

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Preschool - A Diverse and Multilingual Arena**

Ann-Christin Torpsten\* & Mirja Betzholtz†

*Linnaeus University, Sweden / Malmö University, Linnaeus University, Sweden*

*(Received 31 May 2013; final version received 22 October 2013)*

In Swedish preschools children with a mother tongue other than Swedish are encouraged to communicate in their native language. Developed skills in the native language increase the opportunities to learn Swedish, good skills in different languages promote learning in other areas. The purpose of this article is to discuss the prerequisites for preschool children's learning, linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the multilingual preschool context. Data was collected through interviews with preschool teachers, surveys of native language instructors and supervisors. Theoretical basis used is postcolonial theory and critical multiculturalism, which question the socially-constructed notions of majority and minority cultures, highlighting opposites, notions of mono-lingualism, the creation of superiority and subordination where the possession of language dominates in different linguistic contexts. Our analysis reveals both relational and didactic competence. Relational competence appears when informants speak about mother tongue, its positive impact on school success and expanded vocabulary. Through native language support, children receive help in understanding the preschool. Teacher education, subject and preschool assignments knowledge represents didactic competence. Offering language support at inappropriate times, i.e. when children are sleeping, shows lack of flexibility in the organization. Arranging native language support when children cannot participate appears as a consequence of superiority and subordination.

**Keywords:** preschool, native language, relational, didactic skills.

I svenska förskolor uppmuntras barn med annat modersmål än svenska kommunicera på sitt modersmål. Utvecklade färdigheter i sitt modersmål ökar möjligheterna att lära sig svenska, goda färdigheter i olika språk underlättar

---

\* Email: [ann-christin.torpsten@lnu.se](mailto:ann-christin.torpsten@lnu.se)

† Email: [mirja.betzholtz@lnu.se](mailto:mirja.betzholtz@lnu.se)

lärande inom andra områden. Syftet med artikeln är att diskutera förutsättningarna för förskolebarns lärande och en språklig mångfald inom en flerspråklig kontext. Data samlades in genom intervjuer med förskollärare, enkäter till modersmåls lärare och rektorer. Teoretisk utgångspunkt är postkolonial teori och kritisk mångkulturalism som ifrågasätter socialt skapade föreställningar om majoritets- och minoritetskulturer, lyfter fram motsatser, skapande av identiteter, föreställningar om enspråkighet och skapande av överordning respektive underordning där den som förfogar över språket får tolkningsföreträde i olika språkliga sammanhang. I analysen framträder både relationell och didaktisk kompetens. Den relationella kompetensen träder fram när informanterna talar om modersmål, dess positiva inverkan på framgång i skolan och utökat ordförråd. Genom modersmålsstöd får barnen stöd i att förstå förskoleverksamheten. Lärarutbildningen och kunskap om förskolans uppdrag representerar den didaktiska kompetensen. Att erbjuda modersmålsstöd vid olämpliga tidpunkter, t.ex. när barn sover, tyder på en bristande flexibilitet i organisationen. Att anordna modersmålsstöd när barn inte har möjlighet att delta kan ses som ett utslag av över- och underordning.

“They learn their languages: Latin, Greek, German and English. At home they speak French and they can speak Russian among themselves, or are found to speak the Jiddish learned in Odessa’s backyard. All these cousins begin a sentence in one language and finish it in another. They need the languages because the family travels to Odessa, to Saint-Petersburg, to Berlin and Frankfurt and Paris. They also need them because they are class-markers. With languages one can move from one social situation to another. With language one is at home everywhere.”  
(de Waal, 2012, p. 39).

We let the above quotation preface this article about preschool as a linguistic, social and cultural meeting place and important arena for children’s participation conditions and opportunities in life in an international society. Today’s Swedish preschool is a diverse and multilingual arena. In preschool 20% of the children have foreign backgrounds and speak a native language other than Swedish at home (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006; National Agency for Education, 2011). Of the registered children with a native language other than Swedish, more than 21% have native language support. Many of these children are multilingual with Swedish as a second language.

Preschool is the first part of the national school system in Sweden. It is optional and covers children not older than 5 years. The second part is the optional preschool class which covers children aged 6 years. Next part is the compulsory school which includes children aged 7 to 16 years. Upper secondary school is optional and covers the years after compulsory school. The preschool has its own curriculum where democracy is expressed as fundamental values that form the foundation. It should promote all children’s development, learning and a lifelong desire to learn (ibid).

