

National minorities, national self-awareness and intercultural learning processes among student teachers in Sweden¹

Christina Rodell Olgaç²

Summary

A period of nationalism during 200 years has led to a predominant image of Sweden as a cultural, religious and linguistic homogenous country. Even though this historical homogeneity has often been emphasized, it is a myth that can be deconstructed. Like most other nations, Sweden has always had a diverse population. Since the year 2000, Sweden has recognised the Samis, Tornedalers, Swedish Finns, Roma, and Jews as official national minorities in the country. This paper discusses how an intercultural approach in a course for student teachers concerning the five national minorities can challenge hegemonic monocultural and monolingual discourses of national

self-awareness in the master narrative of the country, and how an inclusive discourse of a “democratic credo” in relation to the minorities, can develop among the student teachers.

Key words: National Self-awareness - National Minorities - Student Teachers - Intercultural Pedagogy.

Received: 27/03/14
First evaluation: 14/04/14
Second evaluation: 10/05/14
Accepted: 15/05/14

Introduction

The historical homogeneity of Sweden has often been highlighted, but like most other nations, Sweden has always had a diverse population. This perceived historical homogeneity of the country has had far reaching consequences for the lives of the minorities, even in school contexts. A change is now going on since, Sweden in the year 2000, ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages recognising the Samis, Tornedalers, Swedish Finns, Roma, and Jews as official national minorities and Sami, Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani chib, and Yiddish as official minority languages in the country (KU 2005). The monocultural and monolingual image of the country is nevertheless still very much predominant in the national self-awareness. The aim of this paper is to discuss how an intercultural approach, in a course for student teachers, concerning the five historical national minorities, can challenge hegemonic monocultural and monolingual discourses of national self-awareness in the master narrative of the country, and promote the inclusion of the minorities in school contexts.

The Nordic countries from a minority perspective

To understand the minority situation in Sweden today, it is necessary to look at the geographical location of the country. Sweden, together with Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland, are defined as the

Nordic countries with common frontiers among them. From a linguistic point of view, there are also commonalities between the countries as Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Icelandic are related Scandinavian languages and speakers of the different languages can usually understand each other fairly well, or often speak a mixture of these languages when they meet. Finnish however, belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family, and it is not related to the Scandinavian languages. Swedish, instead, was the language of power during more than six hundred years of Swedish dominion in Finland, when Sweden and Finland formed one country. Likewise, migration between Finland and Sweden has always been common and there is still a Swedish speaking minority living mainly in the coastal areas of Finland. In 1809 Sweden lost Finland, when Finland became an autonomous Grand-Duchy of the Russian Empire until its independence in 1917. The border between Finland and Sweden was drawn in the north through the Finnish-speaking Tornedal Valley along the Torne River in 1809. Denmark included Norway until 1814, when Sweden and Norway formed a union until 1905 (cf. Pulma 2006; von Brömssen & Rodell Olgaç, 2010).

When we discuss about minorities in a Nordic context, it is important to bear in mind that almost all of them are transnational. One of the minorities, the Samis, is the indigenous population of this area, and as other indigenous populations around the world through history, it has suffered colonisation and various forms of oppression. Today

Sapmi, the Sami area, covers northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of northern Russia. Minorities of Finnish descent, *kväner*, also reside in northern Norway and in southern parts of the country, *skogsfinner*, “Forest Finns”³ both recognized as national minorities. The Romani and Jewish minorities live in all the Nordic countries and are recognized as national minorities except in Denmark, where only Germans in the border areas adjacent to Germany are recognised as a national minority. In Finland we find the oldest Muslim minority in the Nordic countries, the Tartars, who migrated to the country during the 19th century and today they are one of the six recognized national minorities in the country. Another of the minorities in Finland is also an ancient Russian minority dating back to migrations since the 18th century. Iceland does not have any recognized national minorities and immigration has so far been minimal (Rodell Olgaç, 2010).

