“She was a Bitch”¹

A Socio-Educational Perspective on Motivation for Learning English.

¹ The title is a quote by one of the students interviewed by the author of the present essay, referring to the student's compulsory school English teacher.
Abstract
This degree project focuses motivation for learning English among a group of Swedish upper secondary school students. By employing a socio-educational perspective, some vital factors behind a strong motivation for learning English in school are investigated through individual interviews. Components in the past, heralding either a high level of motivation for English or a low such, are primarily focused. Moreover, essential socio-educational factors behind managing to achieve grades in English despite a low level of motivation and various impediments, such as severe socio-psychological adversities, are looked into.

While motivation for English is emphasized as a critical factor, in accordance with socio-educational motivation theory, the study also stresses the importance of a positive first encounter with the English language, a satisfying English teacher-student relationship, and a sense of success in the English classroom. But above all, the study stresses a need for early tests among young students for reading disabilities, which according to this study often go undetected and thus severely impede any kind of second language learning and motivation.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background
In order to access Swedish upper secondary school’s English education, a pass level in compulsory school English is required. Despite being a non-optional core subject on the Swedish school syllabus since 1955, students continuously leave secondary school without grades in English, as well as in other core subjects. According to the statistics of the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), a total of 5.9% of all Swedish compulsory school students did not pass their year 9 English grades by spring 2006, which is a rise from ten years earlier when the percentage amounted to 5.1% (Skolverket 2007 Tabell 1.5A:24/1.3:38). Given that a full upper secondary diploma is denied until the student has passed his or her year 9 English grade, every upper secondary school is subsequently required to supply special educational provision in compulsory school English alongside the regular upper secondary English education.

A strongly impairing circumstance to completing these compulsory school English grades is arriving in Sweden after puberty, when the lateralization process is believed to be completed, why a high degree of these 5.9% have another first language than Swedish (Fromkin et al. 2007, Skolverket 2007 Tabell 1.5C). Another impeding factor to learning English as a second language is reading difficulties and dyslexia, which can significantly complicate second language learning (Jacobsson & Lundberg 1995).

But, according to research during the last decades, motivation stands out as one of the main determinants in second language learning, regardless of learning impairments. Components in the student’s social milieu, at home and in the classroom, greatly affect the individual’s motivation to learn the second language and subsequent study results (Dörnyei 1994: 273). The socio-educational motivation theory investigates these components, and this paper looks at this theory against a small group of Swedish students’ English achievements in order to discern particularly pronounced socio-educational components among those who have succeeded in passing their grades in compulsory school English and those who have failed.

1.2. The Aim of the Study
The aim of this study is to examine the socio-educational theory, launched by Canadian psychologist R.C. Gardner, and to analyse the responses of a small group of Swedish upper secondary students.
secondary school students in terms of this theory. Some of these students have studied English during secondary school with the help of special educational provision, due to of various adversities, and some students have excelled in English during secondary school and onwards. Because of the limited amount of students, the study assumes an individual-oriented perspective rather than a statistically verified standpoint.

The focus of the main analysis is on socio-educational discrepancies among the students who have studied English with the help of special educational provision. The divergences between those who have finally succeeded in achieving grades in English year 9 and those who have failed will be examined, using the responses of the students who have excelled in English during secondary school as a reference group.

The study thus inquires into socio-educational differences between the students’ past relationship with the English language and the potential effects these differences might have on the students’ motivation and final study results.

1.3 Methodology and Data

This essay assumes a qualitative and individual-oriented perspective, by interviewing a limited amount of hand-picked students at a small rural Swedish upper secondary school. These interviews are analysed against R. C. Gardner’s socio-educational motivation theory (Chapter 2). The students are categorized into two groups according to their previous study situations during compulsory English class, where one group of students have studied English with the help of special educational provision, such as small study groups outside the regular curricula, and one group of students have excelled in English, with high grades\(^5\) in English year 9. In regards to the students with special educational provision, a study group called Bryggan is often referred to in the present paper. Bryggan was a project-based extra-curricula study group at the local secondary school for many of the students of this study, however discontinued in 2007 and replaced with a new project.

The interviewees were recommended to this study by their current upper secondary school English teachers, who also provided additional information on the students’ past and present English study situation. The students were interviewed individually, using a questionnaire (Appendix 1) inspired by R.C. Gardner’s *Attitude/Motivation Test Battery* (Gardner 2004). The questions were posed verbally by the interviewer, supported by exemplifications and resulting questions. All answers and associations were recorded by hand during the interview, and the

\(^5\) The Swedish grading system is applied: IG (fail), G (pass), VG (pass with distinction), and MVG (pass with special distinction) (Utbildningsdepartemented 2003:48).
suggested answer “I can’t remember” was used only as a very last resort, when all other options seemed exhausted.

To some answers, the students were asked to estimate a grade between 0 and 10, where 0 represented a negative position and 10 a positive position. These gradations have been accounted for in diagrams, here called figures.

Students with previous special educational provision who were successful in passing their English grades in year 9 have been juxtaposed with those who were unsuccessful, while the students who have excelled in English during secondary school have been used as a counterexample, possibly displaying socio-educational similarities and/or disparities.

Students with a different first language than Swedish have been excluded from the study, in order for English to exclusively act as the second language.

The group of excelling students of English contains a mixture of students from academic and non-academic homes. Furthermore, the study seeks to exemplify a balanced gender representation.

2. THE SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL MOTIVATION THEORY

2.1 Introduction to the Socio-Educational Motivation Theory

Canadian psychologist R. C. Gardner developed his motivation theory on second language learning based on a social psychological foundation already in the late 1950s, but it did not achieve its present recognition until the early 1990s (Dörnyei 1994: 273). Basically, Gardner’s socio-educational motivation theory emphasises how components in the social milieu affect the student’s motivation to learn a second language. This theory has demonstrated that a so called talent for language learning is a far weaker predictor for language acquisition than a high personal motivation (Gardner 1985:67, Dörnyei 1994: 273).

