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Langue Skills, Lingual Identity and Active Citizenship

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Abstract

This paper focuses on lingual skills, lingual identity, active citizenship and the experiences of second language learners, using a life story approach. The overarching aim is to discuss second language teacher students' encountering with Swedish School, mother tongue tuition and second language and lifelong learning. The goal is achieved by examining an empirical context. A narrative analysis is carried out of life stories given by second language pupils. Trainee teacher students with Swedish as a Second Language told their second language learning memories as aspects of their life stories. They encountered the Swedish school in the 1990s and told their life story memories in 2007.

The life stories were collected in the form of letters and in-depth group discussions. I acted as discussion leader. The stories were studied, interpreted, presented and discussed in different stages with the help of a theoretical starting points and an interpretation framework. A narrative analysis was carried out in a spiral of understanding by means of deconstruction and reconstruction.

The analysis shows that those teacher students' received tuition in their mother tongues when they encountered Swedish School. Mother tongue in school was positive for their continued and life long learning and linguistic development. Good skills in the mother tongue were transferred to the second language and it became much easier to continue developing a second language when skills in their mother tongue improved. The teacher students' mother tongue was very important for the development of bilingualism in terms of multilingualism. Through their lifelong linguistic learning and development it becomes possible to develop an identity as multilingual persons. Good skills in the mother tongue and the second language are conditions for active citizenship in a multicultural society. When the skills in mother tongue increased, the trainee teacher students became aware of the fact that they could switch between their languages. They became aware of their identities as multi lingual citizens and their possibilities of being active multicultural citizens.

Introduction

If one has an immigration background experiences from school and understanding of school differs compared to those without immigration background. In the Swedish pre-school education and the nine-year compulsory school system there are pupils, about twenty per cent, who meet the Swedish language as a second language. Their skills in one or more first

languages were already developed when they came in contact with the Swedish language. Children with a first language other than Swedish, however, have a situation in school which can be described as a race against time. They are supposed to learn the new language and at the same time learn all other subjects with the help of the new language, Swedish. The Swedish language occupies a key position in school work. Communication takes place by means of language and through co-operation with others. In order to be able to benefit from an education within the Swedish system and to be able to develop into multilingual individuals with multicultural backgrounds, they need knowledge about, and skills in, both their first language(s) and their second language. Therefore, pupils with a foreign first language have the right to tuition in Swedish as a second language. Teachers have to meet this situation with carefully prepared education.

Research has shown, however, that teachers are uncertain about second language pupils right to tuition or teaching in and about the subject Swedish as a Second language and what the subject should include. Teachers are uncertain about how they should grade Swedish as a second language skills and second-language pupils. Research has shown that pupils with Swedish as a second language are less successful than those with a Swedish as a first language at achieving goals both in the nine-year compulsory school and the upper-secondary school. Other data has shown teacher students' desire for more education in the field of second language learning and about the intercultural school.

In my Licentiate thesis (Torpsten, 2006) I put light on the subject Swedish as a second language which has grown from a need to keep prevailing order and to foster future citizens. The analysis shows changes, breaks and double tracks with contradictory ideals. Despite efforts towards multicultural ideals contemporary curricula is principally monocultural. Future citizens with migration backgrounds are fostered in restricted participation. Results and data from these investigations made me raise new questions concerning immigrant students' experiences from their encounters with Swedish language and the Swedish school.

Teacher training

Within the Swedish teacher training context, all students are involved in general teacher courses. These courses are organized over three semesters which we call General Educational Area, AU (90 ECTS). The contents of these courses are the same for all teacher students and deal with general teacher competence such as the teacher's role in the classroom, democracy, communication and equality as well as theory and practice of preparing a thesis for examination purposes. In Kalmar one of these courses is called *Intercultural perspectives* (7.5 ECTS). This course *Intercultural perspectives* aim is to create knowledge about teaching children with Swedish as a second language, the multicultural and multilingual school. Teachers educated before 2003 have patchy knowledge about the Swedish multicultural society or no knowledge at all.

Swedish as a second language

Swedish as a second language has a history of nearly forty years as a school subject. The first public sector school curricula, Lgr62, did not mention immigrant children at all. Later curricula, Lgr69 and Lgr80, were in holding what one can call syllabuses for the subject Swedish as a second language. In Lgr69 the subject was called Support to other subjects and in Lgr80 it was called Swedish as a foreign language. When the latest curricula, Lpo94, came into operation there was no specially syllabus for Swedish as a second language due to differences compared to other subject's syllabuses. After adjustment of the syllabus the subject came into operation in 1995/96 in compulsory schools and in upper secondary schools. Purpose, aim and element have been changed over time.