The impact of the recognition of the national minorities on educational policies

The recognition of the national minorities in Sweden in 2000 led to certain curricula changes in the field of education, with the inclusion of contents about minorities in the school curricula and syllabi. There has however been a discrepancy between policy and practice noted by, for example, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), that recommends in its third report about Sweden in 2005 “that the Swedish authorities ensure that

all schools educate their pupils regarding the culture, language, religion and history of national minorities” (ECRI 2005: 10). In addition, a study on the discrimination of the national minorities in the Swedish education system, the Ombudsman⁴ against Ethnic Discrimination (DO) states that the curricula changes have so far had little impact on school content and teacher education. The Ombudsman has recommended the National Agency for Higher Education to investigate about strategies to ensure that all student teachers will develop sufficient knowledge regarding the national minorities’ languages, cultures, and human rights as a part of their teacher education programs (DO 2008: 42). Today, the current curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the leisure-time center (Lgr11) since 2011 stipulates that the school is responsible to ensure that each pupil on completing compulsory school “has obtained knowledge about the cultures, languages, religion and history of the national minorities” (Skolverket 2011: 15). Moreover, the knowledge about the five national minorities is more emphasized, especially in the syllabi of History, Civics, and Swedish.

The diversity of Sweden of today

The population of Sweden today comprises not only the national minorities but in addition many different migrant groups that have arrived in the country, especially since the middle of last century. According to Statistics Sweden (SCB), the population in Sweden in August

2012 was 9.5 million people (www.scb.se 2012-10-13). As Sweden does not allow ethnic registration, figures concerning minorities and migrants are therefore approximate. The number of Samis in Sweden is estimated to be 20,000 – 35,000 people, the Swedish Finns between 450,000 – 600,000, the Tornedalers about 50,000; 50,000 – 100,000 Roma and 20,000 – 25,000 Jews (Länsstyrelsen i Stockholms län & Sametinget, 2011). Approximately 20 percent of the Swedish population have a foreign background, i.e. people having both parents born outside Sweden or themselves being born outside the country. According to the Swedish Migration Board, the largest groups of asylum seekers in 2012 (January-September) are from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Serbia and Eritrea (www.migrationsverket.se 2012-10-23). To conclude, one can state that although Sweden has a small population, the historical minorities and contemporary migrations contribute to a vast linguistic and cultural diversity.

The national minorities in Sweden: a brief historical background

The national minorities in Sweden, through history and as minorities and indigenous populations elsewhere, have suffered oppression and atrocities from the state and the mainstream society. Colonisation of the Sami areas in Sweden began towards the end of the 17th century, when the reindeer-herding Samis were forced to move further north and their land rights were

restricted. According to Amft (2000: 200) the Swedish state used legislation to create a Sami population based on the dominant stereotypical notions of how a “genuine” Sami should be with the consequence that the state split the Sami population into two separate groups, one connected to the reindeer herding with certain rights, and one without this connection and thus with no special rights (Mörkenstam 1999). At the beginning of the 20th century, another prevalent strategy of the state was to try to maintain the traditional Sami way of living through the separation of the Sami children of reindeer-herding families from the mainstream school system and to place them in separate nomadic schools with limited resources where they were initially taught in Sami, and later on from 1925 in Swedish (Mörkenstam 1999; Amft 2000). The Sami children from non-reindeer-herding families were placed in the public school system and were taught only in Swedish. Through these dichotomizing policies the Swedish state created an “authentic” Sami population from a stereotype idea of the Samis. The effects of these policies are still a reality in the country and issues related to land and water rights are still of central concern for the Samis. Today 2,500 Samis earn their income from reindeer herding (Sametinget & Regeringskansliet, 2004: 32).

As mentioned above, there has always been a strong connection between Sweden and Finland, but the colonial features of the Swedish state policy towards Finland have been persistent, whereby the Finns were generally