According to socio-educational categorization, motivation requires three fulfilled criteria: effort, desire, and a favourable attitude towards the target language, also called positive affect (Gardner 1985:10, 13). An individual might expend effort because of a demanding teacher, an upcoming examination, or promises of rewards, but this is not motivation. Similarly, the individual might have a positive attitude towards being able to speak the target language, but resist expending any kind of effort to learn, which also characterizes a lack of motivation (Gardner 1985:10). If the student claims to study the second language only because it is a non-optional subject on the school syllabus, this also signifies a lack of motivation (Gardner 1985: 51). However, the student’s attitude towards learning the language highly depends on the course
itself and its specific teacher (Gardner 1985:149). The teacher’s authority type greatly
influences the nature of the student’s motivation, enhancing or decreasing the student’s self-
determination to succeed, since the teacher’s strong modelling effect influences the student’s
attitudes and orientation (Dörnyei 1994:278).

In this study, the two groups of students are examined against three socio-educational study
areas: their integrative or instrumental motivation, their past relationship with the English
language, and their sense of parental support, which are briefly accounted for below.

2.2 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

The student’s motivation to learn a second language might be internal or external, known as
integrative and instrumental motivation. While the integratively orientated student experiences
social-emotional reasons for studying the second language, such as wanting to interact in the
second language, the instrumentally orientated language student is driven by more pragmatic
reasons, such as the desire of obtaining a certain job (Gardner 1985:11, 55). The history of the
student’s experiences with the target language tends to influence the nature of his or her
motivation, why positive previous experiences produce a good linguistic self-confidence and
subsequently an integrative motivation and low achievements in the second language, such as
low grades, decrease the student’s integrativeness and motivation (Gardner 1985: 68, 93). One
general effect of integrativeness is a more active student in the classroom, but an instrumentally
motivated student might still experience a higher degree of motivation, even though more
pragmatically oriented (Gardner 1985:55, 59). Instrumental motivation may also change as a
result of external changes, but integrative motivation does not change, since it is linked to the
learner’s personal history (Gardner 2001: 15).

2.3 Personal History

Various studies of second language acquisition show a tendency towards a decrease of interest
for second language learning with age. However, this age-bound decrease in interest is greatly
reliant on previous experiences of success or failure (Gardner 1985:44). Being forced to learn a
second language despite a lack of integrative motivation may create a sense of failure within the
student, which generates a negative attitude towards the target language and consequently
towards the second language classroom (Gardner 1985:44, 89). Failure in the second language
course, such as low grades, prominently decreases the student’s motivation for the language,
whereas success increases an integrative motivation (Gardner 2001:17-18). The socio-
educational theory also assumes that learning a second language is a process of internalising
something foreign, why studying a second language includes a various degree of personal conflict, according to previous experiences with the language a (Gardner 2001: 8, Gardner 1985:143, 146). Also, the language teacher’s personality, teaching style, ability to give feedback, and his or her relationship with the student are strong motivational components, which greatly influence the student’s performance (Dörnyei 1994:277-278). Research has shown that positive reinforcement from the teacher, such as praise, increases the study result drastically (Child 1986:44-45). Moreover, young students consciously or unconsciously recognise their teacher’s intrinsic expectations of them and actually strive to respond to these expectations. Thus, students who are expected to succeed with their tasks will strive to do so, while students who are expected to fail with their tasks will make less of an effort to succeed. Therefore, teachers pose just as great an influence on the students’ motivation to learn as the parents (Child 1986:52).

2.4 Parental Influence

Another high predictor of integrative motivation is the parental influence. Parents, who express a positive attitude towards the target language, even though they might not speak the language themselves, induce a similarly positive attitude towards the second language into their children (Gardner 1985: 44, 108). Also, an important factor is whether the parent plays an active or a passive role in the student’s second language studies. The active parent consciously encourages the child to do well, by actively engaging in the child’s schoolwork and making efforts to reinforce success. The passive parent, however, is not often aware of his or her influence, since this is displayed through the parent’s personal attitude towards the target language (Gardner 1985: 110). Research has shown that a passive parental attitude is the most effective and influential. What children remember most when asked about parental encouragement is not their parents’ engagement in their homework and tests, but their parents’ positive attitudes towards the second language. This positive parental attitude towards the second language also gives rise to integrative motivation in the child, whereas the active parental role produces more instrumentally motivated students (Gardner 1985:122).

These possible congruent discrepancies in the motivational histories of students with previously diverging secondary English study situations are here investigated. Firstly, the interviewees are presented in two groups below, according to their secondary English study situations. These students are labelled with a code, in order to facilitate further referencing in the text.
3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1 Presentation of the students

Table 1. Group A: The reference group of excelling students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>English grade year 9</th>
<th>Learning impediment</th>
<th>Special educational provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>MVG</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>MVG</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>MVG</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>MVG</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Group B: Students with previous special educational provision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>English grade year 9</th>
<th>Learning impediment</th>
<th>Special educational provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Undiagnosed reading difficulties, Great socio-psychological adversities.</td>
<td>One year of youth care, followed by studies at Bryggan* year 9. One year at the Individual Programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Diagnosed with dyslexia at upper secondary school (autumn 2007).</td>
<td>A small separate study group in English year 8 and 9. Currently in a regular programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>IG</td>
<td>A severe concentration disorder (diagnosis during secondary school) and socio-psychological adversities.</td>
<td>Expulsion from secondary school, followed by studies at Bryggan. One year at the Individual Programme, currently in a regular programme with an individual study plan for English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Bryggan (The Bridge) a project-based extra-curricula study group at the local compulsory school, for students with severe special needs of a more socio-educational nature, however discontinued in 2007.

Tables 1 and 2 show the distribution of students in the survey. While Table 1 shows the reference group of excelling students in English (Group A), Table 2 shows the group of students who have studied English during secondary school with the help of special educational provision (Group B).
Together with the student’s age and English grade from year 9, the tables shortly present the student’s learning impediment(s) and the special educational provision provided. The student is also labelled according to his or her sex, G for girl and B for boy, together with a number, in order to facilitate referencing in the text.

