VTS in the English language classroom in Sweden: Visuality, paraphrasing and collective thinking in support of language learning

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The position in this paper is that Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) are very relevant for children's education in Sweden, and that their practice makes them highly adaptable to English language teaching. The rationale for this position is that this elicitation and communication technique has proven very effective in nurturing the abilities and skills which are identified in the Swedish curriculum for compulsory schooling. The impact of VTS in the Swedish education system could be significant. First, once known and understood by teachers, VTS can be a very efficient technique in the English language classroom and can directly help to fulfil several of the ambitions of the curriculum and the English language syllabus. Second, abilities and sensitivities developed by VTS correspond to the core values of Swedish society in its promotion of democratic values, which are espoused in the compulsory school curriculum. Third, VTS lends itself to being actively used across school subjects and therefore supports an interdisciplinary sensitivity in students. VTS can help student performance and confidence across subject areas, thus again fulfilling the wider ambitions of the compulsory school curriculum and encourage these students in their growing independence as individuals and as active members of society.

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1. Introduction

VTS is Visual Thinking Strategies. It is a pedagogical method which is centered around the following three questions:

"What is going on in this picture, text etc.?"

"What is it that you see that makes you say that?"

"What more can we find?"

In providing a scaffolding framework through which a teacher (or facilitator) can facilitate a VTS session, these three questions prioritize the recognition of the individual and an appreciation of their contribution to the collective through group VTS discussions. The emphasis of this teaching approach is on enabling students to think for themselves in cooperation with others and to empower them by providing a 'space' in which they may express themselves freely as individuals and in cooperation with others. In doing this, they may allow themselves to reflect on and build on what others say that they perceive when they examine an object which is the focus of attention during the VTS session. In the early application of VTS with young children or first-time participants, this object is most effectively a picture (painting or image) that has a strong narrative that the beginner can relate to (A. Zieler, personal communication, May 13, 2022). As participants progress in their exposure to VTS, other objects of focus can be used such as sculptures, written texts, videos, or even mathematical equations etc.

In this position paper, an argument for VTS as being particularly adaptable to the English language classroom in Sweden will be presented. This will be done by presenting VTS, its origins and its theoretical underpinnings, appraising the current presence of VTS in Sweden at the time of writing, and reviewing the several ways in which VTS in its implementation and values corresponds to the aims and values expressed in the curriculum for primary and middle school in Sweden (Skolverket, 2018, 2021b). In this way, the reader will gain an insight into how VTS is used, its relevance as a flexible teaching approach which can be helpful in fulfilling the ambitions of the education system in Sweden, and the teaching of English in the context of these general ambitions.

Whilst VTS can be used and be beneficial with participants of all ages, in this paper there will be a particular focus on the use of VTS with children in primary and middle school.

This choice is made because VTS can be particularly useful in a child educational context as, in its practice, it places value on where a participant is in their development and who they are at a given moment in time.

2. The purpose of VTS and its origins

VTS is an elicitation and communication technique that can be used in diverse teaching contexts. It is based on the life experiences of the participants, who are children in this paper's case, and in building on those experiences to help develop their thinking about an object or subject which is the focus of the VTS session. With VTS, children are supported in expressing how they perceive the focus object, and their experience with that object at that moment. This is done by having conversations with the children during a VTS session, in which they experience themselves as equals in that conversation (Zieler & Abel Hesse, 2021). It is therefore a student-centered approach which corresponds to a Nordic view of the child as a whole person who already has a life experience actively engaging with the culture around them (Drotner, 2006), and this can be put into play and developed using this method. The three above-mentioned VTS questions (cf. 1. Introduction) provide a scaffolding framework that the child, once they are more experienced in participating in VTS sessions, can use to independently organize and guide their own critical thinking about literally any potential analysis object and situation in their school and extra-mural daily lives.