Research shows that children with foreign backgrounds, who develop their native language, have better opportunities to learn Swedish. Further, the possibilities to develop knowledge skills in several languages are promoted, but also the learning in other areas (Hyltenstam, 1996; Lindberg, 2002; National Agency for Education, 2010; 2011). Language, learning and identity development are interconnected, and preschool should help children belonging to national minorities and children with foreign backgrounds to get support to develop a multi-cultural affiliation (National Agency for Education, 2010). Children with a native language other than Swedish should also be given the opportunity to develop their ability to communicate both in their native language and in Swedish (ibid). The Swedish preschool national curriculum further states that equality and education in democratic values are central in public education. The preschool mandate includes relating to the society's shared democratic values regarding equality and diversity. The teaching in preschool is based on a clear child's perspective committed to interpret, implement and convey the preschool language development mission and these fundamental values formulated in preschool policy documents in their work (National Agency for Education, 2010).

### **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

In preschool children should be given an opportunity to lay the foundation for being able to develop the knowledge that all individuals in society need (National Agency for Education, 2008). Increasing internationalization places great demands on the ability of people to live with and understand the values inherent in cultural and linguistic diversity. In this context, the preschool stands as a meeting place that can both strengthen the linguistic ability of children and prepare them for life in an increasingly globalized society (National Agency for Education, 2010). In a multicultural and multilingual preschool context it is possible for children to create hybrid cultural identities by being part of several different contexts that are provided (Balldin, 2010; Persson, 2012). Children with a native language other than Swedish can be offered native language support in preschool (ibid). This assistance means an opportunity to develop fundamental linguistic skills in both native language and the Swedish language. Native language support instructors can stimulate and support children's language development in order to facilitate multilingualism and develop multi-cultural identity (National Agency for Education, 2008). Linguistic abilities are of great importance for the development of both the individual and the society (Cummins & Schechter, 2003; Petersson & Åhlund, 2007). The task of a native language instructor, together with the preschool staff, the children and the children's parents is to plan, implement and develop the language development support where early intervention leads to gains for both children and society (National Agency for Education, 2008).

### **Attitudes Toward Multilingualism and Success Factors**

Children with multilingual and multicultural competence can act on many scenes on the individual and societal levels (Cummins & Schechter, 2003; Petersson & Åhlund, 2007). Children learn language through instruction, when they speak, read and write together with friends who speak the language they need to learn (Cummins & Schechter, 2003;

Cummins, 2006). The best learning results are gained when the lessons and support are organized in environments where the children feel accepted and that they are included in the group's learning community (ibid). Crucial to a child's language acquisition is also the attitude of the child, the teachers and of others in the surroundings, both toward the language that is to be learned and toward the child who is to learn. A decisive factor is the teachers' didactic competence (Aspelin & Persson, 2011; Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Cummins, 2006), meaning that the pupils are challenged in terms of knowledge and that the teacher formulates clear learning objectives for the individual.

Additional significant factors for whether or not the children will succeed in their learning are the teacher's relational competence in the form of encouragement and support for the children to reach the set goals, as well as the interaction between the children and the teacher (ibid). Success factors for children's language development are teacher's professional competence and training in language development methods (didactic competence), in order to interact (relational competence) with all children with expectations and attitudes that promote their learning and the quality of the preschool (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006). In this context teacher's relational and didactic competence is an important quality factor (Björk-Willén, 2013). If the teacher relates to a wider social mission and includes the children's earlier learning, exclusionary and restrictive functions in preschool are prevented (ibid).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this article is to discuss the conditions for preschool children's learning, linguistic diversity and multilingualism in a multilingual preschool context. We focus on linguistic abilities and the development of native language. More specifically, we analyze how preschool teachers, preschool native language instructors and preschool principals talk about and express:

- language development, native language support and communicating skills,
- children's opportunity to develop linguistic competence in terms of participation conditions,
- experience and competence in relation to the assignment and organization.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Within post-colonial theory (Fanon, 1971; Said, 2004) and critical multiculturalism (May, 1999) historical and socially-constructed ideas on majority and minority culture, stereotypes, colonial structures and how they are built, are discussed and questioned through highlighting contrasts, the maintenance and creation of identities. Examples of this are theories of one land, one people and one language (ibid) that create notions of mono-lingualism and mono-culturalism. In this context the Swedish preschool can be understood as mono-cultural (Gough & Rhedding-Jones, 2007). In the preschool homogenizing normalization practice, an *us-and-them* is created with the focus on fostering and changing *them* (Elmeroth, 2008; Fanon, 1971; Persson, 2010). Differences appear as cumbersome, and the educators' ability to balance diversity

against Swedish thus results in fostering a mono-culture where Swedish is the norm (Elmeroth, 2008; Persson, 2010; Torpsten, 2013).

McLaren, Macrine & Dave (2010) problematize requirements for structural changes. An approach based norm-critical to a critical inclusive intercultural pedagogy expose the oppressive structures in order to visualize the structures and make people aware of the social system they live within (ibid). The Swedish preschool curriculum (National Agency for Education, 2010) advocates an intercultural discourse. But in practice it turns out that it is the mono-cultural discourse that dominates (Ronström, Runfors & Wahlström, 1998).

Intentions in legislation and political documents, for example, the creation of conditions for intercultural or multi-cultural education or taking advantage of the opportunities in the multi-cultural school and preschool environment's diversity, appear as difficult to realize in the educational practice that instead comes to be about managing diversity and mastering inter-culturalism (Lunneblad, 2009; Persson, 2010). When school employees understand and manage the cultural and linguistic diversity mentioned in the mission, the culturally and lingual-defined diversity is seen as an asset only when it is useful. When the above is seen in light of one land, one people and one language (May, 1999) together with historically and socially-created ideas about majority and minority cultures (Fanon, 1971; Said, 2004) the government initiatives appear as a way to draw boundaries and create social and moral order based on the norm for what is good or bad in the country (Milani, 2007). Initiatives such as education create homogeneity and linguistic uniformity (Hübinette, 2012).

### **The Key to Increased Cultural Capital**

By putting forward someone or something as better, in comparison to what is considered worse, creates superiority/super-ordination respective inferiority/sub-ordination (Fanon, 1971). An identity that is sub-ordinated becomes a reflection of the super-ordination's expectations, and those who master the language (May, 1999) govern the context expressed through language. One may interpret different linguistic contexts. Owning the language (ibid) means power that can be used over those who do not master the language (Fanon, 1971). Not being able to speak and not having access to the linguistic context, can be formulated in terms of not existing for other children and preschool teachers, and in this non-existence with low expectations, obstacles are created instead of opportunities for the sub-ordinated. Languages appear in this context as keys to closed doors and existence. One way for the sub-ordinated to exist can be to become linguistically homogenous (Fanon, 1971; Milani, 2007) compared with the super-ordinated.

Through education, adaptation and increased cultural capital, it is possible for an individual to raise his or her social position (Bourdieu, 2005). Developing language skills, one's native language and learning the school language, which in our study is also the majority language, can mean that a child's social and cultural capital increases. When one possesses one's native language and the preschool language she acquires linguistic keys. One can experience less sub-ordination because she has access to the world that is expressed and understood in school and society. One can act in different levels and on diverse arenas (Cummins & Schecter, 2003; Petersson & Åhlund, 2007).

## Empirical Data and Analysis Method

The study's empirical data consists of e-mail correspondence and follow-up interviews with two preschool teachers, questionnaires via Internet to 26 native language instructors in preschools and 35 preschool principals.

The correspondence and interviews were conducted individually at respective informant's preschool. The interviews dealt with preschool teachers experienced and perceived meetings with different groups of children with a foreign background. As a starting point we used the preschool policy documents and diversity mission (National Agency for Education, 2010). The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The online survey, which is part of a review of 429 native language instructors, mother tongue teachers, preschool- and compulsory school principals (Torpsten, 2010) contains a number of closed questions with set responses with space for comments regarding the questions. The questions dealt with issues regarding education and qualifications, the native language organization and fulfillment of writings in policy documents related to mother tongue in pre- and compulsory school.