Some students in Table 2 are undiagnosed with reading difficulties, which here means that they have not yet undergone clinical reading and writing tests, but nonetheless experience handicapping reading and writing abilities. Also, these yet undiagnosed reading difficulties are confirmed by their current upper secondary school English teachers, why first steps towards diagnostic clarifications have been initiated at the time of the study.

3.2 Observations on Integrative and Instrumental motivation

3.2.1 Integratively Motivated Students

Only two students, G1 and G5, showed a prominent integrative motivation. They both expressed a compelling desire to live in USA and England, in order to become part of these countries’ cultures. For these students, the English courses at school merely functioned as instruments of perfecting their own English, in order to facilitate their present English interaction and future emigration. Not only did they claim to visit English speaking chat sites on the Internet on a daily basis, where they had found friends from the desired countries to interact with, but both students also stated that they frequently speak English to themselves as well as to close friends or family members in order to practice their English, or because they perceive English as a better language for self-expression. Interestingly enough, one of these students, G5, belonged to Group B, the group of students who had studied English with the help of special educational provision. However, she was the only student in Group B with no reading difficulties of any kind. Instead, G5’s adversities were exclusively of a socio-psychological nature, with a history of drug abuse which caused her to fail attending most of secondary school. Yet, G5 had managed to pass her English grades, with the help of Bryggan, the extra-curricula study group for students with socio-educational issues. G5 were also involved with a boyfriend whose intrinsic drive to immigrate to USA was just as compelling as hers. Of all students, G5 probably expressed the most enthusiastic attitude towards the English language and towards expending efforts to improve her English proficiency, both privately and in class.

But whereas G5 had no future plans for her English skills, except using the language as a part of her own self-expression and for submerging into an English speaking culture, G1, a girl with excellent English grades from year 9 as well as from her three years of upper secondary
education, planned on also using her future proficiency in the English language as an English teacher.

![Figure 1. “This is why I want to learn English”](image1)

![Figure 2. “These are all the situations when I need English now”](image2)

### 3.2.2 Instrumentally Motivated Students

The majority of the students in Group B, those who had studied English with the help of previous special educational provision, answered “because I have to” to the question why they study English, which indicates a total lack of motivation (Gardner 1985: 51). They also displayed the weakest desire for both learning English and for making an effort in their English class, which also indicates a lack of motivation (Gardner 1985:10, 13). These students are accounted for separately.

There was in fact only one instrumentally motivated student in Group B, the dyslexic boy, B3, who claimed to need English for technical reasons, such as electric manuals, for journeys abroad, and for online Internet games, where he interacted in English on a regular basis.

The three instrumentally motivated students in Group A, the reference group of excelling students, G2, G3 and B1, gave similar instrumental reasons as B3. Both G2 and G3 saw academic pursuits as their main goals, coupled with extended journeys, and B1 saw his performance in English as a way of making himself as attractive as possible within his future vocational field. These three students were also described by their current English teachers as students with a high degree of general motivation for school.
3.2.3 Students Lacking Motivation

Four students in Group B, G4, G6, G7, and B4, lacked motivation for English studies, and three of them, G4, G6, and G7, were challenged with reading disabilities. All these three were yet undiagnosed, but displayed nonetheless obvious reading impediments, both according to themselves and their teachers. However, the boy B4 had a documented concentration disorder which thoroughly impaired his classroom competence, having resulted in a drastic short-term expulsion from secondary school before being able to continue his studies at Bryggan.

Conversely, one of these students, G4, had managed to pass her English grade in year 9 despite a lack of motivation. However, G4 now tended towards a faint but still slightly detectable instrumental motivation. This slight motivation increase cropped from a recent performance on an English test, where she had come close to receiving the grade VG\(^6\) for the first time in her life. This for her unexpected success seemed to initiate a new and dawning motivation for English.

Oddly enough, one student in Group A, B2, responded with a lack of motivation as well, despite being described by his current English teacher as ambitious and talented for English. Consequently, B2 had managed to achieve the highest grade in English, MVG\(^7\), in secondary school as well as at upper secondary school, but had nonetheless chosen to terminate his English studies. In fact, his lack of motivation actually seemed to stem from his talent for English, since he felt his present English proficiency was sufficient for his interactions in

\(^6\) VG = Pass with distinction  
\(^7\) MVG = Pass with special distinction
English on various Internet forums. He therefore claimed to see no further need for continued English studies.

3.3 Observations on Personal Histories

3.3.1 General Observations

To a large degree, the two groups presented two significantly divergent experiences in their past relationship not only with the English language but also with school in general. For one, the students who had studied English with the help of special educational provision, Group B, consisted of students who had changed school on several occasions, in connection with drastic changes on their home scene. These students had suffered from various kinds of psychological trauma, such as distressing divorces, physical and sexual abuse, drug addiction, homelessness, mental illness, institutionalisation, and so on. Even though school had not initially represented their main obstacle, it had nonetheless added to their general suffering by not addressing or even recognising their needs. On the other hand, when finally arriving at Bryggan during secondary school, these students referred to this as a rescue. This rescue consisted of being presented with a warm, welcoming and caring place to escape from pressing home situations, a place where the student’s problematic socio-psychological issues could be combined with school work. So, whereas the regular English classroom situations were described by these students as strongly demotivating, only generating an increasing negative affect for English, the small extra-curricula groups, such as Bryggan, were depicted as motivating, increasing the students’ positive affect towards English, as well as other core subjects.

One student from Group B with no such socio-psychological issues, B3, came from a stable home and had always attended school on a regular basis. What B3 was struggling with throughout his compulsory school education was undiagnosed dyslexia, which was clinically confirmed during his first term at upper secondary school.

The reference group of excelling students, Group A, had none of these disruptive background traumas, but appeared to come from relatively balanced home surroundings.

