

## The Voices of a new Generation of Multicultural Swedish Adolescents: Embracing their Cross-cultural Diversity in Schools and Neighbourhoods

Howard, Anthea  
Masters student, Int. Prog. In Social Work and Human Rights  
Goteborg University, Sweden (2010)

## Introduction into study

- “You stupid Immigrant! You don’t belong here; go back from where you come from!!” (quotation from abstract)
- ...“Racism and xenophobia are diametrically opposed to everything that Europe stands for in terms of human dignity, mutual respect and understanding and citizenship in the broadest sense”... Europe envisions itself to be an open, tolerant, “multicultural”, democratic community while on the other hand people are living in the contradiction of this by experiencing everyday events such as stereotyping, stigmatization, and discrimination at all levels of society Kamali (2005:1)
- How will a new generation of cross cultural Swedes manage their cultural diversity in such a way that will reduce the harsh expression of racism experienced in many other parts of the world?

## Aim of Study

- To explore the experiences and feelings of adolescents toward racism in schools and neighbourhoods within a multicultural environment
- To explore the opinions and perspectives of professionals in schools and organisations with regard to racism in schools and neighbourhoods
- To investigate the intervention methods and their success in schools and neighbourhoods

## Theoretical concepts

- **Immigrants** - For the purpose of this study both immigrants and asylum seekers are referred to in the same category as foreigners. This also includes adolescents who have been born in Sweden but who have one or both parents born in a foreign country.

## Theoretical concepts (cont.)

- **Racism** - Kamali (2005) describes the many faces of racism, as it appears in many forms and variants such as biological racism, genetic racism, cultural racism, religious racism and many more. Ethnicity he adds together with nationality, "race", religion and gender are based on socio-cultural categories and linked to visible physical characteristics such as skin, hair type, or anatomical sex which makes it easy to construction boxes for "Us" and "Them".

In creating this "otherism" it give rise to negative stereotyping, stigmatizing, discrimination and other exclusionary practices toward those who are categorized based on collective traits such s religion, ethnicity, colour of skin, disability, and gender.

## Theoretical concepts (cont.)

- **Xenophobia** - Yaksushko (2009) as a form of attitudinal, effective, and behavioral prejudice toward immigrants and those regarded as foreign. Recently, the term has been linked to ethnocentrism, which is an attitude that the culture of one's own group is superior to others. The term xenophobia is also more commonly used by human rights organizations and the United Nations to describe anti-immigrant sentiments.

Today, presents a different kind of definition: rather that it is a social phenomenon relating to relationships between those with access to and control over legitimate power.

## Theoretical concepts (cont.)

- **'Everyday racism'** is racism that is integrated into daily routines which connects to structural forces of racism with routine situations. Everyday racism becomes part of the expected, and unquestioned, and that the dominant group perceives of as the norm. Hällgren (2005)
- The term racism and xenophobia are interrelated in this study and are mutually forms of oppression. However, racism does not always imply xenophobia and conversely, xenophobia does not always include racist attitudes.

## Earlier Research

- **Racism in Sweden** – slave trading, biological racism, 'race hygiene' (sterilization of 'mentally ill' patients in order to preserve the 'healthy Swedish race'), attitudes towards immigrants and other minority groups for e.g. the Finns, Jews, Roma and Sami.
- The Sami, Sweden's indigenous people suffered much oppression by the State (grave- robbing, skull measuring, and conflicts over religion, right to land and poor education for the Sami children).
- Immigrants and asylum seekers –Swedish society has changed in many ways, one of the most dramatic changes being that if the rapid growth in the numbers of immigrants. Österberg(2000)

## Earlier Research (cont.)

- Prompt political issues (housing, unemployment, limited knowledge of the Swedish language, Swedish culture and a generally perceived low education level is the result of an inability to assess foreign educations by the Swedish Bureaucracy.
- Sweden has the self-image as the 'champion of the elsewhere oppressed', and that Swedes find it hard to acknowledge being capable of racism as a result of their self-perception as 'deeply committed to Social Democrats notions of solidarity and social justice'. (Sawyer (2002:17) & Pred (2000:83))

## Earlier Research (cont.1)

- **Racism in schools** - Hällgren (2005) reports that despite Sweden's international reputation for human rights and democratic values, racism and xenophobia within Swedish schools is a new issue.
- This new phenomenon is due to the increase ethnic diversity of Swedish schools in recent years. SCB (2004) estimated that approximately 485 000 children (excluding national minority groups) has either been born abroad or has one or both parents born outside of Sweden. This represents over 150 different languages in Swedish schools.
- Teachers seemed unaware of the presence of racism and reported that racism was not a problem, while students spoke of their experiences of racism in school (Parszyk (1999))

## Earlier Research (cont.1)

- Swedish schools received antiracist study materials from the National Co-ordinator Committee Against Racism during the 1990's, when evaluated seemed that although some schools indicated to have benefitted from the material, others did not use the material at all.
- Evaluation revealed for non-usage of this material ... irrelevant to the students since they were 'very Swedish'.
- Sweden has a long history of racism, but the concept of racism is a new issue with the Swedish public and in the educational arena.