The e-mail correspondence, the follow-up interviews, the answers of the closed questions and the individual comments from the surveys form the basis of the present study's analysis and discussion. The collected empirical data was treated as a text with emphasis on the themes of the text (Bryman, 2002) concerning the prerequisites for preschool children's learning, linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the multilingual preschool context and preschool assignments according to linguistic abilities and native language development. Our analysis of expressions about the language development mission, native language support and communicating skills, children's opportunity to develop linguistic competence in relation to experiences, assignments and organization derives in preschool teachers professional competence, divided into teacher's *relational* and *didactic competence* (Aspelin & Persson, 2011; Cummins, 2006; Cummins & Schechter, 2003; Persson, 2010; 2012).

Preschool teachers' *relational competence* refer to the ability to show respect, tolerance, empathy and interest of the child and to have high expectations of the child's potential to learn. It referees to dialogue, i.e. child-focused strategies and what the child already knows, and by acknowledging and answering children's questions and mutual understanding of what is possible to teach (ibid). Attitudes, encouragement, interaction, confirmations and answers to children's questions enabling mutual understanding of what is to be learned (ibid).

Preschool teachers' *didactic competence* refers to their teacher education, subject and preschool assignments knowledge, ability to organize teaching in various ways and to adapt their teaching and instructions to the situation and context. Skills in language developing methods and in formulating clear learning objectives, freedom and flexibility in relation to what the teacher has planned, are examples of didactic skills (ibid).

Based on the above we first looked for statements regarding child-focused strategies, confirmations, answers to children's questions enabling mutual understanding of what is to be learned and speeches that reflect expectations about children's potential to learn. We looked for statements expressing the ability to show respect, tolerance, empathy and interest for children. Then we looked for statements made by the informants about teacher education, subject matter and preschool

assignments knowledge, ability to organize instruction in various ways and adapting their instruction to the situation and context. We looked for statements about language developing methods and clear learning objectives, freedom and flexibility in relation to what was planned.

We structured the statements into the headings *Child-focused strategies* and *Education, knowledge and flexibility*, and divided them into relational and didactic competence. We quoted statements of teachers as (PT), of native language instructors as (LI) and of principals as (P).

## Result

The following section presents the results of our analysis regarding relational and didactic competence with subheadings *Child-focused strategies* plus *Education, knowledge and flexibility*.

### ***Child-focused Strategies***

We found statements that indicate relational competence and child-focused strategies. Preschool teachers care, empathy and respect for the children were expressed. Our analysis shows preschool teachers concern and anxiousness about the non-Swedish-speaking children's language and participation conditions and learning situation.

- (PT) "Many are worried about the children's language. We have just received a newly arrived boy and he says nothing."

Preschool teachers and language instructors are engaged and interested in the children and their future. They show expectations about a child's potential to develop and learn. The following quotations about children's opportunities to learn in preschool reveal both empathy and engagement. Native language instructors and preschool teachers struggle to create conditions for the children to develop their identities.

- (LI) "... one tries to support the identity and religion."
- (LI) "... the children's identity is strengthened because we talk like the parents do at home."
- (PT) "...the parents and staff must also help; the children must use their native language from home."

Preschool teachers show an interest for children's language learning possibilities and the language instructors strive to reach mutual understanding of what the children should learn. Furthermore preschool teachers seek for mutuality and they show willingness to support the children in their learning on the basis of dialogue and collaboration with both children and parents starting from what the children already can do.

- (LI) "... we help the children to increase their vocabulary and train/ practice what they hear at home."

- (LI) "... that the children increase their vocabulary when the teacher speaks the same language as the parents."

The analysis exposes statements about positive consequences of the native language for learning and school success. The native language is expressed as important for the children's development of their ability to communicate in Swedish. Native language instructors emphasize the relationship of native language development and children's increased opportunities and possibilities to develop several languages and promotion of other knowledge development.

- (LI) "... native language development goes hand in hand with the Swedish language."

The native language instructors have expectations about children's potential to learn and are aware of the individual's greater opportunities and the society's increased demands on people's linguistic abilities.

- (LI) "... in the short term, the native language is favored, but the children are going to be grateful when they become bi/tri-lingual adults."
- (LI) "One must be able to motivate the children, have fun, but also require a little discipline."

The interviewed preschool teachers express their interest in what will happen to the non-Swedish speaking children in preschool and primary school. Further they emphasize the importance of receiving support in native language in preschool. They show positive attitudes and experiences of native language support and helping children to understand other preschool activities.

