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The Potential of Language Cafes

A case study of the Språkhörnan program at
Malmö City library



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What is to come...

- Språkhörnan program
- Integration and information exchange: definitions
- Research and methods
- Benefits of attending the program
- Information exchange
- IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto
- Current research

Språkhörnan

- Aim of program:
 - **To improve participants conversational skills**
 - **To facilitate integration**
- Newcomers practice their Swedish in groups led by Red Cross volunteers
- Wednesday evenings at Malmö City Library
- Attendance is on a drop-in, voluntary basis

Språkhörnan

- Both men and women attend
- No language requirement
- No conversation themes

Aim of the study

- To investigate if language learning and information exchange during the conversations at Språkhörnan supports newcomers' integration

Integration: A Relationship

Newcomers are able to:

- Fully participate in social, cultural, economic and political arenas.
- Retain their own identity

And

- Their cultures are deemed important and are valued within the society

Information Exchange

- Information grounds: a social atmosphere that leads to casual information exchange

- Information = advice, recommendations, tips, sharing of 'local knowledge', etc

Methods

- Case study:
 - Participant observation (5 weeks leading up to the interviews)
 - Participant interviews (5 participants)
 - Focus group (3 'core' volunteers)
 - Questionnaire (24 respondents)

Benefits of Attending the Program

➤ Language Learning

➤ A key opportunity for becoming conversational in Swedish – even for those attending language courses

➤ Opportunities to converse in Swedish are few for many of the participants

“I get more confidence from [Språkhörnan] because when I go to school I think if I say something wrong that maybe all the other students will start laughing at me so I speak in English. But when I come here, I speak, even if it is wrong, but I try to speak. Now I can speak Swedish good. It’s a really, really enjoyable language ”

Benefits of Attending the Program

- Increased knowledge and understanding about:
 - Economic matters (jobs, CVs, interviewing, etc)
 - Recreational opportunities
 - Educational opportunities
 - Political/civic life
 - Residential issues

"Since I have been here I met all sorts of people and somehow they give you information. How you can tackle with the Swedish system or Swedish society...[T]here was one [group facilitator]...She give me some advice, all sorts of advice, about all sorts of jobs that I can do here in Sweden"

Benefits of Attending the Program

- Help with or guidance in navigating bureaucratic processes or systems
- Increased understanding and knowledge of Swedish culture and society

“When one comes to språkcafé one must talk about something ...sometimes I can talk about politics, sometimes I talk about Sweden’s history...I talk a lot about Swedish traditions, I have learned much about them. About Sweden...about Swedish things and Midsummer...and semla [a traditional pastry] ... For example, for example. One can learn a lot”

Benefits of Attending the Program

- Social Aspects
 - A much-valued social opportunity for participants
 - Friendships formed across intercultural lines
 - Offers a unique opportunity to interact with Swedish people

“When I could not come here I would try to go to the other one [another language café]. It is almost the same thing just to socialize and to be in contact with people because as an immigrant it is not easy in the late twenties or thirties to make some friends. In this way, språkcafé can help you a little, to have social contact with people”

Information Exchange

- A strong indication of informal information exchange between participants and group facilitators
- Swedish group facilitators appear to be key sources of information regarding Swedish society
- Information is also exchanged between program participants

IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto

Core Actions:

- include programs supporting user education, information literacy skills, newcomer resources, cultural heritage and cross-cultural dialogue as integral parts of the services

Conclusion

- Language cafes have the *potential* to provide newcomers with the knowledge and skills (language) needed for future social, economic, political and civic participation

Current Research

- Multi-case study
- A focus on Norway
- Survey – Spring 2014

Tusen takk!

Thank you!