

Multilingual Students Strategies for Participation in Language Contexts

—Students Tell about Language, Language Development and Language Competence in a School Practice

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Abstract

In order to increase knowledge and understanding of school as language practice, a life story approach is used to study multilingual pupils' narratives about their nine years in compulsory school. Texts with the heading *My School Years* are interpreted. Experiences of being outside and initially lacking access to the linguistic contexts in school as well as approaches to linguistic competence or incompetence emerge from the analysis. The pupils' overall language potential is invisible. Other findings are efforts toward what can be described as linguistic uniformity, school and education and development of the pupils' social and cultural capital and linguistic competence.

Keywords

Multilingual Practice, Life Story, Linguistic Uniformity, Competence, Incompetence

1. Introduction

The following quotation is from an essay about starting school written by a pupil in compulsory school Grade 9. The pupil, who is multilingual, first encountered the Swedish language at about age five and has been in Sweden throughout her compulsory schooling. The story is narrated in connection with a national evaluation of compulsory school where Grade 9 pupils were given the task of writing an essay. In the following pupil quotation, the pupil portrays her school years and begins by telling what happened at the start of school nine years ago.

“Soon I have been in school for nine years. When I first started first grade, I was very nervous and scared. I could not speak fluent Swedish. And I had only

lived in Sweden about two years. I did not have many friends either; I just felt a little on the outside. But after a few weeks in the class everything felt better. I had already got many friends, and it was not so hard with the language anymore.” (Skrivbanken, 2009).

With this part of a larger pupil essay, I want to begin this article.

1.1. Aim, Starting Points and Considering’s

The overall aim of this article is to create increased knowledge and understanding of the school as language practice, language development and learning. The starting point is that told school experiences from compulsory school can contribute to understanding and knowing about school life when the pupils are multilingual, their native language is not the school language, and the school language, Swedish, is not fully mastered. Another aspect is that pupils’ told compulsory school experiences can contribute to knowing about and understanding how pupils perceive, organize and connect school experiences with other life experiences. Events, relationships and encounters that multilingual pupils depict in essays about their nine compulsory school years, are therefore the basis. I consider which events are narrated, what significance the pupils give these narratives, what the narratives mean for them and what they say to us about their relationship to the school language practice, multilingualism, the school language as Swedish, and learning in all subjects.

1.2. Compulsory School as School Practice and Attitudes toward Multilingualism

In order to acquire an education in Swedish schools, one needs to have good knowledge and skills in one’s native language(s) and in the language of instruction, Swedish. Almost one-fifth of pupils in Swedish preschools and compulsory schools have foreign background, and some of these pupils have recently immigrated. Many are already capable with one or more languages when they encounter the Swedish language, and for the majority of them, Swedish is a second language. In the mandatory schooling, pupils have the right to participate in instruction in the two school subjects, one’s native language and Swedish as a second language. Instruction in these subjects has been offered for just over forty years, and according to each respective subject curriculum (Skolverket, 2015) the pupils are given the opportunity to develop their native language and develop the second language, Swedish, in speaking and writing in order to be confident in their language ability and to be able to use language in various contexts for different purposes. The organization of the instruction in the native language and in Swedish as a second language most often occurs in school as separate instructional practices where only the target language is intended to be used in teaching the subject. Moreover, the native language subject is often organized outside the ordinary school schedule (Svensson & Torpsten, 2013). This form of educational policy with distinct instructional practices negatively affects the pupils’ perceptions of their own language identity and ability to acquire knowledge

(Cummins, 2007; García, 2012).

Research emphasizes that developing the native language is important and that access to native language instruction has significance for multilingual pupils' literacy development as well as personal and cultural identity, emotional and social maturity, and cognitive development (Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Janks, 2010). However, in the Swedish school practice, a native language and native language instruction are more often regarded as a problem rather than an opportunity by teachers and management. Studies of the manner in which teachers interact with multilingual pupils show that the children's different native languages or multilingualism often is regarded as a difficulty or deficiency, not as a resource. The multilingual pupils take on the role of seeming less capable (Torpsten, 2008; 2013). Other studies show further that teachers encourage similarity and uniformity in school (Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Lahdenperä, 2004; Lunneblad & Asplund, 2009). The attitude of the person who is to learn, attitudes from the environment, attitudes toward the language to be learned and to the person learning, are critical for the acquisition of a new language and for overall language development.