- (PT) "Very sure that it helps to perceive and understand what the teachers have to offer at school."
- (PT) "... help the children get settled in the new school."
- (PT) "A lot about language in the 5-year-old group. A lot about what will happen in school and all that."

In preschool, teachers strive to help the children with a native language other than Swedish to manage well. But, low expectations towards native language and native language instructors become visible when the preschool teachers' make statements about the native language instructors and the native language support, which the following quotation illuminates.

- (PT) "It is an attitude, of course, that has not been so highly prioritized; one has not really understood why they come here, if one may say so."

In preschool there are many children in need of native language support and instructions. Sometimes it is difficult to organize the activity so that all different needs are satisfied. The quotations exemplify the preschool teachers and principals



expressing respect, empathy, interest and attempts of interaction with the native language instructor.

- (P) "... many children with many needs and little time."
- (PT) "... it is difficult when this boy lies down and sleeps."

The answering principals problematize the native language support within the preschool practice and organization and highlight the importance of good relations and cooperation. In turn, the quality of cooperation depends on all the employees.

- (P) "Good collaboration among the staff gave good results for the children."
- (P) "... depends a lot on the preschool staff."

In this context the interviewed preschool teachers express their and their colleagues' intercultural competence, the latter was revealed when recently arrived children started preschool. It appears that the answering preschool teachers provide support for their colleagues in the preschool intercultural task.

- (PT) "... because we must work inter-culturally."
- (PT) "... have a little of the inter-cultural competence."
- (PT) "... they ask because they want support."

From the analysis it is noticeable that support also can involve advice and collaboration with others like the librarian and school library.

- (PT) "... then perhaps we can go to the library."

In this way preschool teachers try to create communication, teamwork and mutual understanding according to non-Swedish speaking children's needs.

### **Education, Knowledge and Flexibility**

The didactic competence is visible in the statements that preschool teachers, native language instructors and principals make about education, knowledge, competence and flexibility according to native language support and non-Swedish speaking children's education.

The preschool teachers express themselves according to preschool assignments in articulating the preschool as based on evidence.

- (PT) "... preschool builds upon a scientific base."

We found statements that express the importance of significant and adequate teacher or instructor education, and subject matter knowledge is regarded as important. Language instructors, preschool teachers and principals express their educational level.

- (LI) "I am a qualified preschool teacher and I have studied bi-lingualism."

- (LI) "... a preschool teacher with a minor in native language instruction and second language pupils."
- (P) "... there is a broad spread of competence among the staff, although all have an adequate education and qualifications."

But to find native language instructors with adequate training sometimes appears as extra difficult.

- (P) "... especially in the minor languages."

Despite the fact that formal and adequate education are expressed as important, some language instructors do not have a formal education. In order to get qualification they may participate in training and are taking courses.

- (LI) "I have worked as a daycare worker since 1995. I have studied many small courses during this time. Continuing education and skills training."
- (LI) "I am studying now through distance education to be a preschool teacher and am on my second term. I am taking courses at Malmö University for native language teaching qualification."

Despite the informants being educated, the education does not always correspond well to the formal requirements for either a preschool teacher or a native language instructor. Different education and skills can be judged by the principals to be sufficient to work as a native language instructor, which the following quotation exemplifies.

- (LI) "I have studied daycare worker education."
- (P) "One must distinguish between adequate education and competence. To carry out the job is something completely different."

Our analysis shows that adequate education is not automatically perceived as involving enough skills. The informants distinguish between education and didactic competence, as well as that adequate education does not automatically lead to high didactic professional competence. It can also be understood as the informants express skepticism of the professional training, e.g. as involving the ability of conducting successful native language instruction.

- (PT) "... thankfully there is a clear majority of teachers who are incredibly talented educators and perform their task in a fantastic way, but anyone who thinks that an adequate education is enough for the task to be carried out well, is sadly mistaken."
- (PT) "Unfortunately not everyone with the necessary education has the competence required to do a good job."
- (PT) "... there are real exceptions that are both well-educated and appropriate."

Our analysis shows that both native language instructors and principals with adequate education can be ill-informed about the preschool curriculum and about the formulated task of native language instruction.

The staff at the municipal level organizes native language support and the native language instructors respond that they often are included in the preschool's regular work. Schedules and work hours are regulated for the native language instructors, and their competence development is credited.