However, apart from disruptive socio-psychological backgrounds, three socio-educational components in the students’ past appeared to bear particular importance for both groups. These three components were the students’ first encounters with the English language, their relationships with the compulsory school English teachers, and their sense of failure or success.
3.3.2 First Encounter with English

Only the integratively motivated student in Group B, G5, could remember her first encounter with the English language prior to her first English class. G5’s first contact with English came through music, imitating the English lyrics of her favourite band and even trying to write her own songs in English. G5 claimed to have looked forward to starting English class in primary school\(^8\), and to have found English class very exciting initially. The rest of Group B recalled to have first encountered English as a subject in school.

Those encountering English for the first time in primary school, had various experiences of starting English class. Only two students, G4 and B3, claimed that they felt good about their first English class. G4 said she initially had found English class “difficult but fun”, and B3 referred to his first English class as “good, interesting and fun”. These three students, G4, G5 and B3, were also the students of Group B who had managed to attain the grade G\(^9\) in English year 9.

B4 also expressed a quite positive attitude to starting English class in primary school, mostly due to a deep fondness for his first English teacher. This seemingly mutual affection encouraged him to often raise his hand in English class, in order to answer questions, and to eagerly finish his homework hoping that his teacher would reward him with a sticker in his English work book.

The other two students of Group B, G6 and G7, expressed a weak initial interest in their first English class. G6 claimed she had been unable to comprehend why they had to study

\[\text{\^8} \text{ The term primary school is applied when referring to years 1-6 in compulsory school, also known as primary and intermediate level.}\]
\[\text{\^9} \text{ Pass level}\]
\[\text{\^10} \text{ Here the students were asked to grade their interest in the English language prior to English class.}\]
English at all, while G7 initially found English rather easy, but soon lost track due to undetected reading disabilities and socio-psychological adversities. G6, G7 and B4 were the students of Group B who had not managed to attain the grade G in English year 9.

By contrast, all but one student in the reference group of excelling students, Group A, remembered vividly their first encounters with the English language prior to English class. G1, the only integratively motivated student in Group A, was inspired by her elder sister to listen to music with English lyrics, as well as G3 who played and performed English songs together with her friends already in pre-school, while G2’s curiosity about English was awoken by her parents using it as a secret language, and B1’s first contact with English came through films and computer games. Only B2, the excelling student with a lack of motivation despite aptitude and excellent proficiency, could not remember encountering English before school and consequently felt no particular excitement when English was introduced in primary school. However, B2 claimed he was very active in English class from the very start, and was offered extra assignments in English because of his high aptitude and splendid performance.

3.3.3 Relationship with English Teachers

Similarly, the students of Group B showed an alarming range of dissatisfactory relationships with their English teachers.

Only two students of Group B, B3 and B4, had experienced a good relationship with their first English teachers. But whereas B3, the boy with dyslexia but no socio-psychological...
issues, continued his satisfactory relationship with the same English teacher up until secondary school, B4’s first English teacher, whom he claimed to have had a deep affection for, left her post after a year, upon which B4 also changed school due to domestic circumstances. Consequently, at secondary school these two boys, B3 and B4, reported on extreme discrepancies in their English teacher-student relationships. While B3 claimed his secondary school English teacher was “good but strict” and that he quite liked her, B4 referred to his secondary school English teacher as “evil” and “nasty” and claimed to have profoundly “hated her”. Also, since B3 displayed signs of reading difficulties, he was moved to a smaller English study group, which he found helpful. B4, however, generated such a disturbance in class, due to a severe concentration disorder coupled with critical socio-psychological issues, that he was temporarily expelled from school before studying at Bryggan.

The rest of Group B, G4, G5, G6 and G7, had very little positive things to say about their primary school English teachers, to whom they referred as “she was a bitch”, “an idiot”, “a know-it-all”, “really cocky” and “didn’t want to help me”.

Furthermore, a majority of these students had to change teachers a multitude of times during compulsory school, in English and other subjects, not only because of changing school, but also because of their teachers’ pregnancy leaves, retirements, and similar reasons. Additionally, all of these students had poor relationships with their secondary school English teachers, claiming that these English teachers “didn’t understand”, “wouldn’t help me”,

![Figure 7](image1.png)
![Figure 8](image2.png)
“yelled at me instead of helping me”, “had something against me”, “wouldn’t come when I raised my hand”, and “hated me”.

On the other hand, the students who subsequently studied in a small group, such as Bryggan, G4, G5, G6 and B4, in unison expressed a strong and positive affection for these teachers. The special educational teachers were referred to as “I loved her”, “she was gold to me”, “he was like a best friend”, “she understood and pushed me to succeed”, and “she never gave up on me”. The majority of these students had also continued their personal relationships with these teachers after secondary school.

In Group A, however, the students’ relationships with their first and last English teachers in compulsory school had been of a far more satisfactory character. Only one student, B1, did not like his secondary school English teacher, since he said she was “very strict” while he was “very shy”. But since B1 performed really well in class and showed an aptitude for English, this teacher took a special interest in B1 upon which their mutual affection improved. B1 also had a positive relationship with his first English teacher, to whom he referred as “stubborn and kind”. Also, G3 referred to her first English teacher as “strict”, but claimed that this teacher had liked her very much, since she was devoted and eager to learn. In fact, G3 claimed that this English teacher might have liked her a lot more than she herself had liked the teacher. When arriving at secondary school, G3 claimed she had had “the best teacher in the whole school”, a “strict and demanding” teacher from whom G3 claimed to have learned the most.
The rest of Group A’s primary school English teachers were described as “kind”, “funny”, “fun to meet for class”, “strict but fun”, and “young”, and received very high ratings from the students of Group A, as did the students’ own estimations of how much these teachers might have liked them in return. The integratively motivated student in Group A, G1, even had a continued personal contact with her first English teacher, still exchanging Christmas cards.

At secondary school, Group A referred to their English teachers as “funny”, “cool”, “nice”, and B2 even claimed that his secondary school English teacher had “applauded” his English.