Children and young people develop their language skills when they socialize with friends who speak the language or languages to be developed. They develop their language through speaking, reading and writing together with others in school and also through instruction (Cummins, 2006; Cummins & Schecter, 2003). And in instructional situations, the interaction between pupil and teacher is central for whether or not pupils succeed in their language development. Ideally, the pupils experience they are included in the class learning community and that the teacher organizes strategies for the instruction which lead to environments where the pupils feel that they and their skills are accepted and valuable (Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Cummins, 2006).

1.3. Language Potential, Learning and Translanguaging

Translanguaging (Williams, 1996), meaning strategic and concomitant use of multilingual pupils' full language potential in the school learning practice, benefits language development as well as knowledge development. Thinking in terms of a resource, where the pupils' overall language potential is taken into account in the school language practice, can benefit learning in all subjects and promote development of identity and knowledge (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2012; Cummins & Persad, 2014). When instruction based on pupils' linguistic resources is critical for multilingual pupils' thinking and learning, there also appear to be rewards for the individual and society (compare with Meier & Conteh, 2014).

Given the above reasoning, it becomes problematic if the pupils in the instructional situation are encouraged to develop language uniformity based on problems and negative attitudes towards multilingualism or if the pupils do not feel accepted as capable.

1.4. Postcolonial Theory and Social Capital

In postcolonial theory (Fanon, 1971; Said, 2004) and critical multiculturalism

(May, 1999) historically and socially-constructed ideas about majority and minority cultures are discussed and questioned. Stereotypes, colonial structures and how they are shaped, are discussed through highlighting the contrasts, and the maintaining and creating of identities. The theory of one country, one people, one language and monolingualism (May, 1999) is an example. Based on this, government initiatives and education with the goal to create language uniformity can be regarded as a way to draw boundaries, create social and moral order, based on what is good versus bad in a country (Milani, 2007). This theory as the basis can be used to understand the separate instructional practices and boundaries between the pupils who master the school language and are monolingual, and the pupils who have not mastered the school language but speak other languages well.

When a pupil with Swedish as the native language is deemed as more competent and capable in comparison to a pupil with another native language, who is judged to be less competent or not as capable, stereotypes are created. In such a way super-ordination/superiority and subordination/inferiority are created (compare with Fanon, 1971) in school. And this order brings power, where the pupil identity as subordinated is created when the pupil mirrors himself or herself in the super-ordinated teachers' or other pupils' low expectations. For example, those who master a language can exercise power over those who do not. The one who possesses the language decides the context, the world that is expressed through language and has preferential interpretation in various language contexts. Not mastering the language and not having access to the linguistic contexts can be expressed as not being there or not existing for the others who do. In this non-existence, obstacles are created rather than opportunities, and thereby dependence. One way for pupils to exist and appear as better and more competent in this context, can be to develop linguistically as uniform and be linguistically alike in comparison with the super-ordinated, with the teachers and classmates.

Based on the above, for a pupil who neither masters the school language, in the present study, Swedish, nor has access to the school language contexts, it can mean to not exist in relation to friends and teachers who also do not expect the pupil to be competent. For pupils it may also bring the sense that they are inadequate, incapable and outside the class learning community if they do not master the classmates' and teachers' common language. Mastery of another language, another native language, other than the school language, in the school context does not give access to the school language environment. In this context, good skills in the school language and linguistic uniformity (May, 1999; Milani, 2007) are the keys to closed doors, to co-existence and participation.

