

Failed grades, schools, families and neighborhoods: Swedish Immigrant pupils' reflections on their reality.

In the Swedish school system students with immigrant background are over-represented among those who finish compulsory school with non-passing grades (Skolverket, 2004). While the problem is significant, there are limited studies conducted in this area (Bunar, 2010). Different explanations are given for their failures, such as individual weakness, parents' low education, unemployment, lack of social and economic capitals. There are also claims that structural problems could be the main cause. Studies undertaken in Sweden and USA show the role of schools and residential areas on student results (Bunar, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, & Hooimelier, 2016). There are other studies with focus on how parents education and access to different social capital can influence their children's success in education (Bergren, 2013; Behotoui & Neegaard, 2015).

I interviewed students in one vocational high school in a big city in western Sweden. The interview was aimed at students with immigrant background, who attended Swedish compulsory school. These students failed in one or more subjects at the end of the compulsory school (ninth grade).

The objectives of the study were to find out on how these students are reasoning about their failure and on how they viewed their school, family and residential situation. The findings from the study could contribute to general knowledge on how these students perceive their results, schooling, family situation and residential areas. Those who are working to improve pupils' achievements and schools' inclusion of immigrant pupils could gain from the study.

Research Question

Which school, family and community related issues are given by pupils as contributing factors for their failing grades in school?

Even if the focus is on their grades and school situation, to understand the reality of the pupils, there is a need to understand the holistic situation of each interviewed pupil. To achieve this goal the Post-Ecological perspective will be considered (Anderson, et.al, 2004; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Rutter, 2006; Nilson & Bunar, 2015) as theoretical framework. Post-Ecological perspective will give the opportunity to look closer to the child/pupil's relation to its classmates, teachers, family members and neighbourhood.

In addition to Post-ecological perspective, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of capital and reproduction will be used. As some of these pupils have been to Sweden and Swedish schools for a short time, they lack the linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) for success. It is also possible that those who are born in Sweden as well as those who arrived later could lack the valuable and necessary cultural and social capital, which could lead to reproduction of existing societal structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Method

The study used interview as a main method (Kvale, 1996; Bryman; 2004; Loseke, 2013) and supplemented it with literature review. I interviewed 21 students, three of them have been dropped out from the study, two of them during the interview worked as student assistants in the school and the third at the end of the interview, declared she had passed in all subjects at the end of the compulsory school. The remaining 18 interviewed students failed in one or more subjects at the end of compulsory school.

The students were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was gained to participate. Information to them included how the collected data will be used, that the students will be anonymous in the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Codex, 2011).

The following data provides information on students' age, sex and country of birth. It also includes students parent's country of birth.

Age	Sex		Total
	Female	Male	
16	-	1	1
17	4	4	8
18	-	2	2
19	-	3	3
20	-	4	4
Total	4	14	18

	Pupils country of birth	Parents country of birth
Afghanistan	3	3
Bosnia	-	1
Eritrea	1	1
Gambia and Sierra Leone	-	1
Iraq	1	3
Lebanon	-	1
Serbia	1	1
Somalia	4	5
Sweden	6	-
Syria	1	1
Turkey	1	1
Total	18	18

Preliminary results

The preliminary interview result shows some factors that could directly influence students' achievements and other factors that indirectly influence their education. Some of the interviewed students, gave difficulties they faced and what could be the reason for their failed results. The first reason was, despite their age some of them did not attend school in their country of origin. Second, isolation from their classmates in the beginning as first immigrants in their school and could not speak Swedish. Third, minimum time for Swedish language lesson, for example only two 45 minutes' lessons per week in one of the schools attended by the interviewee. Fourth, there were substitute teachers that were often coming and leaving, which made it difficult for students to develop a good relationship with them. Fifth, there were only immigrant students in some of the schools and this made it difficult to exercise Swedish and to have friends with Swedish origin.

The immigration situation varied, some students came alone and others together with their families. There are also those who are born in Sweden. Some of them live alone, in foster homes, with single parent and with both parents. According to the students, first in most of the families there are more than three siblings which makes it difficult to get sufficient attention for all. Second, most of the parents have low level of education to help their children in their school work. Third, as most parents are attending the compulsory Swedish course and/or searching for work they have a minimum income. These families even with their low income have "social obligation" to support financially relatives they left behind in their country of origin. Some relatives have meager resources for survival, the elder lacks pension and the sick are desperate of money to get a medical care. Adults are taking the major responsibility for support of relatives in their country of origin but some of these students by distributing advertisements and working in small income generating activities gain some money that they send to their relatives.

Mixed feelings are expressed by students about their residential areas. Some despite their knowledge of problems in their residential area, would compare it to others and give positive picture of their area. The others express their distance by saying, first of all that it feels like they are in a territory outside Sweden. Second, they experience lack of activity and recreation possibility that are available in other parts of their city. Third, they draw a picture of a deteriorating security condition in their sub-urban area. In relation to this they even report increasing criminality and drug abuse. There are also students who say that they would not like their children to grow up in their present sub-urban area of residence. They believe that these areas lack positive things to contribute to their children's well-being and development.

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