considered “primitive” native people (Catomeris, 2004). Traces of these colonial attitudes towards the Swedish Finns can still be found. When Sweden lost Finland in 1809 and the border between the two countries was drawn along the Torne River in the north, “the Torne River border meant the splitting into two halves of a culturally and linguistically homogenous area and population” (Wande, 2003: 170). On the Swedish side of the river, Swedish became the only language taught at school from the 1880s onwards. Because of the political and military threat from Russia, the goal with this language policy was to create strong links between the Tornedal region and the rest of Sweden. The aim was a linguistic assimilation of the Tornedalers “in a harmonized totally Swedish culture” (KU 2005: 108, my translation). The *Meänkieli* minority language of the Tornedalers today is the variety of Finnish developed on the Swedish side of the border, with strong influence of Swedish lexicon and grammar. *Meänkieli* along with Finnish and Sami are languages that, throughout history, have been oppressed in various ways. For example, between 1888 and the middle of the 20th century, it was not permitted to use Sami, Finnish and *Meänkieli* languages at school in the northern part of Sweden, neither as languages of instruction nor for general communication, not even during school breaks (cf. von Brömssen & Rodell Olgaç 2010; Rodell Olgaç, 2010).

The two more recent minorities of the five minorities are the Roma and the Jews. A written reference to the Roma in Sweden first appeared five hundred years ago in 1512, although small groups of Roma probably had been travelling in the country before that date. Today the Romani population comprises many different Romani groups including the Travellers, that have arrived during different historical periods from various parts of Europe speaking different varieties Romani chib (Bijvoet & Fraurud 2007; SOU 2010:55). Many are Catholics, others Orthodox Russians or Muslims and, during recent years many Roma have also come to adhere to the Pentecostal Church. Many Roma still continue to be a target of discrimination, racism and antiziganism in Sweden (DO, 2004). Concerning education, the Roma in general were historically prohibited from attending school until the middle of last century. One of the reasons was forced nomadism, which meant that many of them generally were not allowed to stay for more than three weeks in one place. It was not until the end of the 1960s that the Roma were allowed into permanent housing and thus able to attend school on a regular basis. Since the recognition of the Roma as a national minority, there has been a cultural and linguistic revitalization of the minority and a demand for more inclusion in education (Rodell Olgaç, 2006). Although a change is going on, the absenteeism and drop-out rate from school is high and still only a few people continue to higher education.

Regarding the Jewish minority, Jews have come to Sweden during different historical periods, often as a consequence of the persecutions against the Jewish population elsewhere. Since the 17th century groups of Jews have found their way to Sweden, but a Jewish religious denomination was for the first time allowed at the end of the 18th century. Simultaneously, a special regulation was introduced in 1782 limiting the residential areas of the Jewish population, as well as their professional occupations and who they could marry to, and further impeding them to be elected as a member of the parliament. These regulations were finally abolished in 1838. Towards the end of the 18th century Jews arrived from Central Europe, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of last century from Eastern Europe. There were other Jews that arrived also during the Second World War as well as in the 1950's and 1960's (Bredfeldt 2008). Due to assimilatory policies, the Jewish culture and Yiddish have had a hidden role in the Swedish society (DO, 2008). Jewish children in Sweden have generally attended public schools, but in 1955 the Hillel school was founded in Stockholm for Jewish refugee children from Germany (Borevi 2002). Antisemitism is still a reality, especially on the Internet (ECRI, 2005).

Theoretical perspectives

When discussing the educational situation of the national minorities in Sweden, it is important to take into account that in Swedish educational

policy there have been two dominant and contradictory (exclusivist and inclusivist) discourses relating to minority and migrant children that Muncio (1993) has called as "national self-awareness" and "the democratic credo". The discourse of "national self-awareness" refers to the highly-pervasive notion of Sweden as a monolingual and mono-cultural nation-state, contrasting directly with the historical experience of Sweden as a multi-ethnic nation-state described above. The ideology of national self-awareness has been the hegemonic and normative discourse throughout the early 20th century and remains an exclusivist tendency in contemporary society for the situation of minority and migrant communities (cf. Catomeris, 2004; Hagerman, 2006). As a contrast, the discourse of the "democratic credo" (Muncio 1993), is the inclusivist one based on the principles of inalienable, individual, equal human rights, that gradually developed after 1945, and is clearly in tension with the notion of "national self-awareness". Furthermore, Muncio points out that a prerequisite for upholding this myth has been the repression of the autochthonous language minorities, i.e. the Sami population, Swedish Finns, Tornedalers, Roma and Jews. Despite the diversity described, the idea of a monolingual and monocultural nation-state is still hegemonic and the grand narrative or master narrative of Sweden is so far excluding the national minorities, migrants and other groups. Therefore, as Muncio (2001: 229) argues, it is important "to dismantle the official myth of Sweden as an originally homogeneous