VTS originated in the United States and was developed at the beginning of the 1990s by the former head of the education department at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, Philip Yenawine, and Harvard University-based cognitive psychologist, Abigail Housen. It is fundamentally a structured elicitation technique that stimulates curiosity in children in the development of their reflection skills, critical thinking and communication skills through the collective analysis of an object and provides them the opportunity to communicate these ideas that emanate from this reflection and thinking. VTS was initially developed in the art studies context to be used as a support in art education. Yenawine (2013) describes how he and his colleagues were challenged by MoMa's then board of education trustees to find out how much museum visitor attendees of their education programs actually learned. Yenawine (2013, 2018) solicited the

help of Housen to find this out and despite the frequently excellent evaluations by these MoMa art education course participants, the results relating to what these participants remembered from these courses were very disappointing. As a result of these findings, Yenawine and Housen set about developing a protocol upon which to base further education courses which would yield more productive and lasting learning experiences for MoMa's education program participants. This work on a protocol, made up of a limited number of questions, with pilot programs testing the wording of these questions would eventually provide the three-question framework for VTS. During the early development and testing of VTS, the protocol was taken out of the art museum context and initially introduced into the art classrooms of local schools in New York city. During these periods of in-school experimentation, it was observed that VTS experience in the art class was positively influencing student analysis capabilities and learning in other school subjects such as language studies and math. This encouraged teachers of these other school subjects to actively engage with VTS and test its use in their teaching. As children were becoming more experienced with VTS, they were observed by teachers to independently ask themselves "what is going on in this …?" as a starting point for analyzing objects of study in their everyday school lives (Yenawine, 2018).

3. The VTS protocol and the three questions

The starting point in VTS is situated in the students themselves, in their own experiences and perceptions, and the VTS process builds on these experiences and perceptions. Before using the three scaffolding questions, the VTS facilitator invites participants to take some silent time to study the VTS session's focus object. Through a group dynamic process, where the students are gathered around this object, they then, with the help of their teacher through the three scaffolding questions, put into words what they see in the selected work. And the students listen to the other students' views in turn. This process supports students in their ability to debate in a mutually respectful manner different possibilities for the understanding of the work. They are letting the visual thought process strengthen their ability to investigate, to analyze, to articulate their thoughts, to listen and to reflect (Nolan & Siddha Malilang, 2020; Yenawine, 2013).

3.1 Pointing: "Visual paraphrasing"

When a student is answering a question, the teacher points out in the work what the student is referring to. This has the obvious effect of honing the attention of all participants in on what the speaker is specifically taking about. But it also has the effect of allowing the teacher to verify that they have adequately understood what the contributing participant is talking about and ensuring that other participants understand this as well. A participant teacher in one of the early VTS field research experiments, Diane Zimmerman, described the act of facilitation pointing as "visual paraphrasing" (Yenawine, 2013, p. 27). Yenawine (2013) points out that anchoring words with images in this way helps those learning English as it increases their vocabulary.

3.2 Verbal paraphrasing

Once a student has answered one of the three questions, the teacher paraphrases what the student has said and must keep her paraphrasing as close to the student's own words as possible, whilst at the same time using other words. This is a challenge for the new VTS facilitator who must understand completely and interiorize what the student is saying and provide alternative ways of expressing that meaning. One way of dealing with this challenge is the teacher simply seeking acknowledgement from the student that their paraphrasing of the students' comments was correct. This act in the paraphrasing moment encourages both meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic student reflection. Yenawine (2013) points out how paraphrasing is one way that VTS assists language development if a student's language is uncertain. Then the facilitator can provide support in vocabulary, grammar and language accuracy and students do not feel corrected in this process. They appreciate hearing their idea in the teacher's words. The way the teacher provides another way of expressing what she heard thus demonstrates the syntax and vocabulary possibilities as "[s]he's teaching indirectly, by pertinent example," (Yenawine 2013, p 29) in a manner resembling *recasting* in language teaching (Saxton, 2010).

The facilitator, with practice and time, must also learn to link student comments with each other through reference to aspects of different students' contributions which are similar, common, or very distinct. This reinforces the collective quality of the analysis, making clear the cooperative grounding upon which this understanding is taking place, whilst at the same time ensuring that

each contribution is seen to be valued. It shows the students that listening to others is beneficial in that we can build on the observations and knowledge of others and even change our minds based on others' opinions. In this way, "the cumulative benefits of thoughtful, reflective dialogue" are further potentially bolstered in the perception of students (Yenawine, 2013, p. 30).

3.3 "What is going on in this… picture?"

This is the opening scaffolding question and is only asked once. It allows the students to think independently about 'what is going on' in the study object. But is also formulated in such a way that the viewer is invited to create a narrative about the action in e.g., the picture. As Yenawine (2013, p. 25) states "the question's phrasing is familiar" as "we ask ourselves this question frequently." It is "[o]pen-ended to suggest all sorts of responses are acceptable" and "it challenges [students] to move beyond observations to figuring out what they [add] up to."

