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## Swedish as a second language and citizenship education

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### Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to discuss second language teacher students' encountering with Swedish as a second language. The narrative analysis shows that they felt both different and excluded. They were not monolingual, and did not have Swedish as their mother tongue. They were separated from the other classmates and offered special teaching in an attempt to compensate. The second language tuition they were offered focused partly on their mistakes and shortcomings, and partly on the Swedish cultural heritage. Their earlier experience and skills were not used. The informants were not offered equal education compared to their Swedish classmates. They were not offered education leading to fully but to restricted citizenship.*

### Aim

In this paper I focus on pupils second language experiences. The aim of this paper is to discuss second language teacher students' encounters with Swedish as a second language using a "curriculum theory" and a "life story" approach". The goal was achieved by examining two empirical contexts which can be described as expressed and experienced curricula. In the first context, an idea analysis is carried out of the contents of the syllabi and curricula for Swedish as a Second Language over a period of time.

Purpose is specified in the following way:

- Which educational ideals expressed in the curricula, and changes in these over time, encompass the subject Swedish as a second language?
- Which educational ideals concretized in syllabi, and changes in these over time, encompass the subject Swedish as a second language?
- What is the relationship between curricula and syllabi as far as Swedish as a second language is concerned?

In the second context, a narrative analysis is carried out of the life stories given by second language pupils of their encounter with Swedish as a Second Language and the Swedish school. Trainee teachers with Swedish as a Second Language participate by telling their life stories. The purpose is specified in the following way:

- What educational ideals are expressed in second-language pupils' life stories concerning their encounters with Swedish as a second language and the Swedish school?
- What aspects of the subject are mentioned in second-language pupils' life stories concerning their encounters with Swedish as a second language?

### Theoretical starting points

The theoretical starting point is Foucault's (1993; 2002; 2003) discussion concerning meaning, power, normality, deviation and social constructions. Links are made with Swedish curriculum research and reasoning concerning ideas about what is important to pass on to future generations. In this context, attention is drawn to the importance which the wording in the steering documents has, since both curricula and syllabi include society's ideas about what is important for future generations to learn. In this chapter there are discussions about knowledge and understanding of another person and of various phenomena with the life-world as a starting point. In this way the Swedish curriculum theory research tradition was linked with the life story approach through Bengtsson's (2001; 1999/2005), Dominicé's (2000) and Merleau-Ponty's (1997) ideas about stories of life events and construction of life. A framework for interpretation emerges through reasoning about language and the creation of meaning, as well as culture, cultural capital, similarities/differences, compensating/completing and limited participation/full participation. This reasoning results in the construction of theoretical prisms through which the offered and experienced learning in the encounters with Swedish as a second language can be studied.

### **The research process**

In the first context an idea analysis of the contents of the compulsory school's steering document was carried out. In the curricula and syllabi, educational ideals were formulated and concretized. The different curricula and syllabi texts were studied, interpreted, presented and discussed in different stages with the help of the theoretical starting points and the interpretation framework's theoretical prisms. This made it possible to understand more at a level of principle. The second context involved narrative analysis of the experienced curriculum in the form of life stories concerning pupils' encounters with Swedish as a second language and the Swedish school. The life stories were collected in the form of three letters and three in-depth group discussions in which I acted as discussion leader. The stories were also studied, interpreted, presented and discussed in different stages with the help of theoretical starting points and the interpretation framework's theoretical prisms. A narrative analysis was carried out in a spiral of understanding by means of deconstruction and reconstruction in new thematic stories. Three future teachers of Swedish as a second language participate in the study. They encountered the Swedish language and the Swedish school at the beginning and middle of the 1990s.

### **Results**

The analysis shows that what is on offer in the curricula and syllabi is mainly monocultural. It shows that a new subject has grown up based on the need to teach pupils about the Swedish cultural heritage and Swedish norms. Changes in the expressed educational ideals over a period of time and contradictory educational ideals become evident.

The feeling of *a lost childhood* and a lost language among the respondents was evident. They felt that knowledge and skills from their childhood were not worth much in their encounters with the Swedish school and Swedish as a second language. It is also clear that they were subject to great linguistic demands. They felt that, in their encounters with Swedish as a second language and the Swedish school, they lost what they had learned earlier and that the loss would be replaced by something new. However, the problem was that the new material was presented to them in a language they did not understand. In their encounters with Swedish culture, the mother tongue of the respondents was no longer an obvious method of communication.

In order to learn the new language and be able to communicate, they felt that they had to *let their skills in their mother tongue deteriorate*. In this way they lost something which before had been a natural part of them. The mother tongue as a method of communication is here an example of something natural which has changed. One way of adjusting to the new situation was to let go of the mother tongue. This loss was compensated for by progress in the second language. By learning Swedish as a second language, the respondents *tried to adjust to the demands of becoming a good Swede*. It is clear that the informants felt both different and excluded. They were not monolingual, and did not have Swedish as their mother tongue. They were separated from the other classmates and offered special teaching in an attempt to compensate

In their encounters with the Swedish school, the respondents reported that great pressure was put on them to learn Swedish as a second language. When they encountered the Swedish school they did not understand the language or other communicative signals. However, they wanted both to understand and be understood, and therefore wanted to learn quickly this language which would create a sense of belonging. The Swedish language seemed to be the key to creating *a feeling of togetherness* with others in the school. Being good at Swedish meant opportunities for togetherness and communication and they wanted to establish themselves according to the prevailing language norms quickly by acquiring Swedish in the school's social context. In this way they would be able to display both their new and their old knowledge. To be able to express themselves in Swedish in the same way as others meant that the respondents could assert themselves and be heard. In this way it became possible for them, in accordance with Foucault's (1993) reasoning, to *find balance between the new and the old*. But to learn Swedish as a second language quickly had a disadvantage, because they felt that their skills in the second language improved at the cost of skills in their mother tongue and this led to an imbalance between the old and the new.