country and therefore different from other European countries". The school has been a vital institution for transmitting and maintaining this homogeneous view of Sweden (Lorentz & Bergstedt 2006), as a consequence, there has been a strong deficit perspective in relation to minority and migrant children in school contexts (Municio 2001). Under-communication of ethnic identity (Eriksen 2000), language loss, and high drop-out rates from school are examples that have been a reality for many (cf. von Brömssen & Rodell Olgaç, 2010). The school books have been important tools to convey the above described master narrative contributing to the students' assumptions about "the others", knowledge about other cultures and the ethnic self-understanding. These books contributed, and still contribute, to the idea of Sweden being a country of one people, speaking the same language and thus superior to others (Ajagán-Lester 1999, 2008).

The postmodern society of today, where no longer nationalistic and ethnocentric traditions are valid or necessary, leads to consequences for teaching, learning and pedagogy. Learning, i.e. the complex cognitive, psychodynamic and social processes (Illeris 1999: 17), is today looked upon as a continuous process in which change, co-operation and flexibility are considered important and valuable social assets and competencies. But there is also a fear of challenging Western ethnocentrism in school contexts as this demand for self-reflection and deconstruction (Lorentz & Bergstedt

2006: 31), challenges what can be defined as intercultural learning processes. Intercultural learning embraces the idea of developing "an approach that involves mutual curiosity and enhanced understanding of one's own and others' perspectives on knowledge, ways of thinking, values, living conditions and authority" (Sjögren & Ramberg 2005: 37). These learning processes further include reciprocity, mutual respect, equality and social justice as some of the ethical values often cherished as goals of an intercultural approach (Lahdenperä 2002: 297). Intercultural learning also includes emotional processes for the individual and the group, when ethnocentric preconceptions and values are confronted and deconstructed –processes that can be painful and take time (Gundara, 2000; Pihl, 2002; Lahdenperä, 2004). There is of course the risk of essentialising ideas about "the other" in intercultural learning processes, especially when discussing different groups, minorities, cultures and identities. Here the concept of 'strategic essentialism' formulated by Spivak (1993) can be a useful tool as a *temporary strategy* for promoting social change (cf. Gunaratnam, 2003; James, 2003). In addition, relevant to this strategy is also interrogating and deconstructing predominant master narratives and the creation of counter narratives (see for example Ladson-Billings, 1998; Zamudio et al, 2011). In teacher education this could mean, as for example Vavrus (2011) suggests, curricular strategies that combine critical texts that the students interrogate "through seminar dialog

and related lectures and workshops with autoethnographic narratives". As a consequence of these strategies, the students have the possibility to become aware of their part in history and "that their identities shape the kind of learning environments and curricular experiences they will create in their primary and secondary public school classes" and their agency to "transform classroom practices and the life opportunities of their students" (Vavrus 2011: 28-29).

The study

This study took place in an obligatory five-week course in the fourth term of a teacher education programme for future pre- and primary school teachers given during three terms in 2008 (spring and autumn) and 2009 (spring). The course with the title *Children's Language Socialisation and Literacy* focused on theories and research concerning children's language socialisation in different cultural contexts and the interplay between mother tongue, second language and literacy from an intercultural perspective, using the experiences of the five historical national minorities, especially in relation to language and education as a point of departure. The course was based on lectures, sessions, literature, group work and one week of placement in a school. I myself was the teacher of some of the seminar groups during the three terms. The students received lectures from members from the Sami, Swedish Finnish and Romani minorities giving a general background of basic facts about

the historical and contemporary situation of each respective minority together with their personal experiences. Watching and discussing a film based on an autobiography of a Meänkieli speaking girl growing up in the Tornedal Valley in the middle of last century and her encounter with the mainstream school system, was also included in the course.