2. Empirical Data, Methodology and Implementation

Written narratives about phases of life, life stories (Riessman, 1993) are chosen as the empirical data for this study. The narratives are written as essays in connection with a national evaluation, and are taken from the database Skrivbanken

(Skrivbanken, 2009). The following selection criteria were established: respondent was born in Sweden with both parents born abroad, has oneself immigrated, has come to Sweden before starting school, has come to Sweden during school grades 1 to 5, or has come to Sweden during school grades 6 to 9, speaks Swedish as a second language, and the title of the essay is *My School Years*. Given this basis, I found two essays about the narrating pupil's nine years in the Swedish compulsory school.

The chosen essays were written in an examination situation where the pupils had received instructions to present their school years and their view of school in essay form. The pupils were aware that what they wrote would be assessed by teachers. Since the pupils got to decide for themselves what they wanted to write about, they also created their pupil identities through the narratives, and they also chose how they wanted to fit in and appear for their teachers with their stories. In the essays, the pupils depict events in life as they understand them while also creating their stories in collaboration with those who listen, that is, with their teachers. Therefore, what they chose to tell appears in this context as extra important for them (compare with Pérez Prieto, 2006). As the researcher at the receiving end, I have neither influenced the essay content nor the design. However, my understanding and my research interest impacts the interpretation of the essays, and by placing this study's pupils in the category of second-language pupils, I assign them to a group. This is significant in that I have chosen to analyze stories about nine years of schooling written by pupils who participate in the instruction of the school subject, Swedish as a second language (compare with Karlsson, 2012). Although I have no influence on what the pupils have already written about, I still become in some ways a co-creator of what is told. My research interests, my way of categorizing, my understanding and the questions I put to what the pupils have described, are based on and influenced by my long experience as a second language teacher, a teacher educator and a researcher in this field.

2.1. School Life, Remembered and Narrated Events

School life covers a range of events of which part is forgotten while other parts live on in the pupils' memories. That which lives on can be told and in that way also becomes possible for others to enjoy. When a pupil narrates and focuses specific events from her school life and how these were handled, the pupil also organizes her life story and gives what is told meaning (Reissman, 1993). When an individual speaks about events, she also reflects on what is told, which involves recreating memory, depicting and narrating about knowing or being able to do something in the past (ibid). In a subjective depiction of parts of a whole life, told as a series of circumstances and events, the narrator chooses what is to be reconstructed and how. Each story thus becomes personal testimony of important events. The stories speak about how the individual perceives what happened, and they thereby convey parts of the narrator's life through the personal story (Atkinson, 1998; Bengtsson, 2005; Bruner, 1991; Johansson, 2005; Kohler,

2008; Polkinhorne, 2005; Riessman, 1993).

2.2. Life Story Approach—The Study of Narrated Experiences and Understanding

With a life story approach (Bengtsson, 2005) it is possible to get close to something that another person tells. In this way it also becomes possible to interpret and understand people's reality, to understand another person's experiences of life. Hereby the understanding can increase of the lived lives of both the narrator and other people (Atkinson, 1998; Polkinhorne, 2005; Johansson, 2005). The insight, reflection, and the understanding are based on that which the narrator herself chooses as important to tell.

Based on narratives about life, life stories, and personal memories from life, the pupils' essays in this study are interpreted as both parts of their whole life stories and narrated memories of their schoollife (Atkinson, 1998; Johansson, 2005; Polkinhorne, 2005; Riessman, 1993). First I read the essays several times in order to clarify themes and see connections in the texts. I focused on what is narrated about the time in school, critical events and how the pupils presented themselves (ibid). My thematic interpretations of life in school therefore become school images constructed by myself as researcher where the pupils' own words form the basis. These thematic interpretations also form the basis for my reflection. To obtain a more general understanding of what is narrated, in the following presentation I link the analysis results to postcolonial theory and to theories of social capital and of translanguaging.