In accordance with the flexible nature of VTS, the above-mentioned field research observations in schools in the United States during the 1990s showed that the first question can be adapted for younger age groups. For example, 'what *do you see* in this picture?' was found to be more appropriate for children at four to five years old in their first experiences with VTS. Whilst this wording was not challenging enough for the older children or adults, the simpler question helped younger children (Yenawine, 2013).

3.4 "What is it you see that makes you say that…?"

The second question encourages the student to engage in critical analysis of their own perceptions and rationalize statements that they make based on these perceptions. But conversely and at same time, the question also ensures that the student cannot say anything that can be considered wrong. And this because the answer is found in what the student herself perceives or relates to in the study object. By asking what the student sees in the work that makes her say something, she can justify her argumentation on the basis of something manageable and take responsibility for this point of view and share it. By acknowledging the student's response, the teacher creates a positive and safe framework for opinion sharing (Zieler & Abel Hesse, 2021).

Every individual has their own perspective from which they speak from. By sharing views and listening to the views of others, individuals can both change their own perspective or be instrumental in changing or advancing the perspectives of others (Zieler & Abel Hesse, 2021). This second question therefore supports mutual respect and consequently the democratic process in the student group, whereby students become confident in sharing their views, experience that they may not all see things in the same way and may have their perspectives broadened. In this way, freedom of speech is encouraged in a mutually respectful manner.

3.5 "What more can we find?"

The third question re-opens the session and creates the possibility for a new student contributor to start over and find something completely new to talk about. This new contributor is also free to choose to follow up on the previous conversation with additional new comments. This question, as with the others, was subject to much reflection during the initial development of VTS as it is very natural in English to use "else" instead of "more" in the following manner: "what else can we find?" However, in practice "else" was found to shut down the discussion. Student participants during field research thought that the facilitator was referring to something specific that they were not mentioning. The use of 'more' was found to open up the discussion (Yenawine, 2013). The conversation is rounded off by the teacher thanking all the students for their input so that everyone feels heard and is aware that the conversation is over (Zieler & Abel Hesse, 2021; Yenawine, 2013).

This process can be represented in the following manner as in figure 1 which represents the VTS protocol in practice.

Figure 1. The VTS protocol in practice

Silent Looking…

Q. 1 "What is going on in this picture, text etc.?" (Used once at the start)
Student response

Pointing: Teacher facilitator "visual paraphrasing"

Teacher facilitator paraphrasing

Q. 2 "What is it that you see that makes you say that?" (Frequently used)
Student response

Pointing: Teacher facilitator "visual paraphrasing"

Teacher facilitator paraphrasing

Q. 3 "What more can we find?" (Usually, the most used)
Student response

Pointing: Teacher facilitator "visual paraphrasing"

Teacher facilitator paraphrasing

Rounding up by thanking student participants for their input

3.6 The VTS protocol's flexibility

Whilst the three scaffolding questions are paramount in VTS, it would be a mistake to interpret VTS as being inflexibly methodological in its approach. As mentioned above, the wording of the questions can be adapted to the participants' ages and other contextual considerations. The second question can initially be dropped with the youngest students. This is because it requires a level of logical analysis that a child as described in the earliest period of Piaget's pre-operational stage may not yet be capable of (Singer & Revenson, 1996, cited in Yenawine, 2018; Pinter 2017). Although, this is not always the case. Zieler and Abel Hesse (2021) describe how a 2-year-old child in one of their VTS sessions was able to provide the evidence-based argumentation required for the second question through simple sentences and by pointing.

If students are shy or do not know the word for something that they observe in a VTS focus object, they are free to point at it for the teacher to help them find words for it.

In addition, there is normally no specific or prescriptive goal with the VTS discussion, as emphasis is placed on the students' own reflection processes. However, whilst the emphasis in the VTS discussion will remain placed on the students' own reflections, this does not mean that there is no room for a prescriptive goal to be part of the VTS discussion conclusion. In its recent development, the interpretation of VTS allows for greater flexibility in its practice where such possible necessities for more precise end goals in certain subject areas are required due to learning objectives (Capello & Walker, 2016). Teachers in these subject areas have recognized the qualities of VTS for supporting reflection and critical thinking among students in their school subjects. Nevertheless, VTS' previously more strict manifestation discouraged the provision of a 'right' answer. This can engender some frustration among these teaching professionals and may lead to viable questions regarding VTS' adaptability in certain school contexts (Capello & Walker, 2016). However, recent reflections seem to solve this issue by allowing the facilitating teacher to follow up on a VTS discussion and encourage the participants to think about what they now know about the focus subject, what more they need to know and where they can find precise answers (Yenawine, 2021). Thus, independent student participant effort continues to be encouraged and VTS' potentially wide application in educational systems is still relevant.