3.3.4 Failure and Success

Group A and Group B naturally disclosed divergent stories of failure and success. For example, the dyslexic boy in Group B, B3, said that even though the results of his first English tests were “not so great”, he was “happy nevertheless” since his first English teacher kept encouraging him. However, B3 articulated a strong disappointment about compulsory school English, since never being offered clinical tests for his dyslexia despite his teachers, his family and himself suspecting this ever since primary school. B3 felt he had missed out on many years of appropriate help because of his tardy diagnosis. But, by being able to study English in a small group at secondary school, B3 still managed not to give up and to attain a pass level in English. Now, at upper secondary school, he was finally helped with his diagnosis.

The remaining two students in Group B with a pass level in English from year 9, G4 and G5, also communicated a more positive experience of their first performances in English than
the rest of the group. The integratively motivated girl in Group B, G5, claimed she found English very easy from the very start and that the English teacher acknowledged this.

![Secondary school: “English class in secondary school was...”](chart.png)

Figure 13. Secondary school: “English class in secondary school was”

Also, G4 claimed to have received almost full marks on nearly all word tests during primary school, but that larger tests made her feel uneasy and that her performance suffered thereof. Oddly enough, she stated that her good results were “because [she] had studied for the test”, not because “[she] was good at English”, as if real study achievement had to be innate, without extra-curricula efforts such as studying.

Even B4, who had experienced a deep affection for his first English teacher, reported that he found English very easy from the start and that he proudly went “home to study” in hope that his teacher would place another encouraging sticker in his work book. However, quite soon this satisfactory alliance was broken, and B4’s enthusiasm for English, and school work in general, was disrupted. Nonetheless, B4 still expressed an intrinsic interest for English, despite lacking motivation for studying English. The latter seemed to largely derive from his inability for theoretical concentration and classroom situations.

The remaining girls in Group B who lacked a pass level in English, G6 and G7, both remembered to have performed rather poorly on their first English tests. While G6 claimed to have received no marks at all on her first English test in primary school, G7 reported on having received some marks but feeling very unsettled about English tests because of not knowing “how they would end”.

On the contrary, the students of Group A reported on excellent results on their first English tests during primary school. Most students of Group A claimed to have achieved top marks on their first English tests, which they described as “it was fun”, “it built my self-confidence”, it was really great”, and “I wanted to do more”.

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Another divergence, of a striking nature, was the way Group A and Group B perceived speaking English in the classroom during compulsory school. While Group A generally commented on speaking English in the classroom as “really fun”, “easy”, “it gave me a lot of credit”, and “it was something that I just really loved”, Group B commented on this as something that “made me feel really ashamed”, “scared me”, “was embarrassing”, “made me nervous”, and one student even reported on crying.

Not a single student of Group B was even remotely positive about speaking English in the classroom. One prominent anxiety was a fear of mispronouncing English words, especially words with a *th*-sound, which many students of Group B found too hard to pronounce. However, this fear of speaking English was somewhat relieved in the special educational provision groups, where the same students claimed to feel more comfortable.
Furthermore, another difference was how the two groups of students displayed their own understanding of their strengths in English compared with what they recalled having worked with in the compulsory English classroom.

![Figure 17. Group A: “My strength(s) in English was/were...”](image1)

![Figure 18. Group A: “In English class we mostly did...”](image2)

![Figure 19. Group B: “My strength(s) in English was/were...”](image3)

![Figure 20. Group B: “In English class we mostly did...”](image4)

To judge from Figures 17–20, Group A displayed more coherence than Group B between what the students perceived as their own strengths in English and the actual activities that took place in their English classrooms. Most students of Group A claimed that writing was their strength, and they also recalled working mostly with writing in the English classroom.
By contrast, most students of Group B claimed that their strength in English was the ability to understand spoken English, and some the ability to read English as well, while most of the English classroom activities were concerned with writing, speaking, and reading out loud.

### 3.4 Observations on Parental Influence

Regarding whether the parents played an active or passive role in the students’ English education, the two groups displayed rather noticeable discrepancies. While most of the excelling students of Group A reported on parents who played passive roles by encouraging a positive attitude towards English, most of the students of Group B reported on parents who seemingly played more active roles by reminding about homework and offering help with these, while displaying indifferent attitudes regarding English.

The excelling students of Group A reported on parents who apart from helping with the homework also encouraged the students to talk about English, whereas the students of Group B reported on parents who nagged them to complete their English homework, but without talking about English as such. In fact, most parents of the students in Group B did not know English very well themselves, if at all.

All but one student of Group A reported on parents who had talked about English in a positive and encouraging way, such as discussing with the students about the use and importance of English, or playfully discussing Swedish subtitles of English films.

The only student of Group A whose parents had shown a very vague interest in English was B2, the boy with a lack of motivation despite his English aptitude. B2 claimed this was due to

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**Figure 21.** Primary school: “This is how my parents felt about me starting English class...”

**Figure 22.** Primary school: “This is how important it was for my parents that I learned English...”
his parents not knowing English themselves, and because he lived in a very big family with many siblings why his parents were unable to engage themselves explicitly in his or his siblings’ schoolwork, let alone in English in which they had no proficiency.

In Group B, however, only two students, G5 and G7, reported on parents who talked to them about English in a positive way. But while G5, the integratively motivated girl, reported on a mother who enjoyed talking to her about English and who continuously engaged herself in G5’s English progress, G7 reported on a mother who had a very poor English proficiency, but who kept emphasising the importance of English nonetheless.

The rest of the students of Group B did not remember their parents ever talking to them about the use of English or discussing English, in neither a negative nor a positive way.

All in all, not many students perceived that their parents had been interested in their English grades. The students of Group A claimed that their parents were more interested in the fact that their children were actually learning English, regardless of the grades, whereas the students of Group B reported on parents who focused their main concern on the student’s school attendance and not on what type of grade this attendance might result in.
4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1 A Summary

In an increasingly globalised world the English language prevails as the predominant instrument for communication, not only within professional contexts but also in all kinds of leisure pursuits, such as Internet activities, games, travel, and all sorts of media output. The individual’s English proficiency might therefore prove crucial in any vocational field as well as in recreational activities. Not the least, a documented sufficient English proficiency proves central for Swedish compulsory school graduates, who are required to submit an English pass level in order to access regular upper secondary English education, a requirement for a later access to higher education.

