Chapter 8

The Praxis of Cultural Narratives in International Mobility

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ABSTRACT

Many discourses encourage the international mobility of students as a proof of intercultural openness. The studies abroad are included in all the curricula and satisfy the international profile of future candidates coming in the labour market. In this context, the international mobility of high school pupils is also promoted to acquire a form of personal autonomy with the acquisition of a new language. There is a strong mobility of international pupils that spend a year abroad in another educational system. In Sweden, the choice of a high school depends on the grades obtained earlier but also on what the high schools offer in terms of short international mobility (study trip to England). The programme "One Year in France/Spain/Germany/Austria" was created at the end of the 1980s with the board of international programmes from the Swedish Ministry of Education, some embassies and cultural centres from the concerned countries, the Swedish Institute in Paris. The chapter analyzes the narratives of the students who took part in the programme.

INTRODUCTION

Many discourses encourage the international mobility of students as a proof of intercultural openness (Fabricius et al, 2017). Studies abroad are included in all curricula and satisfy the international profile of future candidates coming into the labour market. In this context, the international mobility of secondary school pupils is also promoted to acquire a form of personal autonomy by learning a new language (Humphreys, 2012). There is a strong mobility of international pupils who spend a year abroad in another educational system. "Travel improves the mind" is the recurrent motto in the current globalisation, which is sometimes presented as a necessity, especially to gain linguistic skills (Bown et

al., 2015). The competition of destinations is often something important in terms of image and attractivity, which is why those programmes often attract the attention of the authorities (Angwenyi, 2014). In Sweden, the choice of a secondary school depends not only on the marks obtained earlier but also on what the secondary schools offer in terms of short international mobility (study trip to England…). The programme "One year in France/Spain/Germany/Austria" was created at the end of the 1980s with the board of international programmes from the Swedish Ministry of Education, some embassies and cultural centres from the countries involved, and the Swedish Institute in Paris. The idea was to build a cultural bridge between young cohorts of Swedish and French pupils. This perspective of language learning is also linked to the European community that promotes the acquisition of at least two foreign languages (Hoareau, 2012). The "ideal multilingual self" is here highlighted by these programmes that encourage pupils to study abroad (Henry, Thorsen, 2018: 350; Dervin, Risager, 2015). This is why cultural centres such as the *Institut français* invest resources in supporting them as they contribute to attracting young Swedish people to France, for instance (Lane, 2013: 35). At the same time, it is always a challenge to attract Swedish pupils in this programme, as they lose one year of their education in Sweden and do not have the chance to compensate for the year spent abroad. The investment is even more of a challenge as these pupils have to experience deep immersion into the French/Spanish/German/Austrian way of life, integrate into an educational system, accommodate to a new host family and acquire a foreign language (Premat, 2010). The programme has different conditions as pupils staying in Spain do not stay at the school during the week-end, they just spend the time at school and with their host family.

The study carried out in this chapter aims to account for the factors that explain the challenges of the immersion of Swedish pupils. How do they experience their new environment? How can we measure their personal development abroad? The study is based on their narratives to know how they integrate/reject their new cultural context. The concept of narratives is here taken as a collection of pupils' testimonies during their stay abroad.

It is possible to categorise the pupils' answers regarding their perception of the facilitators or the hurdles for their integration. How do the Swedish pupils react in their new environment? Which factors are more significant? What is the balance between "cultural factors", "personal factors", "social factors" and "situational factors" (Pavlović, Marjanović, 2018: 222)? A series of regular surveys was initiated during spring 2018, autumn 2018, and the springs of 2019 and 2020 with Swedish pupils thanks to surveys conducted in Swedish. The goal is to see whether these pupils are more focused on the accommodation to the institutional system (school, results, rules) or the perception of cultural norms in the contact with other people from the target country. The analysis of these data is useful as they illustrate the intercultural relationship between the Swedish pupils and their environment. The concrete evaluation of the balance between psychological autonomy and cultural integration is also worth focusing on as most of the research concerns the field of Second Language Acquisition to test the appropriation of a foreign language during the studies abroad. Here, the intercultural background explicitly focuses on the pupil's perception of the compatibility between the culture of origin and the target culture (Plews et al., 2018). This is why the concept of narrative seems to be the most appropriate one to perceive the development of this integration. Discovering other norms and ways of being is intertwined with a form of psychological maturity; for the pupils, this balance is a challenge (Monaghan, Hartmann, 2014).

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