4. VTS in Sweden

At the time of writing, VTS appears to be taking its first steps in Sweden. It has very little presence in the Swedish education system and whilst it has been introduced to some librarians and in some museums through in-house workshops carried out by the Danish VTS organization, *VTSdanmark*, this remains sporadic and mainly focused in the Malmö area of southwest Sweden. Otherwise, the most tangible manifestations of VTS' presence in Sweden are to be found through a pre-doctoral (licentiate level) research project in the University of Karlstad and in Malmö University (MaU).

In the University of Karlstad, VTS is being used as a basis of a research project studying collaborative efforts between such institutions as museums and schools in out-of-school

organizations. The study is based on the *Alma Löv Programme* (ALP) developed in the *Alma Löv Museum of Contemporary Art* in Sweden situated north of Karlstad. This program guides museum educators' and schoolteachers' efforts to support students' art-based learning about science in a *third space*. Part of the focus in a *third space* is the situation of these activities outside of the school and in the museum. In ALP, there is an adaptation of VTS whereby students explore how the views and values of artists on a certain science theme are expressed and visualized. After the museum visit, students acquire information about the science theme, and they are encouraged to discuss how that relates to their own lives, other people and the environment. Their findings are collected on mind-maps from which students use concepts from and views on the science theme they want to express and visualize in their own student-produced sculpture or painting (Raaijmakers et al. 2021). This project, with VTS as its basis, extends the museum experience to an active collaboration with the school system in science school subjects. However, in its interpretation of *third space*, it places much emphasis on the benefits of the out of school experience.

Researchers in MaU are establishing the VTS research group, *VTSmau*, and are orientating their focus in VTS on the in-school experience. Currently, they are especially interested in VTS' potential impact in the English language classroom. These researchers are in the long-term preparation of an action research project studying the impact of VTS through the introduction of instruction in the method in the primary school English teacher-trainee programs offered in the Faculty of Education and Society. Since 2021, a summer course has been established in VTS called "Visual Thinking Strategies i mångkulturella klassrum i de tidiga skolåren" ("Visual Thinking Strategies in the Multicultural Classroom in Primary School").

This summer course is offered to MaU students, but it also is part of an outreach strategy to introduce VTS to students in teacher education at other universities and to established educators in primary schools throughout Sweden.

5. VTS' theoretical grounding, the curriculum and VTS in the English language classroom

> "Language simply doesn't happen. It's the result of many things and perhaps the most important is a child's verbal interactions with older people and other children" (Yenawine, 2018, 2).

In the theoretical grounding of VTS, Dewey, Piaget and especially Vygotsky loom large as they do in the theoretical underpinnings of the Nordic educational systems. Given the socially situated reciprocal nature of student to student and student to teacher interaction in VTS in the naturally occurring context of the VTS discussion, the socially oriented and sociocultural underpinnings of this approach appear evident. In participating in the VTS session, there is an act of socialization at play, both in the larger sense whereby the individual adjusts to, integrates into and behaves in a conventional manner for the group, but also more specifically in language socialization which Duff (2010, p. 427) describes as: "the acquisition of linguistic, dramatic and other cultural knowledge through social experience and is often equated with the development of cultural and communicative competence." The VTS discussion being based on the use of language to elicit, express, and interpret ideas through the three scaffolding questions, participant contributions and the facilitator paraphrasing process makes the VTS session discussion an optimal opportunity for language learning moments through natural language use and language socialization (cf. section 3.). The idea that a 'novice' is inducted into a domain of knowledge and learns the language and ways of using language through listening and dialog with a more knowledgeable individual, as happens in VTS, is central to language socialization, and it draws very heavily on Vygotsky's social theory (Hafner, 2018).