This paper is based on the socio-educational theory launched by R.C. Gardner, and looks at the congruence between this theory and observations regarding interviews with students who have failed in achieving their English grades in year 9 and students who have succeeded, some despite various learning impediments such as reading difficulties and socio-psychological adversities.

The main focus has been on the students’ motivation for English, since the socio-educational motivation theory regards motivation as the most important factor in language learning (Gardner 1985:67). According to the observations made in this study, socio-educational components such as the language introduction, the teacher-student relationship, and early experiences of success or failure, do seem to play a vital role in the students’ subsequent language achievements, such as their ability to achieve grades despite learning impediments, which will be accounted for below.

4.2 Conclusion

4.2.1 Conclusive Motivational Deductions

Firstly, this study has shown that the nature of the student’s motivation, whether integrative or instrumental, does not appear central to the achievement level in English. According to the socio-educational motivation theory, instrumental and integrative motivation can be equally compelling, which this study confirms (Gardner 1985:55). As a matter of fact, the majority of students of Group A, the group of excelling students of English, displayed instrumental motivation, which had clearly sufficed in regards to their language achievements. Thus, judging by Group A’s high grades, the only integratively motivated
student of Group A, G1, had not performed better in her English courses than her instrumentally motivated peers.

Conversely, when lacking a general motivation for school, an integrative motivation for English seemed to be essentially helpful, as in the case of G5, the only integratively motivated student of Group B. Due to great socio-psychological adversities coupled with a difficult drug abuse, this girl had attended school the least of all the interviewed students. G5 attended the few first months of year 7 and a few last months of year 9, with extensive help from the extra-curricula study group Bryggan. Nonetheless, G5 not only managed to achieve a pass level in year 9 English, but also succeeded in passing all parts of the final National Test in English, an extraordinary achievement considering her lack of English education. G5’s integrative motivation for English stimulated a most informal pursuit of English knowledge outside school, through Internet activities and other media sources. Her success seems to stem from three socio-educational components: a) a positive and inspiring pre-educational introduction into English studies through the student’s interest in music, b) a mother who encouraged G5 to speak English, c) a positive initial English classroom experience. This integrative motivation for English thus sustained G5 enough to complete her secondary school English without tuition.

Secondly, socio-psychological adversities seem to have a greater bearing on the student’s level of motivation for English and his or her ability to achieve grades than clinical learning impediments, such as reading difficulties. In this study, reading difficulties alone did not appear to cause either a lack of motivation or a great obstruction to achieving grades in English. However, undiagnosed and/or overlooked reading difficulties coupled with socio-psychological complications seem to have the most crucial effect on the level of motivation. However, this combination of multifaceted study difficulties seems only to have a lasting demotivational effect if the student also experienced an unsatisfactory introduction into language studies, as in the case of G6. After one year at the Individual Programme, where she finally completed her English grade year 9, G6 now studied at a regular programme with an individual study plan excluding English, on her own most persistent request. Her unrelenting lack of motivation for English seemingly occurs from four socio-educational factors: a) an initial and continuous lack of valence, i.e. a lack of anticipated positive consequences and benefits from the study assignments and curricula, b) a sense of failure during the first English class and onwards, c) poor initial and subsequent English teacher-

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11 The National Test in English is distributed by the Swedish National Agency for Education and performed by all compulsory school graduates by the end of year 9. The National Test is divided into four parts: Speaking, Reading, Listening, and Writing, and all parts are assessed according to an enclosed key.
student relationships, d) an undiagnosed reading difficulty (Gardner & Tremblay 1995:508). These components seemingly erased all of G6’s present and future motivation for English.

Moreover, an initial satisfactory English introduction in primary school seems to generate a latent instrumental motivation for English, even in the case of learning impediments. Thus, succeeding experiences of negative English classroom exposure, such as unstable and/or unsatisfactory teacher-student relationships and constant failure, surely seemed to exhaust the student’s motivation for English, but not irreversibly.

In this study, what appeared as a lack of motivation for English among the students at upper secondary school actually disguised a lack of expectancy and self-efficacy, i.e. a lack of perceived likelihood of being successful and able to perform towards a goal in English (Gardner & Tremblay 1995:507). This lack of expectancy and self-efficacy often seemed to present itself combined with a learned helplessness, i.e. perceiving any kind of success in English class as unattainable, no matter the study efforts (Dörnyei 1994:277).

However, when the English introduction in primary school was satisfactory, the lack of motivation appeared to be: a) reversible, and b) not a definite hindrance to achieving grades in English. In fact, subsequent positive experiences of English, such as success, seemed able to awaken this dormant instrumental motivation for English, as in the case of G4 in Group B. Despite a lack of motivation for English as well as impeding and yet undiagnosed reading difficulties, coupled with traumatic socio-psychological adversities which caused a poor school attendance, G4 managed to achieve a pass level in English year 9. Interestingly enough, G4 graded her very first English teacher-student relationship rather high, as 7 out of 10, and also reported on satisfactory results on her first English tests. Consequently, a recent upper secondary school experience of unexpected success on an English test incited a reverse effect on her lack of motivation for English, which G4 herself acknowledged.

Additionally, an initial strong motivation for English could equally be reversed to a non-motivation for English studies. In accordance with the socio-educational motivation theory, a lack of valence tends to have a reversing effect on the level of motivation, as well as over-emphasis on extrinsic benefits and goals such as course specific tasks and grades (Dörnyei 1994: 276). This was exactly the case of B2, a highly excelling student of Group A. Even though regarded as a student with an extraordinarily high aptitude for English, despite his non-academic background and parents with no basic English proficiency at all, B2 claimed to lack motivation for further English studies and therefore terminated his continued English education. Nonetheless, B2 still actively pursued English interaction outside of school. B2 claimed that his current English proficiency already provided him with a sufficient ability to
interact freely in English on this informal basis. B2 also lacked instrumental incentives, since he had no plans on applying to higher education and therefore had no need for further grades. Therefore, B2’s drop-out actually seemed to be a direct consequence of his high aptitude for English, contrary to findings of previous socio-educational research which testify that second language drop-outs display less positive attitudes towards the second language and lower aptitude scores (Gardner 1985:56). In fact, socio-educational impetuses seem to have a far stronger and long-lasting effect on the students’ motivation level than grades and other more pragmatic course-specific incentives.