- (LI) "... we have standards regulating our work hours and schedule."
- (LI) "... yes, in general we have competence development."

Schedules are regulated and organized at the municipal level also has drawbacks, and our analysis show that the children, for the sake of the organization, are offered participation in native language support at inappropriate times, for example, when:

- (PT) "... he is lying and sleeping."
- (PI) "... not always are pupils offered native language support or that it can take place in a reasonable location."

From our analysis it becomes visible that the informants adapt their activity to the situation and context. The native language instructors express their flexibility for example when the native language support is offered to a child at a time other than that first was scheduled, namely, when the children rested.

- (LI) "... then I come in the morning instead."

The native language instructors work at several different schools and meet structural obstacles in changing their schedules. This also reveals a lack of flexibility and non-adaptation to the situation and context in the organization's structure as well. In this context the preschool can be seen as both exclusionary and limiting.

- (PT) "... can we in some way influence when you come?"
- (LI) "No, that you cannot."

The expression highlight collaborating difficulties and inflexibility that affect the native language support organization.

The analysis shows that it is not always easy to understand the future needs of native language support, which appears to be a dilemma for the organizer.

- (P) "The problem is that no one knows the number of applications for native language support that come in every year."

An uncertainty among the informants is expressed regarding funding for the native language instruction. But the lack of instruction does not always depend on a lack of qualified instructors. It can depend on communication problems between organizers and educators.

- (PT) "I do not think there are resources."
- (LI) "... there are not always resources."

Another structural problem can be that the language instructors' classrooms are not organized at the municipal level, but at each respective preschool.

- (PT) "... it is we who should provide native language instructors with rooms, resources and everything."

This demonstrates other structural problems on the part of both the organizers and the educators.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In this concluding section we discuss language development, native language support and experience and competence of preschool teachers and native language instructors, in relation to post-colonial theory and critical multiculturalism.

### **Participation Conditions and Opportunities in Life**

Formulations in policy documents regarding preschool children's possibilities to develop both their native language and the Swedish language, that is, to develop bilingualism, can be understood in terms of power and linguistic arenas (Cummins & Schechter, 2003; Fanon, 1971; May, 1999; Petersson & Åhlund, 2007; Said 2004). When language learning in preschool is facilitated through the help of language development methods, the children acquire many language tools (Fanon, 1971) at their disposal. In such a way, they also become less sub-ordinated. The risk of sub-domination diminishes for the multi-lingual children in the preschool's mono-cultural practice where diversity is expressed as something different to be treated as different, as *they* in relation to *us*, and perhaps as less good (Elmeroth, 2008; Fanon, 1971; Persson 2010). In addition the children receive good opportunities for participation, co-existence and learning both in the preschool arena and in other contexts (Fanon, 1971; Milani, 2007).

There is a shared and co-existing space; "the space in-between is a third actor that can be seen as the strongest educational charge" (Aspelin & Persson, 2011, p. 83). It is in the in-between space, that is, in the relationships, that children's learning is possible. A simultaneous presence in preschool is made possible, for example, when children, through native language support, are given opportunities to develop their native language. In addition, the co-existence becomes possible when these children master the preschool common language, Swedish (cf. *ibid*).

The national preschool curricula (National Agency for Education, 2010) construct the Swedish preschool as a meeting place. Children with a native language other than Swedish have the opportunity to strengthen their linguistic abilities when native language support is offered (*ibid*). In order for all children to have the possibility to succeed with the native language support and to be able to work successfully with their language development, awareness is required of the preschool educators (Aspelin & Persson, 2011).

When children master several languages, they have better opportunities to succeed in school and in life in general (Cummins & Schechter, 2003; Fanon, 1971; May, 1999; Petersson & Åhlund, 2007; Said, 2004). Multilingualism enables the development

of multilingual and hybrid identities (Persson, 2012), also expressed as important in the preschool curriculum (National Agency for Education, 2010). High relational competence and native language support in preschool provide children with good opportunities in life. High relational competence and native language support in preschool provide children with good opportunities in life, e.g. when preschool children are given an opportunity to develop perceptions of themselves as both capable and involved through a possibility to participate and influence the activities (Persson, 2012).