The assessment of the course was divided into three parts. The first exam consisted of writing a reflective paper on each student's own language socialisation and literacy experiences during childhood and discussing these experiences in relation to some of the literature in the course. Many of the students were of migrant background speaking, among them some of the main migrant languages in Sweden as for example Arabic, Kurdish, Spanish, Suroyo and Turkish. For many of the students, it was the first time they looked back on their own childhood in this manner analysing and theorising their own previous personal experiences as a child. In the second part of their examination they had to visit an institution or exhibition related to one of the recognised national minorities together with their workgroup and to write a short reflective paper on this visit. For the third part of their examination, the students in their workgroups had to further explore the situation of one of the minorities. At the end of the course this exploratory work had to be presented to the rest of their fellow students in the seminar groups through a power point presentation made by the group together with artefacts, music, food, and other elements chosen by the workgroup.

Lastly, in addition to the usual course evaluation form, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire (optional) with questions concerning their previous knowledge about the national minorities and their views at the end of this course. The total number of questionnaires (Q) are 192 Q (71 Q out of a total number of 87 students (S), spring 2008; 26 Q out of 45 students, autumn 2008; 95 Q out of 99 students totally, spring 2009). Of the 192 students who answered the questionnaire 174 were female and 17 were male students. One student did not give this information. The students' answers of the questionnaires are the main source used for the analysis in this study. In addition, the discussions of the students' experiences and their reflections upon the literature from the seminars are sometimes included.

The results

The initial question of the questionnaire concerned what the student teachers did know about the national minorities when they started their course. Although the majority of them had gone to school after year 2000 when the changes concerning knowledge about the national minorities in the curricula should already have been in practice, about two thirds of the students declared in their answers that they had no, little or hardly any knowledge about the minorities. Furthermore, during the three terms the questionnaires were collected, there was no tendency of change in the students' answers to this question. The extracts below illustrate

common answers about their knowledge previous to the course.

"Not even who they are." (Q 31, spring 2008)

"Unfortunately not much except for the usual prejudices." (Q 55, spring 2008)

"Absolutely nothing." (Q 6, autumn 2008)

"Almost nothing. I had an idea about the Jews. But it concerned prejudices. So I had no knowledge about these minorities nor that were the Samis the first people in Sweden." (Q 17, autumn 2008)

"Not much." (Q 2, spring 2009)

"Very little." (Q 85, spring 2009)

One of the students above mentioned the Jews, so did some of the other students. The study of the Holocaust and the sufferings of the Jews during that time are included in the syllabus in History and studied in all Swedish schools. However, the situation of the Jewish minority in Sweden, historically and present, was unknown to most of the students in this study. The existence of the Samis was sometimes mentioned by the students, but even so, students mostly stated that they did not know much about them.

Although the course only lasted five weeks, the answers from the students, concerning what they had learnt about the minorities during this short period of time, demonstrate discovering things about Sweden that they had never heard about before.

"I have learnt about their background and how they have lived and live now, I also learned I had been cheated, growing up in a good country, then I learned Sweden has done terrible things that I have never known" (Q 4, spring 2008)

"Lots, I have learnt about these groups' fight for existence and respect in the society." (Q 25, spring 2008)

“There have been many lumps in my throat when I have realized how many people [from the minorities] have had/ have it.” (Q 61, spring 2008)

“I have learnt a lot about them. I had a lot of prejudices about the Roma, but I have got a better understanding of their situation.” (Q 11, autumn 2008)

“Both about their history and the history of Sweden which I didn’t know about, for example the racial biology.” (Q 31, spring 2009)

For these students, the historical diversity and the atrocities that the national minorities had suffered in the past in Sweden were issues that according to their answers had not been included by their teachers during their own time at school. Almost all the students were unaware of the influences of pseudo-scientific racism that grew in Sweden towards the end of the nineteenth century, and that an Institute for Racial Biology was established at Uppsala University at the beginning of the twentieth century. To support, the notion of the Samis, Finns, Jews, Roma and Travellers and other groups being “inferior races” compared with the mainstream population, ideas from pseudo-scientific racism were used (Catomeris, 2004; Hagerman, 2006; DO, 2008). This came as a shock for many of the students, who became upset that this had never been included in their school curriculum and they started questioning the reasons for this and how this could have been possible.