4.2.2. Conclusive Motivational Second Language Incentives
To begin with, the informal first encounter with English appears to be the predominantly strongest incentive to motivation for English. The majority of Group A, the group of excelling English students, could vividly recall their first encounter with the English language outside school, whereas most students of Group B, the students who studied English with the help of special educational provision during secondary school, found it hard to recall any encounters with the English language prior to primary school’s English class. For students who are unfamiliar to English prior to school the English introduction in primary school seems to hold a vital importance for any future motivation level. A positive introduction seems to produce motivation for English, resurrectable if temporarily subdued, and a negative introduction appears to generate an irrevocable subsequent lack of motivation for English.

Secondly, a strong motivating incentive is an affiliative drive, i.e. the motivation to do well in class when liking the teacher (Dörnyei 1994:278). Thus, the average grades of the two groups’ estimations between 0 and 10 show striking discrepancies in regards to their affiliative drive:

“This is how I felt about my first English teacher:”12
Group A: 6.4
Group B: 5.3.

“This is how I felt about my English teacher at secondary school:”13
Group A: 7.8
Group B: 2.6

“This is how my first English teacher felt about me:”14
Group A: 8.8
Group B: 4.8

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12 Figure 5, p. 16.
13 Figure 7, p. 17.
14 Figure 6, p. 16. N.B. Based on the students’ very own perception of the teachers’ feelings for them.
“This is how my secondary school English teacher felt about me.”15
Group A: 8.4
Group B: 2.5

This clearly displays how Group B suffered from an excess of deficient teacher-specific motivational components, i.e. these students experienced their English teachers’ personalities, teaching styles, and ability to relate to them as unsatisfactory (Dörnyei 1994:278). However, the average grades to the same questions regarding the teachers in the special educational provision groups, such as Bryggan, showed a prominent difference:

At special educational provision:

“This is how I felt about my English teacher:”16
Group B: 9.2

“This is how my English teacher felt about me:”17
Group B: 8.7

Therefore, these small extra-curricula study groups seem more able to cultivate learning, possibly because the students work in a very restricted group situation with only two or three other students, and because the teachers’ primary function is to act more as fellow beings and grown-ups than regular language teachers. This explains why most of the previous students of Bryggan still keep in touch with these teachers, to whom they referred as “she saved my life” and “she was the best thing that ever happened to me”. All students of Group B who studied with the help of Bryggan strongly emphasized that these teachers meant the world to them and made a huge difference in their lives.

Furthermore, encouraging parents who play a passive role, i.e. who affect the student’s attitude towards English rather than concern themselves with homework or grades, appear to be a motivational incentive closely related to the one discussed above. In fact, even the English teachers themselves appear to play this encouragingly passive parental role for most students of Group A, who had many positive things to say about their supportive and inspiring English teachers, as opposed to the students of Group B. According to the socio-educational motivation theory, feeling resentful towards the teacher will most probably cause the student to resist the language classroom, despite a positive attitude towards the target language (Gardner 1985:56). This explains why many students of Group B avoided their regular English class. However, teachers of the special educational provision groups seem to work as a counterbalance to any lack of supportive parents. Thus, for students with

15 Figure 8, p. 17. N.B. Based on the students’ very own perception of the teachers’ feelings for them.
16 Figure 9, p. 18.
17 Figure 10, p. 18. N.B. - “ -
dysfunctional parents, a strong motivational incentive was the impact of the special educational teachers who functioned as substitute parents, taking on the positive passive parental role.

Thirdly, agreeable activities in English class, i.e. activities connected to the student’s own strength(s), make another motivational incentive. While most of the students of Group A reported on coherence between strengths and classroom activities\(^{18}\), the students of Group B accounted for the opposite. In fact, most students of Group B claimed to have been forced to speak English in the classroom\(^{19}\), something that utterly terrified them. Naturally, this fear of speaking was most possibly connected to yet unrecognised and/or undiagnosed reading difficulties, impeding the process of decoding written English.

Finally, one of the strongest motivational incentives seems to be the individual experience of success. According to the findings of socio-educational research, students’ anxiety measured before and after a language course differs depending on the experiences of success. Thus, the degree of students’ anxiety drastically decreases during the progression of the language course if the student feels successful (Gardner 2001:17-18). Even a small amount of success in the language course is sufficient to increase both attitude and motivation (Gardner 2001:18). This study has also confirmed this socio-educational conclusion. More so, praise and encouragement seem to be of vital importance in order to create or vitalise any kind of motivation for English among the students of both groups.

4.2.3 Final Thoughts and Suggestions

This study does not intend to take a stand against the English teachers at compulsory school, to whom the students of Group B have responded rather negatively. These responses are rather regarded as an expression of socio-psychologically challenged students’ frustration over the regular language classroom, a milieu in which the majority of the students of Group B claimed to feel “stupid”. In fact, language teachers are often extremely hard-working and very sensitive to the needs of their students, but they are often obliged to manage oversized language groups and thus oversized amounts of individual needs. Naturally, this reduces the teachers’ ability to provide for special needs of students with gaps in their English competence and motivation.

According to R.C. Gardner, the lack of motivation is best cured by language programmes tailored in accordance to the learner’s actual level of development, as this reduces the risk of failure and thus increases the motivation level (Gardner 1985:89). This study deeply agrees

\(^{18}\) See figure 17 and 18, p. 22
\(^{19}\) See figure 19 and 20, p. 22
with this suggestion and emphasizes the need for small English study groups for students
with pronounced socio-psychological needs. These special educational groups, with a highly
limited number of participants, seem to present the students with a calm and secluded place
to succeed without comparison with more accomplished peers.