In the Swedish school the respondents received tuition in their mother tongue. They said that to be able to take part in tuition in their mother tongue in school was positive for their continued linguistic development. It became much easier to continue to develop their second language when skills in their

mother tongue improved. This can be understood in terms of an increase in their total language awareness. In mother-tongue tuition, the respondents met both teachers and other pupils with the same mother tongue. Their *earlier experiences were made use of*, and they could understand and be understood.

Good skills in the mother tongue are transferred to the second language. They facilitate the acquisition of the second language and have a positive effect on the pupils' cognitive development (Cummins & Schecter, 2003). When the respondents' skills in their mother tongue increased, they became aware of the fact that they could switch between their languages. For the respondents, developing and using the mother tongue became both a way of *preserving old skills and a way of feeling a sense of belonging* to what was close at hand. In a we-relationship (Foucault, 2002), which was not otherized, the respondents could find balance with the past.

The respondents' mother tongue was very important for the development of bilingualism or multilingualism. But not to have Swedish as a mother tongue and to leave the class to take part in mother-tongue tuition, meant that *they felt, and were seen as, "the others", those who were different*. What is outside the framework for what is usual and therefore normal in school is considered inadequate and deviant (Foucault, 2002). In school, *a different mother tongue was seen as something inadequate*. However, in the encounter with the Swedish school, having a different mother tongue can also be described as a resource, as something which is complementary.

In the study, different language competences and multilingualism are strongly associated with otherness and deviation. For the respondents, *being multilingual meant being different in the encounter with the monolingual school's language*. Therefore, being multilingual was not only positive, it also increased the feeling of being seen as deviant. Multilingual pupils' language skills were not considered an asset in school. From a perspective in which the teacher's attitude towards the pupils' abilities and skills is crucial to their learning, this negative attitude becomes a serious criticism. *To be multilingual means being seen as a deviant*. They felt, and were seen as, "the others", those who were different. Mother tongue tuition was seen as an easy option.

In their encounters with the Swedish school, the respondents met good teachers who helped their pupils. But it is also clear from the life stories that many second-language teachers are not familiar with the subject. The respondents said that those around them had negative expectations and low opinions of both second-language tuition and the subject itself. They did not believe that school or society in general would suddenly realise how important Swedish as second language can be for second-language pupils. Neither did they believe that it would suddenly be seen as a first-class subject. In the Swedish school, *Swedish as a second language was instead seen as a subject for deviants, for "the others"*. Therefore, it is outside the framework for what is done together and is normal (Foucault, 1993; 2003) in the school context.

In their encounters with Swedish as a second language, it was important for the pupils to receive lots of encouragement. The respondents thought that second-language pupils would have been motivated more by tuition in, and about, the second language. The mistake was, however, that tuition was aimed more at their inadequacies and mistakes rather than their abilities and skills. Their earlier experience and skills were not used. *Through tuition, deviations would be corrected and second-language pupils would become "normal"* (Foucault, 1993).

## **Discussion**

By telling their own life histories as narratives and life history interviews the teacher students have been learning about their own lives and maybe something about life in general as well. My narrative analysis points out identity and code changing, racism in every day life as dilemmas. By quoting the life histories we will highlight some of the result. "The feeling of not belonging anywhere hurts". "I am the multicultural society... because I know how to live it."

The subject Swedish as a second language is similar to Swedish in spite of its status as an independent subject. But there are big differences between the subjects as well. Aim of the subject Swedish as a second language is that pupils shall learn Swedish sufficiently enough to manage well in all subjects in school and attain a first language level in their second language, Swedish. Another difference is that Second language learners are participating in teaching in Swedish and teaching on Swedish in other subjects. A further

difference is that Swedish as a second language meets pupil in all years of schooling and in a wide spectrum of language skills. This means that there are large differences both between first language learners and second language learners and between pupils in the second language group.

Pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish are particular because they are second language learners. Their lack of knowledge of Swedish and difficulties in understanding and fully mastering other subjects are often due to late arrival to Sweden. Therefore the second language teaching must be organized and graded in a different way compared to first language teaching. The subject of Sweden as a second language has to consider second language learners' earlier experiences or needs.

My analysis shows that the informants felt both different and excluded. They were not monolingual, and did not have Swedish as their mother tongue. To make up for this lack of Swedishness, they were separated from the other classmates and offered special teaching in an attempt to compensate. They also received mother tongue tuition, which was not in Swedish, and this became a problem for those around them, who considered this was an easy option. The second language tuition they were offered focused partly on their mistakes and shortcomings, and partly on the Swedish cultural heritage. Their earlier experience and skills were not used.

The informants were not offered equal education compared to their Swedish classmates. They were not offered education leading to fully but to restricted citizenship.

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