One of the final questions in the questionnaire tried to find out if there were any issues that had made any special impact on the students. These are some examples of the answers given to this question, in which the situation of the Roma is often in focus:

“The Roma and the prejudices that I myself have to strive with. I have started to think about my own origin.” (Q 1, spring 2008)

“I have got a completely different picture [about the Roma] now than the poor [empty] one I had before. And this new picture is fighting to win over the prejudices that I after all have/had.” (Q 10, spring 2008)

“Our way of treating the minorities is a shame. It has been very moving to read about the Tornedalers who were denied [the right] to speak their language and that so many Roma experienced the Holocaust.” (Q 62, spring 2008)

“The history concerning the different situations of the minorities in Sweden during different periods, as for example the prohibition to speak their mother tongue was especially interesting” (Q 2, autumn 2008)

“I have had the opportunity to know about my own country and our population. Very interesting with a lot of history.” (Q 80, spring 2009)

As we can understand from the extracts above, the historical and contemporary situation of the Roma was completely unknown to most of the students. Initially, the students expressed very limited knowledge about the Roma or prejudiced views, but in their responses the student themselves formulate a considerable change of attitude. One of the extracts (student 10, spring 2008) above illustrates that this in an interesting experience since the student explains how he is almost literally having a discussion with himself about previous preconceptions concerning the Roma, and the new

knowledge struggling for acceptance. It is as if the two discourses of national self-awareness and the democratic credo that Municio (1993) identified, were *fighting* for hegemony in this student's inner dialogue. Furthermore, many students also mentioned a changed view in their understanding of Swedish history.

One of the final questions to the students inquired about their thoughts of what this new knowledge about the minorities meant to them as future teachers. Their answers aimed at several directions:

"I [now] know that there exists a tradition of cultural diversity, even in Sweden. I have got a less stereotyped picture of these minorities." (Q 9, spring 2008)

"[It] contributes to my development as a reflecting teacher." (Q 27, spring 2008)

"I feel enriched by getting this knowledge and that I, in addition, have learnt how we can act as an educator. To believe in each pupil and to show a sincere interest in the work we have done and in what we have to say." (Q 22, spring 2008)

"Better understanding of how different cultures (minorities) interact in the classroom." (Q 6, autumn 2008)

"Extremely much. Something that I will have to use in my future work with colleagues and pupils. Important knowledge!" (Q 26, spring 2009)

These answers highlight how the understanding of some of the student teachers also expands to other professional areas, including how to act as a teacher in general as well as their relation to their future pupils.

Concluding remarks

When the course *Children's Language Socialisation and Literacy* was first included in the program in spring 2008, there was uncertainty about how it would be received among the student teachers. But at the end of the first course, and during the following terms, there was a rather unexpected and overwhelming positive response in the students' oral expression, in their final evaluation forms and through the questionnaires in this study. The students discovered the sufferings and atrocities of the minorities throughout history, even in school contexts and realised how the treatments of the minorities and the oppression of their languages, cultures, traditions and religions until today have had far reaching consequences for their socioeconomic, educational and linguistic situation. This was in many cases, completely new knowledge to the students and made a strong emotional impact on them. This emotional impact, as have been highlighted by Gundara (2000), Pihl (2002) and Lahdenperä (2004), is an important part of intercultural learning. The writing of the students' own autobiographies on their own language socialisation and literacy experiences for their first part of the examination in an early stage of the course might also have increased the sentience of the students and established a closer connection with some of the experiences of the minorities and thus contributed to their emotional involvement in the subject. Through discovering the silenced

historical diversity, many students felt as if they “had been cheated while learning their own history”. The country that they had lived in -in most cases all their lives- started to stand out differently from what they had imagined before. Just very few students said that they themselves came from a national minority background, but many of them originated from families with migrant or refugee background, and from their own experiences or those of their parents or relatives, they could easily relate to the experiences of the five minorities. These students were rather shaken by discovering a country with a hidden past that they had not been aware of before.

