. For this, the teacher might have a checklist of items mentioned by the students, which grades them in a scale of, for instance, five-points. The teacher should evaluate the students’ skills of the topic and their process of solving the presented problem. Moreover, problem-based learning should provide skills in sorting collected data, using sufficient learning materials, public speaking and creating an oral or written presentation (Delisle, 1997:25, 38). These are aspects that need to be evaluated by the teacher. Despite this, it is crucial to remember that this also needs to be done in a formative way, rather than only doing this summatively.

### 2.5 Problem-based learning and language didactics

According to Säfström (2005), all individuals are born into a society which they know little about. The school system has an important role to raise students and help them to learn about norms and values that dominate the society. This makes the students fit into the society and hence develop into good citizens (Säfström, 2005:14-15). These values as well as receiving new information come from interaction with other people and most often from adults, since they often know more about society than the students (Säljö, 2000:66-67). Learning and interaction environment as well as group work are important when the students learn to tolerate and to listen to each other, to compromise and to understand that people might view aspects in different ways (Englund, 2000:7).

A common problem in school is that students do not always learn what the teacher tries to teach them, even though the teacher explains aspects in different ways. When students do not
understand what is to be learned, education gets meaningless. Education should make sense for the students, but what does that mean? In a socio-cultural perspective interaction is most important when developing understanding among students (Tornberg, 2009:11, 15, 20). According to this perspective, humans learn about new ways of thinking and acting by communicating with others. Meaning is mostly created when individuals are able to exchange experiences and knowledge with each other. Thus, language is important when creating meaningful learning. When interacting with others it is also easy for the students to ask about aspects that they find hard to understand. Säljö also explains that the teacher sometimes makes it harder for the students to understand the tasks than it needs to be (Säljö, 2000:82, 89, 115, 191). This, since there is not always a logical connection between the knowledge learned in the classroom and the society in which the knowledge is supposed to be used (Tornberg, 2009:19). The learning materials in school need to involve both society and culture, if the students are to understand these aspects when they leave school (Dewey, 2005:229). If the students fail to see the connection between society and classroom, the reason for learning becomes nothing more than to pass the tests in school. As the school expects the students to make the connection to reality by themselves this can be confusing for the students. To create meaning in their education the knowledge must be connected to the students’ understanding of reality. Furthermore, meaning can be created by letting the students reflect about their work in diaries, which the teacher will read and give feedback on in order to help the students’ progress (Tornberg, 2009:19, 21, 165).

When the human mind tries to find meaning, it searches for connections between the new aspects and interpret previous information. Students will only remember aspects that they consider meaningful, and when students learn they will sort and interpret all the data and experience they meet in school. This is done by the usage of “schedules”, which is the cognitive function that sorts new data into old and thereby creates understanding for the individual. If a schedule should be missed out from an area of knowledge, new data will not make any sense for the individual. When several schedules are bound together “scripts” are created. To help the students to understand the knowledge they are facing in school it is important that the teacher becomes aware of the students’ development to enable the process of the new data meeting up with the old (Tornberg, 2009:16-18, 21).

A child is able to solve a lot of problematic issues with the teacher's help. This is what Vygotsky called “the zone of proximal development” (Tornberg, 2009:15). This theory is
built upon the hypothesis that knowledge is created from interaction and communication between people. The zone of proximal development equals the distance between what an individual is able to do on his/her own, and what he/she is able to accomplish with the help from other people. The help from others does not necessarily need to come from spoken interaction; instead it might as well come from written instructions that the individual is able to follow (Säljö, 2000:120, 125, 229).

As a strategy for cognitive, learning problem solving as a task among students is mentioned, in which the students analyze, reproduce and connect previous information with new knowledge and in this way create understanding. Another aspect in this way of learning is to form a hypothesis, which the students are able to verify or falsify when they do research on it (Tornberg, 2009:27).

Tornberg also brings up “Learner Autonomy” as a vital part of learning. Learner Autonomy is part of metacognitive theory, in which the students control their own learning and activity in the classroom (Tornberg, 2009:94). The teacher comes to be more of a guide in the classroom, rather than an authority who determines the classroom situation all together (Ferm & Malmberg, 2004:215). The questions that the teacher uses in the classroom affect the students’ usage of language. “Display questions” are questions that deal with facts and for which the teacher already knows the correct answers. “Referential questions” are questions dealing with values and reactions and to which there are no correct answers. Instead, the answer depends on what information the students collect. This can be connected with phenomenographical research, which deals with how students think when learning. Research within the area reveals that students’ knowledge is sometimes broken. This, since the students have misunderstood aspects when learning. For this reason the knowledge becomes useless. If students misunderstand the usage of a grammatical rule they will not be able to use the knowledge. Thus, the knowledge will be of no value. Knowledge can also be hard to understand if the students are not involved in their learning. If the teacher only tells the students what to learn and how to do it, the students will neither understand the reasons behind the learning nor be able to find solutions on their own (Tornberg, 2009:21, 61).
3. Methods and materials

