



This paper is taken from

*Creating Communities: Local, National and Global
Selected papers from the fourteenth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2012

**edited by Peter Cunningham and Nathan Fretwell, published in London by CiCe,
ISBN 978-1-907675-19-5**

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as
Torpsten, A. (2012) 'Mother tongue and multilingual education', in P. Cunningham & N. Fretwell (eds.)
Creating Communities: Local, National and Global. London: CiCe, pp. 153 - 160.

© CiCe 2012

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a selection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Mother tongue and multilingual education

*Ann-Christin Torpsten
Linnaeus University (Sweden)*

Abstract

The overarching aim of this paper is to highlight second-language pupils' engagement with the Swedish school system, as far as language development and learning are concerned. The empirical focus of the paper is directed towards experienced learning and is investigated through the interpretation of oral and written learning memories. Informants speaking Swedish as a second language participate by recounting their school memories. Using a 'life story' approach the interpretation of these learning memories focuses on lingual skills, education, lingual identity and citizenship. For those whose first language is other than Swedish, mother tongue education becomes a focal point within the school system. The research shows that participating in mother tongue lessons was seen as positive and that taking part made it easier to improve skills not only in the mother tongue but in the second language, Swedish, as well. Through widened linguistic horizons it then becomes possible to develop a multilingual identity and students become aware of their possibilities as active global citizens.

Keywords: *lingual skills, education, lingual identity and citizenship*

Introduction

By improving my skills in the mother tongue, it became much easier for me to continue to learn the Swedish language. When I developed good language skills in the mother tongue and Swedish I became aware of how often I switch between languages and the way I talk depending on the situation.

This quotation from a multilingual teacher student visualizes how he remembers his multilingual development in the Swedish school system. I use this as a starting point in this paper.

About twenty per cent (National Swedish Agency for Education, 2008) of the children in Swedish pre-school education and the nine-year compulsory school system have a foreign or immigrant background. For some of these children are skills in one or more first languages already developed when they came in contact with the Swedish language. Teaching and dialogue takes place by means of language and in order to be able to learn and develop into multilingual individuals, the children need knowledge about and in their mother tongue, and their second language Swedish. Skills in the first and second languages are needed in school and pupils with a first language other than Swedish have the right to be taught and instructed in Mother Tongue and in Swedish as a Second Language.

The right to succeed in school and to be participating pupils as well as citizens, forces schools to develop the necessary education and teacher competence. But studies have shown that pupils with foreign background are less successful in achieving the educational goals both in the nine-year compulsory school and the upper-secondary school when one compares them to their classmates with Swedish background (National Swedish Agency for Education, 2002; 2004a; 2004b; 2008).

Research shows that students with foreign backgrounds are less successful than students with domestic backgrounds in reaching the goals of compulsory education. Failure to achieve the basic goals of the school means that students do not have permission to continued education and have poor conditions for participation in community life. Relative to the average in OECD countries, in Sweden is major difference in reading comprehension among students with foreign backgrounds and students with a Swedish background. The differences have increased since 2000. Using results from PISA the Swedish National Agency for Education shows that fifteen year students of foreign origin who were born in Sweden and abroad reach 70 percent respectively 52 percent basic reading level. The result can be compared to 86 percent of fifteen year old pupils with Swedish background achieving this level. Swedish background means that at least one parent born in Sweden.

Bunar (2001), Bunar and Kallstenius (2007), Lahdenperä (2004) and Torpsten (2008) has interpreted this phenomenon. They found that one explanation can be that the education does not carry out the multicultural society's demands and the pupils' requirements. Other explanations can be teachers' lack of awareness about the pupils' right to be taught in the subjects Mother Tongue and Swedish as a Second Language. Some more explanations can be teachers uncertainty about these subjects and about the pupils' right to instruction or supervision in lessons in their Mother Tongue and Swedish as a Second Language. Teachers are uncertain about how they should examine and evaluate skills in Mother Tongue as well as in Swedish as a Second Language.