Through the exploratory work that the students had to do about one of the minorities, which they had to present to the other students of their group for their final examination of the course in the last seminar, they also created counter narratives challenging the master narrative of the country (cf. Ladson-Billings, 1998; Zamudio et al, 2011). But their discussions concerning the minorities were not only limited to the seminars. They continued them outside the university challenging prejudiced and racist ideas about the minorities that in many cases they suddenly started to discover among family members, relatives and friends. On several occasions in the seminars, students reported back from lively discussions that they had been engaged in at home with their family or with their friends concerning common prejudices about the national minorities, especially

the Roma. As Vavrus (2011) points out, through the course and these discussions they also discovered their part in history and the agency that they actually possess especially in relation to minority and migrant students and further to all pupils in school contexts, i.e. their possibility as future teachers to make a difference.

Of course there is always a risk of essentialism and of reproducing stereotypical ways of thinking in a course concerning minorities. In this case, two thirds of the students in the study at the beginning of the course had none or very little knowledge about the history, language, religions, traditions and culture. The impression is, however, that through their various ways of exploring deeply the situation of one of the minorities’, the students reached a more complex and diverse image of these minorities than their previous mostly limited and prejudiced one. By using the concept of strategic essentialism formulated by Spivak (1993), one could argue that, as the students initially had so little basic knowledge about the minorities, the strategy was to start working with essentialist facts about the history, languages, religions, traditions and cultures about them. Through this process and the students’ own exploratory work, they gradually achieved a more nuanced understanding of the situation of the minorities.

The study indicates that through revisiting the past and studying the present situation of the national minorities, intercultural learning processes developed among the student teachers.

As a consequence, the discourse of national self-awareness that was initially prevalent among the students, challenged and an inclusive discourse of a 'democratic credo' developed among them (cf. Muncio 1993, 2001).

The implications of the study are that a course concerning national minorities can act in favour of a democratic credo and of an inclusion not only of minority but also of the new migrant groups of children and others in school contexts.

Notes

¹ Original work in English.

² Södertörn University, Sweden. christina.rodell.olgac@sh.se

³ *Skogsfinner* 'Forest Finns' are the descendants of the migration from Finland that took place in the 16th century, when several thousands of Finns originating mainly from the region Savolax migrated to Sweden and into Norway (Bonnievie & Bolme Moen 2010).

⁴ Commissioner

Bibliography

- AJAGÁN-LESTER, L. (1999). Text och etnicitet. I C. A. Säfström & L. Östman (red.). *Textanalys: introduktion till syftesrelaterad kritik*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- AMFT, A. (2000). *Sápmi i förändringens tid: en studie av svenska samers levnadsvillkor under 1900-talet ur ett genus- och etnicitetsperspektiv*. Samiska institutionen. Umeå: Umeå universitet.
- BIJVOET, E. and FRAURUD, K. (2007). *Det romska språket och romsk språkvård i Sverige 2007*. Stockholm: Språkrådet vid Institutet för språk- och folkminnen.
- BONNEVIE LUND, A. and BOLME MOEN, B. (red.). (2010). *Nasjonale minoriteter i det flerkulturelle Norge*. Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag.
- BOREVI, K. (2002). *Välfärdsstaten i det mångkulturella samhället*. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- BREDEFELDT, R. (2008). *Judiskt liv i Stockholm och i Norden: Ekonomi, identitet och assimilering 1850-1930*. Stockholm: Stockholmia Förlag.
- CATOMERIS, C. (2004). *Det ohyggliga arvet: Sverige och främlingen genom tiderna*. Stockholm: Ordfront.
- DO (Ombudsmannen mot etnisk diskriminering) (2004). *Discrimination against Romanies in Sweden: report on the DO project in years of 2002 and 2003 on counteracting and forestalling ethnic discrimination against Romanies*. [www.do.se] 2012-10-23
- DO (Ombudsmannen mot etnisk diskriminering) (2008). *Discrimination of national minorities in the education system*. DO:s rapportserie 2008:2 eng. [www.do.se] 2012-10-23
- ECRI (Europakommissionen mot rasism och intolerans) (2005). *Third Report on Sweden*. CRI (2005)26. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- ERIKSEN, T. H. (2000). *Små platser – stora frågor: en introduktion till socialantropologi*. Nora: Nya Doxa.
- GUNARATHNAM, Y. (2003). *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power*. London: Sage Publications.
- GUNDARA, J. S. (2000). *Interculturalism, Education and Inclusion*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- HAGERMAN, M. (2006). *Det rena landet: om konsten att uppfinna sina förfäder*. Stockholm: Prisma.
- ILLERIS, K. (1999). *Lärande i mötet mellan Piaget, Freud och Marx*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- JAMES, C. (2003). *Seeing Ourselves: Exploring Ethnicity, Race and Culture*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.
- KU (Konstitutionsutskottet) (2005). *Nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk*. Rapporter från riksdagen 2004/5:RFR3.
- LADSON-BILLINGS, G. (1998). 'Just what is critical race theory and what is it doing in a nice field like education?' In: *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11, 7-24.