3.1 Method

To detect the difficulties in the teaching of English, six observations were made. This empirical part of the study took place at an upper secondary school in the middle regions of Sweden. The school for this project was chosen from a convenient selection (Bryman, 2002:114), since the most suitable and accessible choice was a school I already had had contact with. The observations were completed during English lessons with students of the ages of sixteen up to eighteen. The method for the observations was unstructured (Bryman, 2002:176). According to Bryman (2002) an unstructured observation is done by taking notes from observed aspects that are considered vital for the research, without using an observation schedule. Instead, the aim for the researcher is to describe details of behaviours and other aspects that might appear in a certain environment during the observation. This method is thereby preferred, rather than only ticking off detected aspects in boxes in an observation schedule (Bryman, 2002:176).

During the observations notes were taken from what could be observed in the classroom situations. The observations were of simple character (Bryman, 2002:176) in which I, as the observer, did not take part in any of the classroom activities. Bryman states that an observer who is not participating in the activities during an observation does neither influence nor affect the situation. In this way, it is considered to be of less risk to change the natural order of what is taking place in the situation (Bryman, 2002:176). In my point of view, the students will most likely be aware of my presence, but they might be less affected in this way, than if I had participated in the classroom activity.

Since the study is based on a qualitative method, the research materials were openly encoded according to the method of Grounded Theory. According to Bryman, Grounded Theory is the most common strategy used when working with qualitative research. The encoding for this strategy consists of breaking down information, categorizing it into themes and comparing different aspects with each other to be able to draw conclusions (Bryman, 2002: 377). This strategy has thus been used for the encoding of the research materials from the observations and I also find it most suitable for my way of working. This, since Grounded Theory also deals with analyzing the materials during the time of collection instead of strictly dividing the process, which is what I most often do when I work (see table 2 and 3) as well as from the
theoretical materials. In this way, the difficulties within the school context, as well as the essential features from the method of problem-based learning have been accounted for. Furthermore, the collected characteristics of problem-based learning have functioned as a foundation for drawing conclusions to explain the difficulties, which were found during the observations.

3.2 Materials

To collect data about the method of problem-based learning, I have used the school documents and literature about the mentioned method, learning in general and language didactics. The essential features were detected and collected by summarizing the concrete parts of the method found in literature.

The theoretical materials were encoded by making a summary of the most useful and concrete themes and characteristics of problem-based learning. The problematic aspects during the observations were collected and analyzed by using different tables to be able to overview this data. These tables will be presented along with the description of the observation in chapter four. The characteristics of problem-based learning have furthermore been compared to the problematic aspects from the classroom situations. Thereby it has been possible to connect the essential features of the method with the problematic aspects in the classrooms. In this way suggestions for solving the difficulties have been drawn which furthermore have lead up to the conclusions for this study, which will be presented in chapter six.

3.3 Reliability and validity

The results for this study are not considered to rely on coincidences, therefore the reliability of this study is considered to be good. The method for the collected data is presented as well as all the information that this study was built upon. This strengthens the reliability even more. Despite this, the method of using unstructured observations can always be discussed. Since the unstructured observations were based upon my own notes from what I saw during the lessons, they will include subjective features. This, since the results will be part of my interpretation of the classroom situations. On the other hand, qualitative research is about interpretation. What I could have done differently during the observations is to ask someone else to observe with the same method during each lesson. This would have lead to two sets of
notes from each observation, which could have been compared to each other. Thus, the results would have been more reliable, since two researchers instead of one would have noticed aspects during the lessons. Since this is a minor study and this would have taken much more time and since I was writing this essay alone, this was not an option I found necessary. The validity is moreover satisfying, since the method for this study is considered to reveal the answers to the research questions and since the method and encoding of the research materials are based on authentic research methods. Since this study is of a minor character I do not have any intentions of generalizing the results to other contexts.

4. Results

4.1 Observation 1 (O1)

The teacher discusses movies and television programmes with the students. Most of the students are unwilling to speak English and tend to make statements in Swedish or remain silent.

The students are positive and excited when the teacher lets them decide which movie they wish to discuss. This makes the students relate to how they would have felt and reacted if what happened in the movie would happen to them.