Through analysis of the narrating pupils' experiences over nine years in school, I want to increase the knowledge and understanding of school as language practice, language development and learning when the pupils are multilingual, their native language is not the school language, and the school language is not fully mastered. This is possible by clarifying how pupils give events meaning when they present themselves in various contexts, and perceive, organize and connect school experiences with other life experiences when they organize, reflect over and evaluate events that happened earlier (Atkinson, 1998; Bengtsson, 2005; Bruner, 1991; Johansson, 2005; Kohler, 2008; Polkinhorne, 2005; Riessman, 1993). The questions I ask the essays are the following:

- Which events, encounters and relationships are narrated?
- What importance do the pupils give to what is told?
- What does the narrated mean for the pupils?
- What does the narrated say to us about the pupils' relationship to the school-language practice, language development and learning?

3. Results, Analysis and Theoretical Basis

In the analysis three themes become visible and the following section is an analysis and connections to theories. These three themes are: *Without a key to the school's linguistic contexts-not speaking openly*; *Majority language, minority language and language uniformity* and *Importance of the school and instruction*

for increased social and cultural capital. The end of this section highlights *Pupil identities-the pupil emerges from what is told* and *Events and encounters that are critical with “a before” and “an after”*. The thematic presentation recurs in the text with quotations from the essays. The quotations are translated from the original Swedish.

The analyzed essays are presented in an appendix under the headings, *The story about feeling on the outside* and *The story about daring to speak openly*. Both essays are authentic, meaning they are not edited though they are translated.

3.1. Without a Key to the School’s Linguistic Contexts—Not Speaking Openly

Starting school without having acquired the school language is experienced as a limitation in the school’s linguistic contexts and an obstacle to relating to other pupils, which can be understood based on Fanon’s (1971) discussion about the importance of language as a key to closed language-doors. When the pupil did not possess the school language, the key to the inside group’s locked doors was missing, which became an obstacle in regard to the class linguistic contexts. Lacking this key, not being able to communicate with friends, appears in the narratives as being linguistically inadequate, linguistically incompetent. One of the analyzed essays expresses this experience of inadequacy as, “*My Swedish was really bad. I could not speak correctly.*” Seen in the light of what Fanon (1971) describes as the creating of subordination and super-ordination and the possession of language, this appears as a perceived weakness, as a deficiency. The pupil was considered in this educational context as weak and inferior to other pupils who had mastered the school language and who were there by also superior. The pupil is considered inadequate and incompetent (compare with Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Lahdenperä, 2004; Lunneblad & Asplund, 2009; Torpsten, 2008; 2013). The pupil in this way also did not possess the world expressed through the school language. The same pupil also writes that “*I was really good in school when I was little, but I had a little ‘problem’ with me.*” That pupils perceive themselves as incorrect can also be understood on the basis that people are each other’s mirrors (Fanon, 1971) and that it is through the other that we create the perception or image of ourselves. Based on the above, the second-language pupil’s identity was constituted as incorrect and inaccurate when the pupil reflected herself in the others’ perceptions and low expectations, for example, the mastery of the school language. In this context, the other is made up of the pupils and teachers who possessed the school language, context and values.

3.2. Majority Language, Minority Language and Linguistic Uniformity

The pupils in this study can be assumed to have the experience of attending school, where Swedish was spoken by the majority. At the start of school they mastered languages other than Swedish, but these were not spoken by many in

Sweden. In school these two pupils developed competence in the school language, Swedish, and that became their second language. Based on postcolonial theory (Fanon, 1971; Said, 2004) and critical multiculturalism (May, 1999) with ideas about majority and minority cultures as socially-created dichotomies, the second-language pupils in this context become representatives of various minorities. They have mastery of languages spoken by a minority of people in Sweden. That the pupils belong to a minority implies that there are other pupils who make up a majority, and in the Swedish school, the majority of the pupils have Swedish as their first language, their native language, while the minority of the pupils have Swedish as their second language. They have another native language and their overall language competence is different from that of the majority pupils. The reason why the pupils in this study did not possess the school language at the start of school was because their time in Sweden had been relatively short. *"I had only lived in Sweden about two years,"* writes one of the pupils.