- LAHDENPERÄ, P. (2002). Developing Multicultural Schools and Intercultural Education. In Gomes, N. B. et al, *Reflections on Diversity and Change in Modern Society. A Festschrift for Annick Sjögren*. Botkyrka: Mångkulturellt centrum.
- LAHDENPERÄ, P. (red) (2004). *Interkulturell pedagogik i teori och praktik*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- LORENTZ, H. and BERGSTEDT, B. (red.) (2006). *Interkulturella perspektiv: pedagogik i mångkulturella lärandemiljöer*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Lgr11, *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011*. [www.skolverket.se] 2012-10-23.
- Länsstyrelsen i Stockholms län & Sametinget (2011). *Nationella minoriteters rättigheter. En handbok för kommuner, landsting och regioner*.
- MUNICIO, I. (1993). Svensk skolpolitik under intryck av två diskurser: nationell självförståelse och demokratiskt credo. I *Invandring forskning politik: en vänbok till Tomas Hammar*. Centrum för invandringsforskning CEIFO. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet.
- MUNICIO, I. (2001). The return of the repressed other: Linguistic minorities and the Swedish nation-state from the 1940s to the 1990s. In: *Racism Xenophobia and the Academic Response. Proceedings from the Unica Conference on Racism and Xenophobia, Stockholm 29-21 August 1999*. ed. C. Westin. Stockholm: CEIFO, Stockholm University in collaboration with Unica.
- MÖRKENSTAM, U. (1999). *Om 'Lapparnes privilegier': Föreställningar om samiskhet i svensk samepolitik 1883–1997*. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- PIHL, J. (2002). Monumenter og mot-monumenter. *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 2/2002, 141- 154.
- PULMA, P. (2006). *Pohjoismaiden romanipolitiikka 1500-luvulta EU-aikaan*. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 230. Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy.
- RODELL OLGAÇ, C. (2006). *Den romska minoriteten i majoritetssamhällets skola: från hot till möjlighet*. Studies in Educational Sciences 85. Stockholm: HLS Förlag.
- RODELL OLGAÇ, C. (2010). Nationella minoriteter: en nordisk utblick. I A. Bonnevie Lund & B. Bolme Moen (red). *Nasjonale minoriteter i det flerkulturelle Norge*. Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag.
- Sametinget & Regeringskansliet (2004). *Samer: ett ursprungsfolk i Sverige*.
- SPIVAK, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge.
- SJÖGREN, A. and RAMBERG, I. (eds) (2005). *Quality and Diversity in Higher Education. Experiences from intercultural teacher education*. Tumba: Mångkulturellt centrum.
- SOU 2010:55. *Romers rätt: en strategi för romer i Sverige*. Betänkande av Delegationen för romska frågor.
- VAVRUS, M. (2011). Critical Multiculturalism and Higher Education: Resistance and Possibilities Within Teacher Education. In S. May & C.E. Sleeter, *Critical Multiculturalism: Theory and Praxis*. New York: Routledge.
- VON BRÖMSEN, K. and RODELL OLGAÇ, C. (2010). Intercultural education in Sweden through the lenses of the national minorities and of religious education. *Intercultural Education* Vol. 21, Nr 2 April, 121-135.
- WANDE, E. (2003). Quo vadis, Meänkieli? Twenty years after 'the last language struggle'. In *Multilingualism in global and local perspectives*. Stockholm: Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University and Rinkeby Institute for Bilingual Research.
- ZAMUDIO, M.M. et al (2011). *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology*. New York: Routledge.