4.2 Observation 2 (O2)

During this lesson, the students are requested to discuss the topic “tolerance” according to questions, which have been handed out. The questions are ambiguous and include formal words of academic character, which the students seem to find hard to understand. The students have formed small groups around tables and the discussions do not exactly deal with tolerance, but rather with the interpretation of the meaning of the questions. Some of the students agree on an interpretation of the questions and discuss in accordance to this. The discussion does not last long, since the students do not seem to know much about the subject and do not have much to say. One of the groups discuss violence and abuse with interest, even though this is not a topic that the questions are dealing with.
The discussion is interrupted by the teacher and the students are not asked to present their findings. The classroom is noisy and it is hard to hear the teacher when she states that they will have a five-minute break. The loudness increases and none of the students leave the classroom.

When the lesson continues the students are requested to read stories to one another, which they have written themselves. Most of the students have not finished their stories yet. The loudness increases again and one student is not participating in her group. Instead she is massaging her temples as she seems to have a headache. The students finish their reading and then start to speak about other things. The teacher speaks to another teacher in the doorway before she tells the students that the lesson is over.

4.3 Observation 3 (O3)

The class has taken a grammar test and the teacher declares that many of the students have failed. One of the aspects in this test has dealt with word classes, which most of the students were unfamiliar with. The teacher states that this class was unwilling to learn from the very beginning when the teacher introduced the topic. She explains that many of the students have said that they started to practice the day before the test. The teacher says that she has shortened the information hugely to help the class through with this, but states that most of the students did not have the basic knowledge of grammar to begin with. Thus the students have found it hard to understand the given information.

The teacher hands out the corrected tests. The classroom is noisy as some of the students are speaking with each other and others are stepping into the classroom five to ten minutes late without excusing themselves.

The teacher intends to speak with the students individually about the test results in the corridor outside the classroom. Some of the students leave the classroom before the teacher has finished speaking about this. The teacher lets them leave without saying a word.

There is not enough time to speak with all the students during this lesson, but the teacher will continue with this during the next lesson. Two of the students have scored very well and a few students have scored only enough to pass the test. The rest of the class has failed, since they have not answered the questions and they left most of the answering sheets blank. Those of the students who did not pass the test will be able to re-take the test later on.
4.4 Observation 4 (O4)

This lesson starts with the teacher handing out booklets as a preparation for a test they are going to have on the English language. I noticed that the booklets are dated with the year 1999. Some of the students complain about having done this before, but the teacher states that if this is the case it will be a repetition. The students start to work with the tasks on the paper which contains, for example, sentences with gaps of missing words about tense to be filled in, smaller text passages with questions about the contents and tasks dealing with translation. The teacher says that she has to leave the classroom for a while, since she needs to copy some learning materials for her next lesson. The teacher leaves and the students continue working in silence.

The teacher comes back at the end of the lesson only to finish it in a hurry, since her next class will begin shortly.

4.5 Observation 5 (O5)

This lesson takes place in a computer room, which does not ordinarily function as a classroom. The reason for this is that the school has too many lessons at this time of the day and therefore there is no other classroom left to use. The students talk loudly as they gather around large tables in the middle of the room. Some of them are not facing the teacher and others have taken place in front of some computers at the end of the room. The talking among the students continues as the lesson starts and not many of them seem to pay attention to the teacher’s instructions.

The task for today is to work with an English computer programme to practise grammar, spelling and reading tasks. Most of the students rise from their chairs heading for a computer when the teacher has stopped talking. A few students are still sitting and they ask what they are supposed to do, as if they had not listened to the teacher and the teacher has to repeat the instructions.

There are not enough computers for all students and the teacher suggests that some of them sit in pairs while working. Most students do not begin to work with the computer programme though; instead they are talking with their friends or looking at Internet pages, which has nothing to do with the English subject.
The teacher leaves the noisy classroom. Only a few students do as they are told. One group of students shares computer while laughing loudly at pictures from the Internet. The teacher comes back and tells them to work with the task they were given. The students look at the teacher, but do not start the programme. The teacher tells me that this room makes it impossible to teach. The teacher walks up to the group of students and tells them to open up the programme. The students turn around, stop laughing and do as they are told.

When the lesson is over all the students leave the classroom hastily. A lot of trash is left behind by the computers, which the teacher has to collect and throw away.

