My dissertation project on classroom management as an element of academic language support is part of the BilLe-project based at the University of Münster. BilLe stands for Bildungssprachförderliches Lehrerhandeln (“teaching practices of academic language support”, Fürstenau/Lange 2013). The Study analyses academic language teaching in multilingual classrooms. It is a video-based classroom study focusing on the empirical investigation of how teachers build bridges that allow their students to move from the level of everyday language to an educated language level. The research question is: How do the teachers foster their students’ acquisition and development of academic language proficiency?

As the research on learning and teaching has revealed in recent years, success in school is closely connected to the mastering of academic language, not only in language-related subjects, but in all subjects. The question of how to improve language teaching within the context of linguistic and socio-cultural diversity is an important issue being discussed in education policy and research in most European countries. In Germany, migrant students with German as a second language as well as students coming from a family with a low socio-economic background achieve poorer results than their peers. These children depend on the support of their teachers to master the (linguistic) requirements imposed upon them by the school system. At this time, however, teachers’ awareness of the relevance of academic language support for students’ success in school still seems to be low.

‘Academic language’ is a specific linguistic register students need to acquire in order to “become full members of the school community” (Gibbons 2002) and to be successful in school (Cummins 2008). It is characterised by linguistic structures which help to express complex and abstract content isolated from its initial context, and it features the characteristics of written language (Gogolin, 2009). In recent years, notions such as “languages of school” (Council of Europe), “language of schooling” (Schleppegrell 2004) and – in the German-speaking context – “Bildungssprache” (Gogolin/Lange 2011) have increasingly aroused attention in educational research and policy.

Apart from different definitions and approaches to a deeper understanding of academic language we focus on the interdependence between language and learning and therefore on the special challenges provided by the language which is required for learning in school. We still know little about teachers’ and students’ actual practices in dealing with linguistic requirements in educational contexts (Morek/Heller 2012). That’s why the BilLe-project focuses on exactly these language teaching practices.

In the BilLe-project, we analyse classroom activities of expert teachers in regular multilingual classrooms. We call the teachers “expert teachers” because their students unexpectedly achieved good results in the language categories of assessment tests. Most of them have or
had a special role concerning the development of language support in their school. The good results of the language tests were unexpected because a high percentage of the students do not have German as their native language and come from a low socio-economic background.

The data include about 27 recorded hours of regular lessons taught by nine teachers in forms 1-10 in two primary schools, one secondary and one advanced secondary school in a major German city. A wide range of subjects was recorded. This allows us to analyse everyday language teaching in subjects like Latin or German but also in non-linguistic subjects such as Biology, Maths or in free learning times, for example. Contextual data include teacher-questionnaires, guided interviews with the teachers, student data provided by the teachers and teaching material. In the analysis, we employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: a content based analysis (low-inference video coding of the surface structures) is combined with interpretive video interaction analysis. The coding of the social arrangements (e.g. individual work, working with a partner, group work) and the teachers’ and students’ turn taking provides the basis for qualitative sequence analyses that focus closely on classroom interaction in key incidents of language teaching. One objective of the study is to develop observation categories for every day academic language support which can be implemented as a useful tool for future classroom observation studies. Theoretical qualitative characteristics of supportive academic language teaching shall be verified, differentiated, extended and complemented. Another aim is to produce video-based key incidents which can be used in teacher education.

First results of the study suggest that the number of individualized lesson phases during the expert teachers’ lessons is exceptionally high. So is the turn taking of the students. We assume that individualized lesson phases hold the key to individual linguistic support. The high turn taking of the students seems to provide many opportunities for the students to acquire, practice actively and develop their academic language proficiency.

In my dissertation project, I analyse the BilLe-data with the focus on classroom management. The results of international school assessment tests show that effective classroom management is strongly linked to student achievement and the progress of learning. The research on this field includes aspects such as classroom discipline, time management, rules, procedures and rituals or lesson preparation. There are many definitions of classroom management. According to Andreas Helmke, classroom management includes all kinds of activities that help to build up a structured framework for effective teaching and learning (Helmke 2012). My research is on the framework built up by the expert teachers as the basis for all kinds of language teaching. I analyse the ways in which rules, routinized procedures and rituals can support academic language teaching.

It is not always easy to differentiate between rules, procedures and rituals as elements of classroom management. Rules can be defined as binding general agreements for social behaviour and interaction. They are often short normative principles such as “We have to be polite” or “We don’t interrupt someone who is speaking”. Procedures are the sum of interactional patterns that regulate specific and recurring interaction situations. Each situation has got its own set of regulations which can be more or less binding. Because of the procedures the interaction partners know how to behave and which behaviour to expect from each other. There are small procedures like a raised hand to signal that it is time to be quiet.
and pay attention. There are also more complex ones like opening up a lesson by checking the students’ presence or interactional genres like discussions, for example. In contrast to procedures, rituals are ceremonial actions. They are always presented in the same way and they are of symbolic importance. Rules, procedures and rituals structure the daily classroom routine and can have positive effects on the social behaviour, the learning environment and the time that is left for active learning.

As an illustration, I will now give a brief insight into a 3rd form classroom from the BilLe-sample and point out some rules and procedures which increase the students’ turn taking and lay the foundation for academic language support.

Two female teachers are teaching as a team in this classroom, and two trainees were there at the day of recording. There are 19 children, 13 children speaking a different language apart from German at home. The socio-economic background of the families is low.

The school day’s schedule includes almost exclusively individualised lesson phases. In the data, we can observe that during these free times of learning the students are widely spread throughout the classroom. Each of them works on his or her own tasks. These individualized lesson phases are completely structured by rules and procedures that make this setting work.

Each student has got an individual learning plan for free times. It is written in a learning guide where the teachers register which tasks have already been fulfilled and which can be done next. The students decide to a large extent what they want to start with, if they want to work individually or with partners and which material might be helpful. While the students are working on their tasks, the teachers walk around and support the students. Either the children ask for help or the teachers go towards them and decide which kind of support might be useful. I assume that this procedure is routinized because the students don’t show an unnatural behaviour when they recognize that the teacher is around.

During all phases of the lessons, interaction rules apply that all participants have to follow. These are for example: “The speaker mustn’t be interrupted”, “It is important to stay on-topic”, “Everybody is allowed to finish speaking” or “Everybody has to speak comprehensibly.” The rules reassure the students that they will get undivided attention of the teacher and guarantee an intensive interaction between teachers and students as well as opportunities to deepen learning contents. Furthermore, the students learn to follow social interaction rules which are also part of academic language proficiency.

Integrated in this free learning time there is the institution of the ‘learning advisory’. This is a short conversation between a student and a teacher about the achieved learning targets, where there were problems and what is to do next. The teachers mostly ask open questions and enter into a dialogue with the student about his or her learning process and specific learning strategies. Although the turn taking of the teachers is relatively high, the teachers listen to the students once they start talking. This procedure can train the students to interact in situations in which academic language proficiency is required. In the learning advisory, there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities which are important for many other interactional situations in the academic context, too. Furthermore, the routinized procedure of the learning advisory is a structured framework for further and deeper practices of academic language teaching. Two
examples which are analysed in the dissertations of Isabella Galling and Imke Lange are language-sensitive teaching practices and reflection phases.

I chose the examples from the 3rd form classroom to show how rules and procedures as elements of classroom management build up a framework for academic language teaching. In my dissertation, I will compare rules, procedures and rituals in different expert teachers’ classrooms, and I will scrutinize academic language support in these settings with the method of conversation analysis.

**Literature**

Council of Europe. URL: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Schoollang_EN.asp.