1. Mother Tongue, Multilingual Education and Multilingualism

Pupils' continued development of their mother tongue is essential for reaching multilingualism, improving knowledge and for success in school. Good skills in one's mother tongue make it easier to learn other languages and to develop knowledge in other subjects (Ministry of Education and Science, 2011).

Mother Tongue as a subject has a history of thirty year (Torpsten, 2008). There were no specific writings concerning children with foreign background, pupils with another mother tongue than Swedish or multilingual children in the first curriculum, Lgr62 (Ministry of Education and Science, 1962). Since the second curriculum, Lgr69 (Ministry of Education and Science, 1969), there have been formulations that can be understood as Swedish as a second language or multilingualism. The importance of developing multilingualism was expressed in the supplement from 1985. Developing the mother tongue, Swedish as a second language as well as multilingualism have been expressed since 1995 (Ministry of Education and Science, 1995).

Mother tongue skills and linguistic richness is important for learning, for success in school and in life in a multicultural society:

Having access to their native language also facilitates language development and learning in different areas" / ... / "To have a rich variety of languages is important to understand and operate in a society where cultures, philosophies, generations and languages meet" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p 87). Education in mother tongue is expected to stimulate students to read and write in their native language, develop their cultural identity and become multilingual. "Language is man's primary tool to think, communicate and learn. By language people develop their identity, express thoughts and feelings and understand how others feel and think" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p 87). The tuition is expected to "... help students develop a comparative approach to cultures and languages. (Ministry of Education, 2011, p 87)

In Sweden Mother tongue lessons can be organized in different ways. It can be within ordinary time table or outside ordinary time table. Mother tongue can be organized at the children's ordinary school or another school. Swedish as a second language can be organized parallel to Swedish as a mother tongue lessons or as special needs lessons. Education, multilingual students and language development are discussed by Cummins and Schecter (2003). These researchers have studied second language acquisition and teachers ways to meet the multilingual pupils. They note that motivation, feelings of togetherness and the interaction between student and teacher is critical to language acquisition. Best results, reach students when they feel they are part of the class and learning community. And good skills in ones mother tongue have positive effects on the cognitive development.

Cognitive and language development can be understood in terms of widened horizons (Bengtsson, 2001; 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 1997) and widened awareness. When ones earlier experiences are made use of her linguistic understanding and knowledge can be seen as moved to higher levels and new cognitive horizons.

2. Aim, Method and Research Process

Overarching aim of this paper is to highlight second-language pupils' encountering with the Swedish school, mother tongue and multilingual education regarding language development and learning.

An empirical context called experienced learning is investigated by interpreting oral and written narrated learning memories. In order to achieve the overarching aim following questions are specified:

- What aspects are mentioned concerning Mother Tongue, language development and learning?
- What aspects are mentioned concerning lingual skills, lingual identity and citizenship?

Informants speaking Swedish as a second language participate by telling their school and learning memories. By written and verbal communication they related their learning memories as aspects of their life stories, their school stories. The life stories are collected in the form of three letters and three in-depth group discussions in which I acted as discussion leader. An analysis is carried out in terms of deconstructing and constructing. Using a life story approach the interpretation focuses on lingual skills, education, lingual identity and citizenship. Results from this analysis are presented thematically.

3. Presentation of interpretation outcome

The interpretation shows that participating in those lessons was known as positive. Taking part made it easier to improve skills in mother tongue as well as in the second language Swedish. Increased language skills were positive for continued learning, linguistic development, development of bilingualism and multilingualism.

Through widened linguistic horizons it becomes possible to develop an identity as multilingual persons. The informants become aware of their possibilities of being active global citizens. Their ability to perform in different lingual settings becomes visible. When language skills increase they become aware of their identities as multilingual persons.

3.1 Continued linguistic development

In the Swedish school the informants were offered education in and about their Mother Tongue. In their stories they highlight Mother Tongue education as positive for their continued linguistic development. It became much easier to continue developing their second language when skills in their mother tongue improved. In accordance with Bengtsson (2001; 2005) and Merleau-Ponty (1997) this can be understood in terms of an increase in their total language awareness. In Mother Tongue lessons they met both teachers and other pupils who speak the same mother tongue. Their earlier experiences were made use of in the classroom. They could understand and be understood. They participated and were listened to.