## Earlier Research (cont.2)

- Studies have shown that large numbers of young people are experiencing the dark side of bullying, racism and violence. Almost half the respondent in a survey of 305 schools indicated that this was the case. While another survey conducted minority children struggling with offensive language from teachers, not being assessed on fair grounds compared to others and having fewer opportunities to talk to adults in school, and not being able to defend themselves against racist attacks due to fear of repercussions.
- Hällgren & Weiner (2003) suggests that there is a growing concern for the increased evidence of racism in Sweden.
- A survey conducted in 2002 by the Swedish National Agency for Education to enhance the understanding of democracy, found that xenophobic parties 'won' the election in 4.5% schools.

## Study Methods

- **Qualitative Research** – to explore the experiences and feeling of adolescents with regard to racism in schools
- **Data collection-** In-depth un-structured interviews and focus groups 1)Nine adult professional (teachers, social workers, youth activist, organisational leader and an Ombudsman for Social Democrats) participated in interviews. 2)Two focus groups were conducted with nine adolescents between ages 13-21 years old
- **Snowball sampling** was used to gain access to the target population (adolescents and professionals in schools) through word of mouth recommendations.
- **Limitation-**This study is limited in that it has not included a larger sample more representative of the many minority immigrants groups and is geographically limited.

## Adolescents Voices

Themes identified in analysis:

- Stigmatised (identity, neighbourhoods, schools)
- Work harder to succeed than native - Swedes
- Non-intervention with racial and cultural conflict in schools
- The future of a new multicultural generation in Sweden

## Professionals Voices on racism and intervention

### Issues raised in analysis

- Racism yes!! Not only among Swede and immigrant also immigrant and immigrant
- Racism used inappropriately– not always genuine cases of racism
- General apathy toward dealing with issues of racism in schools by professional staff
- Teachers not always interested, skilled or confident to deal with issues of racism
- School Professionals challenges –financial cutbacks, understaffing, limited time, language barriers, allocation of resources

## Professionals Voices on racism and intervention

- Role of Education in change  
*“If we want to change these situations in schools which are not good. Many kids are violated in many ways. Need to support and develop the children for society, then schools has to take that responsibility ...even if they don't want it... parents of course too!.. (Ombudsman for Social Democrats)*
- Intervention  
*“...enough talking, we need to do things differently, change the norms and lead by example...”(Social Worker #3)*

## Intervention approaches and responses

- Denial forms the foundation for limited responses to intervention programmes or approaches
- Professional schools staff are not trained to manage racial conflict or to initiate dialogue that reduces racial attitudes and actions (apathy, fear)
- Intervention is in form of counselling by the social worker, class discussions when racism is reported in class
- Some schools have exchange programmes with other schools
- Culture days – once off activity organised by schools - general message is 'be nice to immigrants' and 'avoiding the real issues'

## Conclusions

- Racism is alive in schools - adolescents are experiencing racism on an everyday basis in schools.
- Racism is complex and multifaceted.
- Professional school staff not really able to manage racism in schools as few facilitate dialogue in classes.
- Denial a strong strategy among many, while not having the competence or skill and being afraid to address racism.
- No specific preventative intervention programmes regarding racism were in operation in schools.
- Social Workers managed intervention through counseling individuals and classes on discrimination in general.
- Social Workers had little scope to bring about change on their own.

## Reflections and Recommendations

- Low level of acknowledgement that racism is everyone's problem and exists on a daily basis.
- Everyday racism needs to be explained and understood so that schools staff, parents and public can become more aware of it.
- Create open platform for dialogue and discussion about racism.
- A collaboration of professions and organisations are needed to address this problem in the broader societal context. (Educational Authorities, Teachers, Social Workers, NGOs)
- Develop a specific programme for implementation in Schools that fits the unique Swedish context and that builds a nation of diversity.

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