5.1 VTS, the Curriculum and the Syllabus for English

Language education policy for English at primary and middle school levels in Sweden is essentially delineated through the syllabus for English which is in the *Curriculum for Compulsory School, Preschool and School-age Educare* (version translated into English, Skolverket, 2018), and its support material and updates (Skolverket 2021a, 2021b, 2022). An updated version of the curriculum is in vigor from the 1 July 2022. The main change from the previous version relevant to this paper is a greater

focus on gender equality, mutual respect between genders and continued gender identity awareness (Skolverket, 2021b, 2022). The English syllabus which outlines the specific goals and guidelines for English as a subject is presented in the context of specific overall goals and guidelines for compulsory primary and middle school education in the country (Skolverket, 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). These goals and guidelines indicate the core values and aims of the Swedish education system which are very relevant when evaluating the adaptability of VTS to the objectives of the compulsory school education system in Sweden. This is an education system in which student perspectives are to be valued and promoted, and democratic awareness and understanding is endorsed and encouraged, and all students are encouraged to live up to their full potential in the context of respect for others regardless of e.g., their background or gender identity. The development of critical thinking, solidarity, student confidence and communication skills are also emphasized as priorities at curriculum level. Student ability to use English is specifically identified in the general introduction to the curriculum as being part of the communication skills that the school must ensure that their students have at the end of their compulsory schooling (Skolverket, 2018, 2021b). And indeed, knowledge of foreign languages and explicitly knowledge in English have been identified as far back as 1946 as important in the compulsory school system for the promotion of values, abilities and skills that are recognized as the basis of a successful democratic society in Sweden (SOU 1948:27, 7 cited in Lundahl, 2019, 18).

Much in these values and aims of the curriculum correspond to the values of VTS as espoused by one of the main VTS promotion organizations in the United States, *VTShome*, which, even though it has a focus in the Art studies domain, states the following:

> VTS is much more than an art curriculum; as a facilitation method and professional development program that fosters collaborative, inclusive, community-building dialogue, VTS has the power to change the way we relate to one another as teachers, students, and colleagues. VTS is comprised of arts and education professionals that specialize in deep listening and responsive teaching practices […] (VTShome, 2022)

They go further in stipulating that they value:

- Thoughtfully facilitated discussions of art making education more engaging and equitable
- Reflective teaching practices that support education systems to become more inclusive, accessible, and responsive
- An equitable society of thoughtful, respectful citizens that value diverse perspectives
- Reflective practice around issues of race, class, gender, and ability in order to increase awareness of and respond to the inequities that exist in the arts and education

(VTShome, 2022)

Much of the sentiment contained in, and the words and terms used in these quotations from this VTS organization source correlate with the aims and values of the education system and the English subject in Sweden.

The post-modern pedagogical philosophy which is at the basis of a post-methods era pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2012; Lusianov, 2018), features of which are to be found in today's Swedish curriculum for compulsory schooling also resonates in VTS as a pedagogical strategy and approach in a language teaching context. Lusianov (2018, p. 363) points out that for post-modernists "interaction between the knower and non-knower is often best seen as a dialog, which leads to mutual influence rather than the simple transmission of knowledge from one to another." This is highly analogous with the above-mentioned socialization process which is very discernable in a VTS discussion.

Lusianov (2018, p. 364) further points out that post-methods pedagogy is "context-oriented teaching and learning" and this is very much the basis for VTS. Outside of the three scaffolding questions which can be adapted to the students (cf. section 3.), the orientation, content and language used in a VTS discussion is very much controlled by the student participants themselves. The facilitating teacher guides this dialogue within the VTS discussion and student progress within a single session or over time through a series of VTS session dialogues. However, VTS teacher-facilitators are encouraged to maintain a neutral stance in their VTS facilitation. In doing this, they are communicating an important feature of VTS to the students and that is that a teacher or an authority figure is not always needed to help them understand things (Yenawine 2013). Moreover, Yenawine (2013, 30) points out that:

they learn how knowledge is created: that it's not simply "delivered" by a teacher, parent, or media. They learn to think things through on their own and find that they can rely on their peers for help, letting different ideas provide stimulation and different knowledge get factored in.