When the first syllabus was written children speaking Swedish as their second language were supposed to need help because of their lack of knowledge in Swedish. Knowing a language other than Swedish was not understood as one's ability but as one's lack of knowledge. Because of that, second language learners were supposed to need support and by knowing Swedish pupils were compensated for that lack. Later purpose of the subject was that pupils should reach a restricted level of knowledge in Swedish since it was named Swedish as a foreign language. According to the third syllabus purpose of the second language teaching is to give pupils equal knowledge in Swedish compared to pupils with Swedish as a first language in order to promote equality. One can say that the development of the subject is from support and restricted knowledge to functional knowledge and fully participation in school and in society.

My dissertation focused on those experiences of second-language pupils which involve linguistic encounters. The overarching aim was to analyse second-language pupils' encounters with Swedish as a second language and the Swedish school. The dissertation has its starting point in social and educational areas which involve the compulsory school.

Aim

This paper focuses on lingual skills, lingual identity, active citizenship and the experiences of second language learners, using a life story approach. Overarching aim is to discuss second language teacher students' encountering with Swedish School, and Swedish as a Second Language in terms of Language Skills, Lingual Identity and Active Citizenship. The goal is achieved by examining an empirical context. A narrative analysis is carried out of life stories given by second language pupils. Three trainee teacher students with Swedish as a Second Language told their second language learning memories as aspects of their life stories. They encountered the Swedish school in the 1990s and told their life story memories in 2007.

Theoretical starting points

Life stories are social constructions which influence, and are influenced by, their context. A theoretical starting point is life world, life story, knowledge and understanding of another person through Bengtsson's (2001; 1999/2005), Dominice's (2000) and Merleau-Ponty's

(1997) ideas about stories of life events and construction of life. By reasoning about language and the creation of meaning, as well as culture, cultural capital, similarities/differences, compensating/completing, limited participation/full participation and active citizenship I construct theoretical prisms (Torpsten, 2006; 2007) through which the experienced learning in the encounters with Swedish as a second language and mother tongue are studied.

A 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. I discussed 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. Through the framework for interpretation and by reasoning about language and the creation of meaning, culture, cultural capital, similarities/differences, compensating/completing and limited participation/full participation the encountering with Swedish School, and Swedish as a Second Language in terms of Langue Skills, Lingual Identity and Active Citizenship are studied.

The research process

This context involved narrative analysis of the experienced learning in the form of life stories concerning pupils' encounters with the Swedish school and Swedish as a second language.

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 who have learnt Swedish as a second language participate in the study.

Results

The analysis shows demands of becoming a good Swede, longing for togetherness. Analysis shows balance between new and old. Earlier experiences and old skills were useful. Switching languages and senses of belonging were other results. Difference and different mother tongue was seen as something inadequate.

Becoming a good Swede and balance

By learning Swedish as a second language, the respondents tried to adjust to the demands of becoming a good Swede. 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.

Earlier experiences and old skills

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.

Sense of belonging

Good skills in the mother tongue are transferred to the second language. They facilitate the acquisition of the second language and this has 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.

Differences and different mother tongue

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.

Discussion

Teacher students speaking Swedish as a second language have been asked to tell their life histories based on their immigrant experiences. By learning Swedish as a second language, the respondents tried to adjust to the demands of becoming a good Swede. 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 highlights identity, code changing, otherness and life long learning as dilemmas. By quoting the life histories I will highlight one part of the result. "I am the multicultural society... because I know how to live it."

Those teacher students' were not monolingual, and did not have Swedish as their mother tongue. They received tuition in their mother tongues when they encountered Swedish School. Mother tongue in school was positive for their continued and life long learning and linguistic development. Good skills in the mother tongue were transferred to the second language and it became much easier to continue developing a second language when skills in their mother tongue improved. The teacher students' mother tongue was very important for the development of bilingualism in terms of multilingualism. It becomes possible to develop identity as multilingual persons.

Good skills in the mother tongue and the second language are conditions for active citizenship in a multicultural society. When the skills in mother tongue increased, the trainee teacher students became aware of the fact that they could switch between their languages. They became aware of their identities as multi lingual citizens and their possibilities of being active multicultural citizens.

But, different language competences and multilingualism are strongly associated with otherness and deviation. Being multilingual meant being different in the encounter with the monolingual school's language.

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