Furthermore, this study suggests early and continuous reading and writing tests, starting
already during the early stages of primary school, in order to detect reading difficulties of
any kind, which severely complicate second language learning, especially if undetected.

Also, this study testifies that the language introduction in primary school should focus on
creating an interest for English and its usage, rather than on practising formal language
skills. The teacher should also be aware of acting as a first, and sometimes only,
representative of the English language. Thus, if the teacher acts encouragingly towards the
language student this will most likely produce a positive attitude towards English. This
positive attitude generates motivation for English, which in turn produce formal language
skills and grades.

Finally, building and maintaining a personal relationship with the second language learner
is strongly recommended. From the observations made in this study, a trusting teacher-
student relationship is the strongest incentive behind motivation for English, regardless
teaching methods and didactics.
REFERENCES


**Dictionaries**


APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE

BACKGROUND

Name
Class
Grade year 9
Upper Secondary School year 1

Parents’ vocation: mother
father

Student’s vocational goal(s):

Last/current English teacher’s reflections about the student’s English and motivation:

HISTORY

1a. I first got in contact with English:
In school / Through media (films, tv, etc) / At home / Elsewhere: 

b. Before I studied English, the English language


didn’t interest me at all was very interesting to me

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (I can’t remember)

c. Because:

2. I first started studying English in school at age 

indifferent really excited

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (I can’t remember)

b. Because:

c. This is how it showed:

Primary school
3a. My first English teacher was a (adj) 

man woman

b. This is how I felt about my first English teacher

hated her/him loved her/him

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)

c. Because:

4a. This is how my first English teacher felt about me

hated me loved me

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. Because:

5a. I changed English teacher …… times
b. The best teacher was the……… because:

6a. When I spoke English in class I
hated it  felt really good
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. Because:

7a. My strength(s) in English was/were
speaking / reading / writing / understanding
b. We mostly did…………………………

8a. When I made oral mistakes in class, my teacher:
ignored it / friendlyliy corrected me /
unfriendlily corrected me / something else:
b. which made me feel:

9a. When I needed help with my English, I asked
my teacher / my classmates / other friends / my parents something else:…………
b. The help I would have needed with my English was:

10a. We had English tests in intermediate level yes / no
b. The result of my first English test was
Really bad Excellent
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
c. It made me feel:

11a. I felt I was good / bad / (adj) ……… in English.
b. Because:

12a. My teacher said I was good / bad / (adj) ……… in English. (didn’t say)
b. Because

Secondary school

13a. My English teacher in secondary school was a (adj)………. man / woman
b. This is how I felt about my English teacher in secondary school
hated her/him  loved her/him
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
c. Because:

14a. This is how my secondary school Eng teacher felt about me
hated me  loved me
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. Because:

15a. I changed English teacher until year 9 …… times
b. The best teacher was the……… because:
b. English class at secondary school was
really hard  really easy
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
c. Because:

16a. When I spoke English in class at secondary I
hated it  felt really good
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. Because:

17a. When I made oral mistakes in class, my teacher
ignored it  / friendlily corrected me  /
unfriendlily corrected me / something else:
b. which made me feel:

18a. When I needed help with my English, I asked
my teacher  / my classmates  / other friends  / my parents something else:
b. The help I would have needed with my English was:

19a. The result of my first Eng test at secondary school was
Really bad  Excellent
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. It made me feel:

20a. My English grade in year 9  IG / G / VG / MVG
b. I had expected  IG / G / VG / MVG
c. My teacher’s reason(s) for my English grade was:
d. I thought the grade was fair / unfair  because:

PARENTAL SUPPORT
Primary school

21a. This is how important it was for my parents that I learned English:
Didn’t care  Really important
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. Because:

22a. This is how my parents felt about me starting English class
Didn’t care  Really excited
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(I can’t remember)
b. Because:

23a. About homework in English, my parents
Asked me if I had homework
Didn’t ask if I had homework  
Didn’t seem to care  
Something else:  

b. If I showed my English homework to my parents, they  
Nagged me to do it  
Rewarded me if I did it  
Helped me with it  
Encouraged me to talk about it  
Punished me if I didn’t do it  
Ignored it  
Something else:  

24a. My parents / mother / father / used to talk to me about English  
yes no  
in a positive / negative way / something else:  

b. Because:  

Secondary school  
25a. This is how important it was for my parents that I got good grades in English  
not important Really important  
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
(I can’t remember)  

b. Because:  

26a. This is how interested my parents were in my English skills  
Didn’t care Really interested  
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
(I can’t remember)  

b. Because:  

c. This is how it showed:  

27a. About homework in English, my parents  
Asked me if I had homework  
Didn’t ask if I had homework  
Didn’t seem to care  
Something else:  

b. If I showed my English homework to my parents, they  
Nagged me to do it  
Rewarded me if I did it  
Helped me with it  
Encouraged me to talk about it  
Punished me if I didn’t do it  
Ignored it  
Something else:  

28a. I discussed my English test results with my parents  
yes no
b. Because:

29a. I discussed my English grades with my parents
   yes  no
b. Because

INTEGRATIVE or INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATION

30. These are all the situations I when I need English now:

31. This is why I study English:

32. This is why I want to learn English:

33. To learn English I
   read English newspapers/magazines
   read English books
   watch English speaking films without subtitles / try not to look at the subtitles
   travel to English speaking countries / plan to travel to an English speaking country
   chat in English on English speaking Internet sites
   write poetry / lyrics in English
   sometimes talk English to my friends / family / myself
   something else:

34. This is why I will need English in the future:

35a. I would like to live abroad
   Absolutely not!    More than anything!
   0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   (I don’t know)
b. Because:

c. If yes, which country:

36a. I would really like to know some English speaking people
   Absolutely not!    More than anything!
   0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   (I don’t know)
b. Because:

34. I think the English language is (adj)..............................................