Through their deliberate neutrality and conscious avoidance of transmissionism, the teachers are eventually slipping into the background and with time and exposure to VTS, the students are gaining confidence in themselves and learning to express their own independent thoughts and implement their own sense of agency. These are important objectives of the Swedish compulsory school curriculum, and VTS participant students can achieve these objectives as part of a collective: "[…] they come to realize that scrutiny and debate of ideas provide valid ways of testing hypotheses. This way, disagreement becomes interesting and valuable, not threatening, and most problems suggest not one solution but many" (Yenawine, 2013, p. 30). Not only do they progress in their thinking through collective agreement, but also and possibly more valuably, they progress through their disagreement which is to be embraced and perceived as an opportunity to further their reflection, analysis and sharing skills.

Yenawine (2018, 133) highlights Dewey's (1897) assertion that he "believe[s] that education… is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" making schooling a part of the here and now of everyday life. Dewey (1897) further emphasizes how "school must represent present life." This particularly finds echoes in the Swedish Curriculum's English syllabus in which it is iterated that the core content of teaching should be subject areas "that are familiar to the pupils." And this, for all periods of education in primary and middle school from grades 1 to 9 (Skolverket, 2018, pp. 35-6, 2022). This is followed up, for example, in grades 4 to 6 with the core content instruction: "Everyday situations, interests, people, places, activities and events." This type of everyday situation can be sourced "in different contexts and areas where English is used (Skolverket 2018)." In the more recent version of the syllabus, it is even emphasized that this can be done "even in relation with one's own experiences and knowledge" (author's translation, Skolverket, 2022, original: "även i jämförelse med egna erfarenheter och kunskaper").

Whilst this can be from the English-speaking world, this does not prevent the teacher from finding inspiration locally in Sweden where the students find themselves.

Whilst intercultural openness is an underlying feature of both VTS and the compulsory school curriculum, there is arguably an explicit requirement to further localize these English language classroom activities. This does not undermine externally orientated interculturality and indeed, it possibly bolsters it in making the English-speaking world more understandable and accessible for the Swedish student by connecting it to their own lives. It not only corresponds to Yenawine's interpretation of Dewey's (1897) sentiments and constitutes a core element of the thinking behind VTS, but it also corresponds to an aspect of post-method pedagogy as identified by Lusianov (2018) which is its localized quality in how language teaching should be adapted to the students' familiar surroundings. This also correlates with a tendency within English studies which views English not in the singular or as the sole property of inner-circle countries (Kachru, 1985), but in the plural and potentially the property of the places in which it is used and adapted to local needs in its manifestation as a current day *lingua franca* and as several localized *Englishes* (Jenkins, 2015).

Through the very nature of its basis in art education and its seemingly natural extension to other school subjects, VTS is in its essence a teaching tool which encourages participants to think in an interdisciplinary manner. Again, the curriculum for compulsory schooling stipulates that students should have opportunities to work along interdisciplinary lines (Skolverket, 2018, 2021b). VTS, through its potential various applications and variety of focus content, can very effectively and efficiently be used to promote an awareness of interdisciplinary connectedness for students. At the same time, it can provide the English teacher ample opportunities for supporting their English students' language learning.

This can potentially positively influence students' performance and confidence in a wide range of subject areas that they work with in their school days. This will thus help to fulfill the wider ambitions of the compulsory school curriculum, and help these students develop their independence as social agents within and beyond the education system.

6. Conclusion

The position in this paper is that VTS is very relevant for children's education in Sweden, and that the practice of VTS makes it highly adaptable to English language teaching. The rationale for this position is that this elicitation and communication technique has proven very effective in fostering and developing the abilities and skills which are identified in the Swedish curriculum for compulsory school and the English language syllabus therein.

The consequences of a wide adoption of VTS in the Swedish education system could be far reaching. First, once known and understood by teachers, VTS can be a useful and very efficient tool in the English language classroom and can directly help to fulfil several of the ambitions of the curriculum and the English language syllabus. Second, abilities and sensitivities developed by VTS correspond to the core values of Swedish society in its promotion of democratic values, which are espoused in the curriculum (Skolverket 2018, 2021b). Third, by virtue of its origins, VTS lends itself to being actively used across school subjects and therefore it fosters an interdisciplinary sensitivity in school students. This can help their performance and confidence in a wide range of subject areas, thus again fulfilling the wider ambitions of the compulsory school curriculum and encourage these students in their growing independence as social agents. As VTS promotes an individual's independence which is furthered in the group, VTS is a collective activity which refocuses attention on each participating individual progressing in their understanding of the world around them with others. And consequently, it fosters a positive re-evaluation of how an individual can emancipate themselves and grow within a society.

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