4.6 Observation 6 (O6)

The students have had homework on a text from the textbook. The teacher hands out papers with Swedish vocabulary that are to be translated into English. The students start with the task as soon as they get their papers. The classroom is silent. After a while the first student rises from her chair and approaches the teacher to hand in her paper. This pattern is followed by other students. The teacher looks at her watch and states that the time is up and that the few students who are still writing need to hand in their papers.

The lesson continues with a rehearsal of the text. The teacher asks the students questions about the content, such as what a certain person in the text expressed at a certain moment in the story. Some of the students raise their hands willingly to answer, while others are looking down on their desks. The students who are raising their hands often get to answer the questions, but at one moment the teacher turns to a student who is not raising his hand and wants him to answer one of the questions instead. “How did Jack feel when he found out what his brother had done?” The student looks at the teacher but remains silent. The student then asks the teacher to repeat the question as if he had not heard it or forgotten it. The student then says that Jack felt sad. This is an incorrect answer and the teacher asks the student in the next desk instead. The other student says that Jack got surprised and angry, which in this case is the correct answer.

The last task deals with writing in individual books, in which the students should reflect on their own progress during the week. The teacher explains to me that this is a kind of evaluation for the students as they come to pay attention to their own learning.
4.7 Summary

A summary of the information about the classroom activities and the problematic aspects from the observations are presented in the tables below:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 reveals the tasks that the teachers provided the students with during each observation. These aspects are interesting to know about in order to understand what the students did during the lessons when the difficulties, which this paper intends to solve, appeared.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom activities</th>
<th>O1</th>
<th>O2</th>
<th>O3</th>
<th>O4</th>
<th>O5</th>
<th>O6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as a whole class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual work  X
Evaluation of test results  X
Preparations for test  X
Repetition  X
Practising grammar and words  X
Test on homework  X

Table 2 describes the activities that were involved in the tasks that the students worked with during the observations. This table clarifies the aspects that were connected to the problematic aspects in the classroom. These activities will also reveal when the difficulties appeared and how the activity could be developed in accordance with the method of problem-based learning in order to prevent the troubles to emerge.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problematic aspects</th>
<th>O1</th>
<th>O2</th>
<th>O3</th>
<th>O4</th>
<th>O5</th>
<th>O6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unwillingness to speak English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incapability to understand the tasks (too difficult or ambiguous)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher does not follow up the activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noisy environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students are requested to present unfinished tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students finish their tasks before the lesson ends and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
become passive

The students have failed a test X

Unwillingness to learn X X

Students are late X

Students leave the classroom for reasons unknown X

The students have done the task before X

The teacher is not in the classroom X

The learning materials are limited X

The students do not listen to the teacher X

Some students do not have the knowledge required for participating X

Table 3 shows the main problematic aspects among the students that were expressed during the observations. It is not to be forgotten that teacher’s role in the classroom also affects the students behaviour. These aspects will be related to the method of problem-based learning in order to find solutions for these problems. This will be discussed in the section below.

5. Discussions

The problematic aspects that occured during the observations begin with the “unwillingness to speak” (O1) (see table 3). I consider this to be an aspect that might be solved by helping the
students to find motivation for the topic. The problems that are constructed by the teacher in the method of problem-based learning should be related to the students’ own experiences of life and provide an understanding of how the knowledge can be utilized outside school (Delisle, 1997:24). This is crucial since the natural way of learning comes from experience (Boud & Miller, 1996:3). From a socio-cultural perspective, meaningful learning is created through interaction and communication. In this way, it becomes easier for the students to understand what they are expected to learn (Tornberg, 2009:11; Säljö, 2000:115). Similarly to this, meaningful learning deals with an exchanging of experiences between individuals (Säljö, 2000:89). Since this lesson dealt with a discussion of TV-programmes, the topic can be related to the students’ lives by letting them discuss what they would have done if they were in the situation of a certain character in a movie. That this form of discussion is effective was also shown in the observation when the students were allowed to choose their own movies and TV-programmes to discuss. The discussion then increased as the students began to talk about themselves in English. This indicates that students are able to relate their school work to their own lives by themselves if the teacher lets them choose topic according to a theme as in this case.

The “incapability to understand the task” (O2, O3) (see table 3) can be related to the type of negative knowledge that Säljö (2000:102) is speaking of. Tasks of this kind create dependency on the teacher among the students. Tornberg (2009) explains that incapability to understand information not always has to do with the individual alone. Instead, the problem often has to do with the knowledge in school that has no logical connection with the everyday life outside the classroom (Tornberg, 2009:19, 21). Furthermore, Kernell (2002) states that new information should be built upon previously learned facts (Kernell, 2002:146). In this case, the information was neither connected to previous information nor to the society which, as I see it, are aspects that decrease learning most. In O2, the students try to understand but fail which, in my point of view, means that the students at least were motivated to learn to begin with.