From the descriptions about school life, it further appears that pupils are taught the school language, Swedish, in separate groups and sometimes at other schools. *"I only got to go to that school for two months, if I remember correctly, because then I was sent to a school where I could learn Swedish,"* writes one of the pupils in her essay. It becomes clear throughout that the second-language instruction was organized in special instructional groups that were separate from the other instruction. The instruction was organized as separate instructional practices which according to Cummins (2007) and García (2012) neither serves the pupils' linguistic identity nor their ability to gain knowledge and learning. Seen in the light of a power perspective (Fanon, 1971) and based on second-language pupils' inadequacy in mastering the language, the above appears as an approach to compensate through education for what is perceived to be the pupils' linguistic deficiencies, in the sense of creating linguistic order and language uniformity (Milani, 2007). There was a quest in the school, through education, to create linguistic uniformity through separation (compare with Cummins, 2007; García, 2012). The quotation, *"After six months in the same school, my Swedish got much better and I could read and write like all the other children,"* reveals the pupil's experience that linguistic uniformity and competence were achieved. The pupil no longer saw herself mirrored as different and incompetent in the classmates' and teachers' eyes (compare with Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Lahdenperä, 2004; Lunneblad & Asplund, 2009; Torpsten, 2008; 2013). It therefore became possible to appear as linguistically similar (compare with Milani, 2007) in the Swedish-speaking classmates' eyes. The quotation, *'School is something important. I think that I am who I am because of school, and also because of where I come from and where I grew up and most importantly, I believe that my family and culture have a lot to do with it,* also makes visible the pupil's awareness of life before and outside school; the family and the family's culture have great importance for one's identity and knowledge development (compare with Williams, 1996; García, 2012; Cummins & Persad, 2014).

3.3. The Importance of Language for Increased Social and Cultural Capital

Mastering the school language, Swedish, appears in the stories as a desirable competence that makes it possible to dare to participate in conversations without anxiety. It also emerges that the competence in the Swedish language continued to develop when the pupils' access to the school linguistic contexts became possible. *"I was sent back to XXX school in time for second grade. But now I dared to speak more openly and wholeheartedly,* writes one of the pupils in the study. Based on ideas about social capital (Bourdieu, 2005) the above appears as that the second-language pupils initially bore low social capital because they did not possess the school language. Increased language skills led to both increased social capital and perceived competence for them, which in turn meant that they were given greater power over the overall language situation. The quotation, *"With each passing year my Swedish got much better,"* expresses increased social capital and competence. The increased capital and this competence made higher social status possible, and the risk of appearing less knowledgeable (Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Lahdenperä, 2004; Lunneblad & Asplund, 2009; Torpsten, 2008) or less rational (Fanon, 1971) diminished. When the Swedish language was mastered to a greater degree, the worry of embarrassing oneself also disappeared. It became easier to socialize which also seems as the moral order was re-created where the pupils' linguistic borders were re-drawn differently (compare with Milani, 2007).

Developed skills in the Swedish language also mean increased cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2005) through education. The pupils in the study conquered higher status in school through instruction and through their competence, which in turn means that school was experienced as more fun and they dared to be more open in relationships with other pupils. One of them describes the difference between possessing versus not possessing the language in the following way: *"That made me different then, as opposed to now I am always open, cheerful, fun and independent."* In step with mastering the Swedish language better and better, with the increased social and cultural capital, the pupils perceived the school as a better place to be. *"But after a few weeks in the class everything felt better. I already had many friends, and it was not so hard with the language anymore,"* writes one of the pupils. In step with the increased linguistic competence in the school language, the fear of embarrassing oneself also disappeared and it became easier to socialize with classmates.

Learning a new language and a new culture is presented in the narratives as complicated. *"I believe that was why I learned the language so quickly, because I was young,"* writes one of the pupils in the study, which thereby can be understood to show reflected, high expectations. Seen in the light of what Fanon (1971) writes about mirroring oneself in the super-ordinates' expectations and the creating of the identity as skillful. As an example, the teachers' high expectations on a young pupil isosimply acquire the new language and in this context through separate language instruction. The attitude toward the pupil and the high ex-

pectations can be thought to have facilitated the language acquisition and to have contributed to the pupil's image of herself as having strengthened linguistic competence (compare with Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Cummins, 2006). When the pupil learned the language and reflected herself in the teachers', or someone else's, perception of her (Fanon, 1971) as linguistically competent (compare with Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Lahdenperä, 2004; Lunneblad & Asplund, 2009), she perceived herself as skillful.