It is easier to express oneself in one's mother tongue than it is in a second language. The mother tongue has a foundation of knowledge and another kind of fluency compared with the second or foreign language. In the Mother Tongue lessons the teachers' starting point was the informants own experiences and skills, their needs and capabilities. In these circumstances they recognized Mother Tongue education as important.

3.2 Linguistic development

Skills in languages are transferred when new languages are to be learned. These interpreted learning memories visualize mother tongue skills that are transferred to the second language. Because of this transference acquisition of the second language becomes easier. In accordance with Cummins and Schecter (2003) good skills in the

mother tongue have positive effects on cognitive development as well. In this situation, informants developing and using their mother tongue enable both a way of preserving old skills and a way of feeling a sense of belonging to what is close at hand.

The degree of interaction between pupil and teacher is important for the success or failure of pupils in their language acquisition. The most successful situation is one in which the teacher's organization and teaching strategies lead to a learning environment where the pupils feel accepted by their teacher and everyone has a voice. In this way, the pupils can have a strong sense of belonging both to the learning environment and to society in general (Cummins & Schecter, 2003). Whether or not language diversity, for example, a different mother tongue, is seen as a deficiency, a right or a resource is crucial for the second-language pupils' development. In accordance with Cummins and Schecter (2003) and from an inclusive perspective, different languages and multiculturalism are seen as resources rather than just individual rights or deficiencies.

3.3 Bilingualism in terms of multilingualism

The informants say that their mother tongue was very important for their development of bilingualism in terms of multilingualism. In the stories they speak about their feelings as being *the others*. They were looked at as those who were different from their classmates and divergent compared with the norm. In accordance with Foucault (2002) what is outside the framework for what is usual and therefore normal in school is considered inadequate and deviant. In the compulsory school, a different mother tongue was seen as something inadequate. However, encountering the Swedish school, having a different mother tongue compared to the norm can also be described as possessing a resource. It can be described as something complementary. In accordance with Bengtsson (2001; 2005) and Merleau-Ponty (1997) the informants linguistic awareness resulted in their widened linguistic and language horizons. When their skills in their mother tongue increased, they became aware of the fact that they could switch between their languages dependent on situations. In accordance with Peterson and Åhlund (2007a, 2007b) they were able to perform in many different arenas and settings.

4. To conclude and for the future

Overarching aim of this paper is to highlight second-language pupils' encountering with the Swedish school, mother tongue and multilingual education regarding language development and learning. Informants speaking Swedish as a second language have been asked to tell their life histories based on their learning memories. In the interpretation of those written and oral told memories, I use a life story approach the interpretation of these told learning memories focuses on lingual skills, education, lingual identity and citizenship.

In the life stories the informants highlight their multiculturalism in the multicultural society. They were not mono-lingual; they were bilingual. They have other mother tongues than Swedish and received education in Mother Tongue when they encountered the Swedish school system.

Speaking about learning and cognitive development, it is important to have good knowledge and skills in mother tongue (first language). This is expressed in the curriculum through wording such as language development and learning in different areas is facilitated when one can speak her native language. Linguistic awareness broadens the linguistic horizons and the importance of developing multilingualism has been formulated in the policy documents. One can learn a new language through teaching. But she also learns when she speaks, reads and writes along with other children and young people in school and when she socialize with peers who speak the target language.

The degree of interaction between student and teacher has proved to be crucial for language acquisition, if one will succeed or fail in language development through education. Most successful is if the teacher's organization of and strategies for teaching creates learning environments where students both feel accepted by their teachers and all student voices are allowed to express themselves. This means that students can both feel they are part of a learning community and in the society. The opposite is not to find themselves part of a community that is not to belong to the group.

Motivation and togetherness, according to researchers, are other concepts that strongly associated with learning and motivation are achieved when students feel they are part of a community. In the meeting with the Swedish school and mother tongue, it is important to be together with other native-speaking peers and to develop the mother tongue. It is important to feel an affiliation with peers who speak the same language.