One way of dealing with this problematic aspect might be by relating the tasks to the students’ lives. In this way, the students will recognize the task and it will be easier for them to work with it, since it will deal with a known topic. They will also be able to relate to previous knowledge. Aside from this, the tasks should be presented in a clear and understandable way. According to Delisle (1997) the given tasks should be formed according
to the students’ level of development, otherwise the students will not make progress (Delisle, 1997:17). In this way, motivation and the willingness to learn will also be created, which is very important when learning (Banner, 1999:11, 14). For this to be done, the teacher needs to work in a formative way in order to find out where the students are in their progress and development. Even though this could be hard to evaluate, it might be possible to deal with this problem by utilizing the explaining part of problem-based learning. This is the part where the students will explain rather than repeat their own understanding of the learning materials they work with. Delisle states that the teacher should let the students work in this way, rather than only repeating the given information (Delisle, 1997:5). In this way, the teacher will be able to find the errors where the students fail their understanding, and the teacher will thereby be able to help them.

This can also be related to Kernell as he states that good relations between the teacher and the students are important for their learning (Kernell, 2002:13). The teachers in O2 and O3 do not seem to have a good knowledge of the students’ capacity and development, since the given tasks do not suit the students’ understanding. This could indicate that the teachers need to work with the relationship and the atmosphere in the classroom, and get to know the students better. Barth (2001) and Delisle explain that the lessons should not deal with right-and-wrong questions, since this is another way of creating dependency and passivity in the classroom (Barth, 2001:3; Delisle, 1997:9). When it comes to working with questions it is also important that the questions are complex and do not deal with one correct answer. These are the referential questions that Tornberg (2009) writes about, and which are more preferred than the display questions that only have one correct answer (Tornberg, 2009:61). In this way, the students will learn more than if they only are searching for the correct answers according to a specific book. If the students need to think for themselves before answering, rather than only finding the answer in a text they are also likely to learn more. To come up with an answer of your own requires reflection; while an answer that is found directly in a text can be copied and memorized even if the student does not understand it.

Another formative way of dealing with the “incapability to understand the task” is by letting the students do a diagnostic test to reveal how far they have come in their levels of development concerning the English language. If the students do not understand the task they are taking, they will not learn. This, since humans will only remember what they find meaningful. By recreating the questions as problems that the students are able to discuss, and
by simplifying the language a bit the students would be able to understand them better. If the students then would discuss and search for more information connected to the problems, the cognitive function of “schedules”, which Tornberg (2009) writes about, would be produced. When the students interpret data on their own and through discussion, they will create and develop meaning and understanding (Tornberg, 2009:16-18, 21). Moreover, the teacher could guide the students to the solution of the problems by helping them to move forward in their communication. Thereby, the students would find answers and solutions in the way that Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development suggests (Tornberg, 2009:15; Säljö, 2000:229). This would also facilitate the relation between the teacher and the students in a positive way. Furthermore, a task of this kind with interaction and contact among students would support the development of the social competence that Ferm & Malmberg (2004) speak about (Ferm & Malmberg, 2004:40).

Another problematic aspect occurs when “the teacher does not follow up the activity” (O2) (see table 3). This is the opposite of what problem-based learning stands for, since the teacher should work as a guide who helps the students with their work and evaluation (Delisle, 1997:5, 17). If the teacher does not follow up the discussion the students will not have any guidance for the task at all. Brandt (1998) explains that the students should be provided with useful feedback (Brandt, 1998:36). Positive feedback is also important for students, since the feedback will show them when and how they are reaching progress. Positive feedback will make the students repeat their successful behaviour, which will lead to more progress (Tornberg, 2009:52). Brandt states furthermore that the tasks should trigger curiosity and contain interaction between the students to increase the learning (Brandt, 1998:10, 34). Therefore the problematic aspect might be solved by adding some useful input or feedback from the teacher to show the students the way. Otherwise there is a risk that the students might misunderstand the learning materials and thereby learn incorrect information or not learn anything at all. This could lead to the creation of broken knowledge, which Tornberg writes about (Tornberg, 2009:21). In this case, the teacher could have walked around in the classroom, while listening and helping the students along with their discussions. This would also facilitate the students’ metacognition, since they would become aware of their own learning and discussion through the reflection that would occur between the teacher and the students.
The next problematic aspect deals with “noisy environment” (O2, O3, O5) (see table 3), which occurred in this study when the students did not seem to be engaged with the task (since they did not understand it) and when the students did not have a task (which was the case during the lesson dealing with individual evaluation). If the students had been focused on something they could understand and found interesting, this problem might have decreased or not occurred at all. Banner (1999) states that interest for learning is created when the subject is related to the students’ lives (Banner, 1999:28-29). The answer might therefore be to motivate the students by letting them work with a task related to their own lives, which they find important and exciting. In these cases, the teacher could have helped the students, who had a task, to understand it. For the students who did not have a task, which was the case in O3, the teacher could have had some problematic dilemmas that the students could discuss when the teacher was in the corridor doing the evaluation. Even if the environment would not be completely silent, the students would at least focus on something and be stimulated. Stimulation in the learning process is also what Lpf94 emphasizes (Skolverket, 1994:6). Moreover, the teacher might consider telling the students to talk more quietly.