3.4. Pupil Identities—The Pupil Emerges from What Is Told

Both the pupil alone and he or she together with many friends, emerges from the narratives. Images of being anxious and afraid in certain situations and feeling content, enthusiastic and well in other situations also become visible. The anxious and afraid pupil was unable to communicate with school friends and/or afraid of other pupils because of feeling on the outside, being bullied, being unfairly treated or experiencing other conflicts. The content and enthusiastic pupil learned a lot in school, communicated and discussed with her friends. The pupil who initially did not possess the school language, but who acquired it through both her own effort and through instruction, becomes visible. The image of the pupil who took control over her language acquisition, widened her linguistic perspective, dared and could participate in the classroom community, namely, created for herself admission to the language community also emerges from what is told.

The experience of being on the outside, of having gone through upheaval and the feeling of entering into a community become visible in the stories. Wigg (2008) who has studied the consequences of having been forced to flee and begin again, demonstrates three identities called alienation, ambivalence and activity. For the pupils in this study, the experiences of not mastering the school language and of being cut off from the class community, led to the macting; they struggled to acquire the school language. This activity made it possible for them to participate in the ordinary instruction and to gain access to the class community and the linguistic contexts there. The pupils were offered admission when they were deemed to be competent, when they had mastered the school language well. The pupils position themselves as happier and more independent in line with the increased competence in the Swedish language. Given the above reasoning, mastery of the school language appears as obvious for success in school and for one's own well-being.

3.5. Events That Are Critical with “A before” and “An after”

The start of school is an event which appears in the narratives as critical for the pupils. In what is told, there is clearly “a before” and “an after” to the start of elementary school. Not being able to express oneself like one's classmates in various situations or expressing oneself incorrectly and being separated from one's class, in a segregated instructional practice, in order to practice Swedish, appear as daunting and critical experiences and events. The opportunity to get back to

one's class and to the community when one has obtained a sufficient level of proficiency in the Swedish language, marks a turning point. Since the pupils are not able to possess the school language, the language practice that the pupils themselves organized and the language training in the separate instructional groups, involve critical events with a before and an after in relation to incompetence/competence, subordination and super-ordination, power over the school language, access to the inner group, and the pupils' possibility to have preferential interpretation of the school language practice.

4. Conclusions

In this study I have analyzed and interpreted pupil essays which told memories from life in school. The study was limited to two essays written by compulsory school pupils with Swedish as a second language and both essays had the title *My School Years*. My starting point was that the pupils' remembered and narrated compulsory school memories would be able to contribute to knowledge about and understanding of how these pupils perceive, organize and connect these school experiences with other life experiences. Events, encounters and relationships that the pupils told were therefore the basis when I took part in the pupils' subjective recreation of memories, depicting and narrating about knowing or doing something in their past (Riessman, 1993).

In my analysis I was interested in which events were narrated, what importance the pupils gave to what was told, what the stories mean for them, and what they say to us about their relationship to the school language practice and to the school language, Swedish. To have the opportunity to take part in the pupils' memories and told school experiences has therefore been critical for the results of this study, and the findings are closely considered in this concluding section.

In the analysis and interpretation various images emerge. The anxious pupil, the pupil who takes charge over her situation and the content, positive pupil become visible in the stories. In this context the experiences of not being able to express oneself or being anxious about saying something wrong and the desire to achieve admission to the school language context, are clear. Also the experiences of being on the outside at school are revealed. And the relationship of being subordinate and not competent with respect to one's classmates and to the school practice is clear. Other things that appear are experiences of various approaches to linguistic competence or incompetence in relation to the school language. Pupils' actions and efforts toward what can be described as linguistic uniformity in relation to the school language and the importance of the school and education for increasing social and cultural capital, also become visible. Through the separated instruction, the uneven relationship as incompetent and subordinated could be changed toward a more equal relationship.