Participating in Mother Tongue lessons was positive. Those lessons made it easier to take steps forward in and make improvements in their language development. Mother tongue skills were transferred to the second language improvement, and it became much easier to continue developing the second language when skills in mother tongue increased. Their skills in their mother tongue and other languages were positive for continued learning and linguistic development. It was very important for the development of bilingualism and multilingualism. Through widened linguistic horizons it became possible to develop an identity as multilingual persons. When skills in different languages increased, the informants became aware of their identities as multilingual persons.

References

- Bengtsson, Jan (2001) *Sammanflätningar. (Intertwinings). Husserls och Merleau Pontys fenomenologi.* Göteborg: Daidalos
- Bengtson, Jan (Red.). (2005) *Med livsvärlden som grund. (Life world as a foundation).* Lund: Studentlitteratur
- Bunar, N. (2001) *Skolan mitt i förorten. Fyra studier om skola, segregation, integration och multikulturalism. (Children in the suburb. Four studies about school, segregation, integration and multiculturalism).* Stockholm; Brutus Östlings Förlag Symposium

- Bunar, N. & Kallstenius, J. (2007) Valfrihet, integration och segregation i Stockholms grundskolor. (Freedom of Choice, integration and segregation in Stockholm compulsory schools). Stockholm; Utbildningsförvaltningen
- Cummins, J. & Schecter, S., R. (2003) School Based language Policy in Cultural Diversity Contexts. In S. R. Schecter & J. Cummins (Eds.). Multilingual Education in Practice. Using diversity as a resource. Portsmouth: Heinemann
- Foucault, Michel (2002) Sexualitetens historia. Band 1. Viljan att veta (Historie de la sexualité, 1976). Göteborg: Daidalos
- Lahdenperä, P. (red.) (2004) Interkulturell pedagogik i teori och praktik. (Intercultural pedagogics in theory and practice). Lund: Studentlitteratur
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1997) Kroppens fenomenologi. (Fenomenology of the body). Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos
- Ministry of Education and Science (1962) Läroplan för grundskolan, Lgr62. (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, Ccs62). Stockholm: Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Education and Science (1969) Läroplan för grundskolan, Lgr69. (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, Ccs69). Stockholm: Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Education and Science (1995) Svenska som andraspråk och betygssättning i svenska. 1995:40. (Swedish as a second language and grading). Stockholm: Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Education and Science (2011) Läroplaner för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet Lgr11. (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre). Stockholm: Ministry of Education and Science
- National Swedish Agency for Education (2002) Utan fullständiga betyg – varför når inte alla elever målen? (Without a complete degree – why does not every child reach the educational goals?). Report 202. Stockholm: National Swedish Agency for Education.
- National Swedish Agency for Education (2004a) Elever med utländsk bakgrund. Svar på regeringsuppdrag. (Pupils with foreign background. Answer to a government task). Stockholm: National Swedish Agency for Education
- National Swedish Agency for Education (2004b) Kartläggning av svenska som andraspråk. (Survey from Swedish as a second language). Stockholm: National Swedish Agency for Education
- National Swedish Agency for Education (2008) Med annat modersmål – elever i grundskolan och skolans verksamhet, Report 321. (With a different mother tongue – pupils in compulsory school and the school activities). Stockholm: The National Swedish Agency for Education
- Peterson, Abby & Åhlund, Alexandra (2007a) Etniciteter: Ras, kön, klass, identitet och kultur. (Ethnicity: Race, gender, class, identity and culture). I A. Peterson & M.

- Hjerm (Red.). Etnicitet. Perspektiv på samhället. (Ethnicity. Perspectives on society). Malmö: Gleerups Förlag
- Peterson, Abby & Åhlund, Alexandra (2007b) Ungdomar och identitet. (Young people and identity). I A. Peterson & M. Hjerm (Red.). Etnicitet. Perspektiv på samhället. (Ethnicity. Perspectives on society). Malmö: Gleerups Förlag
- Torpsten, A-C. (2008) Erbjudet och upplevt lärande i motet med svenska som andraspråk och svensk skola. (Offered and Experienced Learning in the Pupils' Encounters with Swedish as a Second Language). Växjö: University of Växjö