That “the students are requested to present unfinished tasks” (O2) (see table 3) is another difficulty which appeared. On the one hand, this task dealt with interaction between the students, which triggers curiosity and increases the learning (Brandt, 1998:10, 34). On the other hand, the problem was that the students did not have anything in particular to present to one another. This, since they had not finished the stories they were going to read to each other. The reason for this might be lack of time or lack of motivation among the students, or a combination of these aspects. In this case, the students could have discussed and given feedback to each other’s stories instead of only reading them to each other. As Tornberg suggests, the students could also have reflected on their work in written form and in a metacognitive way, in order to become aware of and come to understand their own learning. The teacher could also have provided the students with feedback, if he or she would read the students written reflections afterwards (Tornberg, 2009:165).

The problems with the students who came late (O3) and the students who left the classroom for unknown reasons (O3) (see table 3) might not have appeared if the students were motivated to take part in the lesson. If the students were triggered by curiosity and were eager to attend this lesson, they would probably be on time and stay until it was over. This can also be seen as an example of students who have not learned about respect for others and the
importance of being on time, which are values that are important in society. Säfström (2005) describes school as an important institution when it comes to learning the values of a democratic society as well as restrictions and rules that need to be followed in order to maintain a democratic society (Säfström, 2005:14-15). According to Crawford et al. tasks in the method of problem-based learning should deal with understanding and solving problems, investigating areas of knowledge, practise critical thinking and questioning information (Crawford et al., 2005:1). The cognitive strategy suggests that solving problems should include features of analysis and be connected with previous information (Tornberg, 2009:27).

By working with problem-based learning the students should learn to collect useful information and present their own oral and written solutions for the problems (Delisle, 1997:38). If the task had contained these features, and if the teacher would have had the guiding role in the classroom, motivation for working with the task as well as a meaningful and complex discussion among the students might have been created. This would have lead to increased learning and development. This would also have helped the students to develop a linguistic competence and a discursive competence, since the students are writing about their solutions to the problem, as well as presenting it orally to the other students.

Moreover, Boud & Miller (1996) explain that the student must be involved in the classroom activity if learning should take place (Boud & Miller, 1996:9). When a new topic is introduced in the classroom it is important that the students get a chance to discuss their ideas about the topic and that they are able to ask questions (Crawford et al., 2005:2). If the lesson had dealt with tasks that made the students active rather than passive, the activity would require the students’ presence. Crawford et al. (2005) state that being active when learning is essential for progress. Important activities of this kind involve asking, explaining, thinking critically, inventing, discovering and figuring things out (Crawford et al., 2005:1). The teacher could have given some brief information about what particular errors the students had made, and provided them with simplified information to help them understand the grammar. The students could then have discussed the difficulties in groups and searched for more information about the grammar that they found hard to understand. In this way, aspects such as interaction, discovering, asking and explaining as well as to figuring things out together would have been involved in this process.

“The students have done the task before” (O4) (see table 3) is a problematic aspect, which might be eliminated if the students worked with problem solving tasks on a new topic. Torp
(2002) states that the tasks should be unstructured and presented as a problem that stimulates the students’ interest (Torp, 2002:16, 22). Moreover, when the students collect their own learning materials to solve this task it will probably not be considered as old and familiar. On the other hand, tasks do not always need to be new. In some cases repetition might be good, since students sometime forget what they have learnt before. That “the teacher is not in the classroom” (O4) (see table 3) is a tricky part worth discussing. According to Ogden (2008), the teacher should provide the students with his/her full attention during the lessons and not leave the classroom in order to do other things or to speak with others (Ogden, 2008:169). In this way, the students will have the support they need. The teachers will be needed at all times for the support. On the one hand, the students should not depend on the teacher and in this point of view the teacher should not need to be in the classroom all the time. According to problem-based learning, on the other hand, the teacher should be a guide for those who are in need of feedback and help (Savin-Baden, 2004:24; Delisle, 1997:5). For this reason, the teacher has to be reachable to be able to evaluate the students work and help them with the parts that they find difficult, as well as making sure that the students are on the right track in the working process. This can be connected to what Tornberg calls “Learner Autonomy”, in which the students control their own learning through metacognition, while the teacher guides them though the difficulties (Tornberg, 2009:94).