In this study I have made clear the significance of being participatory in the school language context and the importance of perceiving oneself and being perceived as competent instead of incompetent in various classroom and language practices. The narrating pupils' relationship to the school practice appears

initially as subordinated. It is filled with both anguish and yearning. There is the anxiety of not being adequate or of embarrassing oneself, being teased for not speaking correctly, and the yearning and effort toward feeling involved and having access. The super-ordinates' awareness of attitudes toward pupils, to linguistic differences and attention to organization and implementation of second-language instruction, separate practices, appear as meaningful for the pupils' well-being in the school pedagogical practice. Mastery of the school language, meaning, linguistic uniformity, is important for the narrating pupils and the school language practice.

Thus new questions which arise deal with how instruction in general and in Swedish as a second language in particular can be arranged so that pupils are not segregated, subordinated, anxious for appearing as incapable and not set outside the classroom community or other contexts in school. New questions also consider in what ways strategies are used in the school linguistic practices for developing and affirming pupils' overall language competence, that is, language practice based on translanguaging.

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Appendix—Two Authentic Essays, Meaning They Are Not Edited though They Are Translated

The Story about Feeling on the Outside

“Soon I have been in school for nine years. And I have changed school only once, and that was when I started high school. When I first started first grade, I was very nervous and scared. I could not speak fluent Swedish. And I had only lived in Sweden about two years. I did not have many friends either; I just felt a little on the outside. But after a few weeks in the class everything felt better. I had already got many friends, and it was not so hard with the language anymore. Being an immigrant and changing culture and traditions is not easy. Especially if you are an adult. Soon I will finish here and start high school. It feels strange and I get nervous every time I think about it. But when I think back over my school years, it has been fun, strange, difficult, etc. Every time I have changed class or when I changed school, I have always thought the worst. I have always thought negatively, but now before high school I have actually begun to think positively. Of course, I am nervous and anxious but I believe that will pass; I have done this before. It feels good to finish middle school soon. I feel like I have grown up so much now; soon I am an adult and will build my own future. School is something important. I think I am who I am because of school, and also because of where I come from and where I grew up and most importantly, I believe that my family and culture have a lot to do with it. I cannot express and describe my thoughts, feelings and memories in a way that you can understand how my school years have looked or been like. But I can say that I have spent almost nine long years of my life going to school, and that is something I am never going to regret.”

The Story about Daring to Speak Openly

“If I think hard enough, I can remember pretty much about elementary school and middle school. It all began when I started first grade. I was really good in school when I was little, but I had a little ‘problem’ with me. My Swedish was really bad. I could not speak correctly. I was scared that if I said something wrong, people would either laugh or tease me and then laugh. I only got to go to that school for two months, if I remember correctly, because then I was sent to a school where I could learn Swedish. When our bus arrived, there was a teacher standing outside waiting for me. We went to a classroom and I got to meet more people. When the school day was over, I went back on the same white bus and the same driver. When I got home I sat down on the floor, put my hand in my schoolbag and took out a Swedish handbook. I started to write and study what I wrote. Each day was the same for me. I wake up, get out of bed, into the shower and then out, get dressed, eat breakfast and go. After six months in the same school, my Swedish became much better and I could read and write like all the other children. I was sent back to XXX-school in time for second grade. But now I dared to speak more openly and wholeheartedly. My days in elementary school were all the same. With each passing year my Swedish got much better. I liked/

like to talk to people that you must use certain words. It made me feel better. That made me different then, as opposed to now I am always open, cheerful, fun and independent. When I got my grades in eighth grade, I was not happy. Since that day I decided to do better. In ninth grade I started the day with a book and finished the day with a book. If there had not been the work in the school where I am going now, I would have fallen behind a lot. In ninth grade we have had fewer tests and exams but more advanced words, speech and assignments. 'And here I am sitting and doing the National Exam, which I hope wholeheartedly to finish and pass.' We will not tell the rest of the story and the future."



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