Negotiate neglected narratives
The lonely girl in class
“Everything changed after it took off my Hijab”
versus
“Everything changed after I got a friend”

The lonely girl in class

Hi! – My name is Aisha, and I am originally from Afghanistan. I am 19 years old and am going to the third year of upper secondary school. I came to Norway when I was ten years old. When I first came here, I did not recognize my father, I just ask my mother – is this my father? I had not seen him since I was a little girl. My father just said – I have missed you all so much. However, my mother was dissatisfied, because we did not recognize him, and because he did not remembered our correct age. So actually my father made it wrong, he wrote the wrong birthdate. When I first came here, I was about ten years old, but my father wrote in my papers that I was 15 years old.

When I came to Norway, I had never gone to school before. I went to a school for foreigners, but because of the mistake of my age, I had to go to a school for illiterate adults, primary school for adults. There I went for many years before I began at upper secondary school.

The first year at upper secondary school – when I was 16 years old, but 22 in my papers – it was sometimes very boring. I did not have any friends. When I tried to talk or sit together with the other students, they just did not bother talking with me. Sometimes I just thought it was because I was wearing a hijab, because I am a foreigner. I was tired of being alone, and missed one friend. Just one friend is enough, I often thought.

Between my first and second year at upper secondary school, my sister and I talked about quitting wearing the hijab. Our mother told us that before, when she was young, the women in Afghanistan could make their own decision about wearing the hijab, and about half of the women did not wear the hijab. It was voluntary in those days. So, we made that decision to quit using the hijab. When I began my second year at school, I felt things became easier. Here in Norway there are almost nobody waring a hijab, so it is difficult to wear the hijab. It is as if you see another person than their actually are. I also got one friend in my second year, and we were a lot together at school.

Now thinking back, I think it was important to take off my hijab. Everything changed after that, and I am very happy now with my situation. I have many friends, and I feel god inside me. I have hopes for the future, but I still have to work very hard with my schoolwork.

During my PhD- fieldwork, I was following a first class at upper secondary school in Norway (Solbue, 2014; Solbue, Helleve & Smith 2017). The class was composed of 24 students/pupils and nearly half of them were either immigrants or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. In the group, there was only one girl wearing hijab. She was in my eyes very visible but she seemed to be almost invisible to the class. This paper will seek to understand her life history, to understand more of how she is negotiating her neglected narratives.

During all the three years at upper secondary school, I am interviewing her about her flight from Afghanistan to Norway, about her family, how she experience the school and the life in Norway. She presents a very complex story in the three interviews.
I interviewed the girl three times during her upper secondary schooling, one each year. My questions revealed several existential turning points such as her escape from Afghanistan to Norway, how she viewed her family life and how she experienced the school and existence in Norway. She presents a very complex life history (Goodson & Gill, 2011). The narrative analysis is structured around the turning points in her life history (Johansson, 2005).

However, when analyzing her life history I need a theory that allows me carefully to unveil the different levels of her story. Why does she seems to be so alone in the class, why does she not have any friends at her first year at school? What kind of roles does she have in her own family, and how does she react on the special event making her six years older than her real age based on the false declaration of her father.

This paper seeks to reflect on the consequences my preconception as a researcher will have on the analyzes of her life – history (Solbue, 2011). How will we interpretive her neglected narrative if the turning point of her life-history is when she took of her hijab versus when she got a friend?


Solbue, V. (2011). In search of my hidden preconceptions as a researcher. Reflective Practice, 12(6), 817-827.

Solbue, V., Helleve, I., & Smith, K. (2017). “In this class we are so different that I can be myself!” Intercultural dialogue in a first grade upper secondary school in Norway. Education Inquiry, 8(2), 137-150.