That “the learning materials were limited” (O5) (see table 3) would not be a problem if the students were asked to find and collect their own learning materials from the library and interviews, from their own ideas and the Internet. According to Delisle (1997) it is possible to work with problem solving tasks in several ways. These ways could be to deal with solving a problem, such as the reason to why a historical event happened, as well as to work with understanding and interpreting literature (Delisle, 1997:1). A historical aspect could have dealt with events that have affected culture in an English speaking country, which also would be in accordance to what the English course plans stress (Skolverket, 2000a:1; Skolverket, 2000b:1; Skolverket, 2000c:1). A task on literature could have dealt with English poetry and include culture, interpretation, discussion and reflection. If the students have collected their learning materials by themselves, as suggested above, the learning materials would have been broader. If each student would have chosen their own learning materials, this might also have created motivation for working with the task. In this way, the students might also learn more,
since they are able to work with different aspects and are able to discuss these with each other later on.

That “the students did not listen to the teacher” (O5) (see table 3) might have had to do with the students’ lack of motivation. According to Brandt, the psychological environment influences the learning. Stress is considered to be a factor that decreases learning the most, while eagerness, curiosity and enjoyment increase the learning (Brandt, 1998:10). Everyone can lose focus sometimes and the teacher might have to remind the students of doing their work, but the students might not persist to ignore the teacher if they found their studies meaningful. Banner (1999) explains that the human brain tends to think about more interesting issues when it is presented with tasks, which the mind finds uninteresting (Banner, 1999:15). If the teacher presents a problem that is recognized by the students from their own lives they will work more efficiently with the task (Delisle, 1997:24). In this case, the teacher could have interacted with the students and helped them to open up the computer programme and get started. The teacher would thereby have guided them through the problem of starting up the activity. Furthermore, the teacher could have had a discussion with the students, when the teacher saw that the planned activity did not work out well. The students could then have worked with solving grammatical problems by discussing referential questions and examples of when it is important to know about these aspects in real life. In this way, curiosity would have been triggered and the reason for learning would be clearer, since the students would be aware of when and how they might utilize this knowledge in real life.

The problem with that “some students did not have the knowledge required for participating” (O6) (see table 3) can be related to Ogden’s emotional learning climate, since the teacher might consider some of the students to be more capable of learning than others (Ogden, 2008:94). This situation would not appear if the answers to the questions did not only have one correct answer, and thus were referential questions (Tornberg, 2009:61). Crawford et al. (2005) also mentions the “higher order questions”, which are questions that deal with more complex aspects such as how and why a certain aspect or incident took place. These are questions that consist of more than one answer which, for this reason, increase the learning spectrum. These questions also open up the possibility for the students to come up with individual answers and further questions about the topic (Crawford et al., 2005:5-6). In this case, the students could have discussed referential questions about the text. Instead of asking: “How did Jack feel when he found out what his brother had done?”, the teacher could have
summarized important parts of the text and then put the question in a different way by asking: “How would you have felt if you had been Jack?” and “Why would you have felt this way?”. This could have been the beginning of a metacognitive discussion, in which the students would have been aware of what thoughts they had about the text and why they thought in this way. Furthermore, they would have been aware of the other students’ thoughts, which might have been different from their own. Thereby, the students would have learned about other ways of thinking as well. Moreover, if a student had given an unexpected answer to the teacher, the teacher should not have rejected the answer. Instead the teacher should have encouraged the student by asking why the student answered in this way to reach the student’s thoughts.

6. Conclusions

To summarize the problematic aspects during the lessons in the survey, the problematic aspects mostly seem to deal with speaking and understanding. These aspects are most likely to appear in subjects dealing with a second language. Other problematic aspects were activities that are not followed up, the teacher leaving the classroom, and when the teacher has planned that the students should present a task without checking that this task is finished and that the learning materials are not provided for everyone. These are aspects that are not specific for the English subject; instead these aspects could appear in any discipline. In this study, the students do not always seem to care about the lessons and the learning, since they come late and express an unwillingness to learn. The reason for this might be that the teacher does not always seem to care much about the students, since the teacher sometimes leaves the classroom during the observations and comes back only to end the lesson.

I found that the most essential features of problem-based learning would be to create a complex problem, which should not contain only one answer and that would trigger curiosity and thereby motivate the students. It should include interaction and reflection, but also independent work with the teacher as a guide.

In order to activate the students, it is important to trigger curiosity and to relate the topic to the students’ own life. This, since the students have much knowledge from their own experience, which will make the task more fun to deal with. Furthermore, they will probably
find the topic more useful for them to master, since it will be related to real life. The task should also be created so by applying Vygotsky’s zone of proximate development to benefit learning among the students would appear. This does not happen in the best way when the teacher lets all the students work with the same text in the textbook and provides them with display questions. This, since the students will not make much progress without reflection, which these kinds of questions do not provide. The students should furthermore receive satisfying feedback on their work, a feature that was absent in general during the observations. During O3 the teacher mostly gave feedback by stating that the students had passed or failed the test, which is not feedback of a constructive kind. In my point of view, this kind of feedback will not help the students, who have failed the test. They will not receive the strength and willingness to try again. In this study, I also found that the problems were not always caused by the students, but also by the teacher as the teacher left the classroom, or did not follow up activities or let the students present unfinished tasks. This is an important element to keep in mind when the lessons are planned in the future. This is a problematic aspect worth considering even in other subjects than English. It would thus be vital for teachers to plan the time for their feedback more thoroughly so the aim and purpose of the feedback will be fulfilled, rather than only providing feedback when the students have finished their tasks. This, since the students will not realize the value of the feedback if the task is over once they get it.

As I have gone through the research materials I have also found some complex aspects about problem-based learning, which could be worth keeping in mind when working with this method. One thing worth considering, that is related to this method, is that it might be hard for a teacher to figure out issues, which the students will find exciting. On the other hand, it is not only the teacher’s responsibility to constantly trigger the students’ curiosity. The students also need to learn how to work and how they will be able to trigger their own curiosity by working in a metacognitive way. Moreover, it is not possible to predict beforehand whether the students will find a certain task exciting or not. Furthermore this aspect might require more work and consume more time for the teacher. This might be considered as a negative side of the problem-based method. On the other hand, the teacher might get more time for helping the students with their work and the teacher might also find it relieving, since he/she does not need to prepare much learning materials. This, since a part of this method deals with the
students finding their own learning materials. The teacher does not have to prepare for many lectures either, since the classes are worked out in another way.

This study reveals possible ways of dealing with difficulties in the classroom by working with problem-based learning. The suggestions for solutions might not be the solutions for all problematic aspects that might appear in school. The solutions in this study focus more on the specific difficulties that appeared in these cases. Despite this, it is still possible that the solutions for these cases might be useful when solving similar problems in other school contexts and some of the aspects might even be suitable for other subjects as well. In my point of view, problem-based learning is a method that is worth considering when students do not make progress or find it hard to understand information and have little motivation.

There are many problematic aspects that are possible to bring up and there are also many ways of dealing with them. For these reasons I consider the method to be worth working with and it is worth trying when the teacher is facing problems with the students, such as lack of motivation. The teacher decides if the method is used as the only method or combined with other ones. In my point of view, it is vital to mix this method with other methods throughout the students’ education, since this will lead to more variety during the lessons. Thus, I consider this to be a method worth working with when problematic aspects appear in the classroom as well as to prevent these aspects from appearing at all in the future.

In future research it would be worth trying to work and to deal with the problematic aspects revealed in this study during lessons in school. Thereby it would be possible to verify or falsify the suggestions for the difficulties that are presented in this essay. Another possibility for further research would be to look into other school contexts to see if the problematic aspects presented in this study appear in other school contexts as well or if other schools are dealing with different problems within the English subject or in other subjects in school. Will the suggestions for dealing with the difficulties work in other contexts as well or is the context to be considered as unique? And if the aspects of different contexts differ, what are the reasons for this and is it possible to see problem-based learning as a solution. If other contexts differ from these cases, how is it then possible to solve these aspects? As can be seen, there are many interesting aspects to work with in further research and, since the field is broad, I believe there is yet more to be found. Despite this, it must not be forgotten that problem-based learning is not the answer to all difficulties that can appear in the school context. This is why I view problem-based learning as a method that contains many good features, although it
certainly would not be solution to all difficulties alone. Thereby a combination of problem-based learning and other methods would probably be helpful for a lot of problematic aspects in school.


**References**


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