Our analysis shows that native language support is arranged in the regular preschool and that educators attempt to take a child's perspective (Sommer et al., 2009). A child's perspective means the child's right to adults who take responsibility regarding the child's future opportunities in life. Children in the preschool multi-cultural arena are given opportunities to develop skills in several languages; this can be understood as the adults' responsibility regarding the children's learning and their awareness that the children's learning in other areas is also promoted (Hyltenstam, 1996; Lindberg, 2002; National Agency for Education, 2010; 2011).

### **Final Word and the Future**

We have highlighted the importance of both relational and didactical competence from the statements made by preschool teachers and native language instructors about the positive consequences that the native language has for the children's development, learning and school success. The informants' relational competence are revealed by their interest in what will happen to the children in primary school when they emphasize the importance of the children receiving support in their native language in preschool.

Native language support is organized by staff at the municipal level, and high didactic professional competence of the organizer is demonstrated when the native language instructors respond that they can often be included in the preschool's regular work staff. Didactic competence is further revealed when the organizer regulates the work hours for the native language instructors, and their competence development is credited. We interpret this as that the organizer takes on a native language instructor's perspective, which can be compared with a child's perspective (Sommer et al., 2009) where attention is directed toward understanding, in this case, the native language instructors' perceptions of schedules, work hours and competence development. An example of high didactic professional competence is the native language instructors' flexibility.

A dilemma in terms of offering native language support and future native language support needs becomes clear from the statements. They suggest that it is not easy to understand the future needs of native language support because you cannot know in advance, it is dependent on upcoming children's needs. Preschool children who are offered the opportunity to develop their native language get better opportunities to learn Swedish and other languages, but are also promoted to learn in other areas (Hyltenstam, 1996; Lindberg, 2002; National Agency for Education, 2010; 2011). Through education and increased cultural capital, an individual can raise her social capital (Bourdieu, 2005) and thereby experience less sub-ordination in the preschool monoculture (Gough & Rhedding-Jones, 2007).

Things that appear as problematic are that the rooms are not organized at the municipal level, but at each respective preschool, which is an example of a structural

problem (Balldin, 2010). An uncertainty regarding funding for the native language support, deficiency of support that not always depends on absence of qualified instructors plus problems with communication between organizers and educators, becomes visible.

We have demonstrated that both relational and didactic competence of preschool teachers and native language instructors as well as of organizers are crucial for preschool children in developing good skills in both their native language and Swedish. It is also critical that preschool children have the opportunity to develop into multilingual individuals in an otherwise monolingual context. To assist children's participation in different linguistic contexts, the children are in need of good language skills. But children also need to be able to master several languages because; "... they are class-markers. With languages one can move from one social situation to another. With language one is at home everywhere." (de Waal, 2012 p. 39). The above-mentioned quotation, which also introduced our discussion about prerequisites for children's diversity in preschool in terms of preschool children's participation, conditions and opportunities in life, binds together our presentation.

### Notes on contributors:

**Ann-Christin Torpsten**, Ph.D. and Assistant Professor in Education, teaches in the teacher training programs at Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her research focus is on diversity, participation, identity and citizenship when preschoolers and pupils have the school language as a second language. On-going projects are Preschool – a diverse arena and Language Development in a Multi-lingual Classroom.

**Mirja Betzholtz**, Ph.D. student and lecturer, teaches in the teacher training programs at Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her research area is education and diversity in preschool. Her Ph.D. project is: Teacher's talk about the diversity task in preschool in light of the terms and conditions for young children's learning in a multicultural childhood context.

### References

- Aspelin, J. & Persson, S. (2011). *Om relationell pedagogik. (Relational Pedagogy.)* Malmö: Gleerups.
- Balldin, J. (2010). *Utsatta barn i förskola. Utmaningar och möjligheter. En kunskapsöversikt. (Children at Risk in Preschool. Challenges and Opportunities. An overview.)* Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Bryman, A. (2002). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder. (Research Methods).* Stockholm: Liber.
- Cummins, J. (2006). Förord (Preface). In: Gibbons, P. *Stärk språket stärk lärandet. (Strengthen Language Strengthen Learning.)* Stockholm: Fallgren & Hallgren.

- Cummins, J. & Schecter, S., R. (2003). School based language policy in cultural diversity contexts. In: S.,R. Schecter & J. Cummins. *Multilingual Education in Practice. Using Diversity as a Resource*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- de Waal, Edmund (2012). *Haren med bärnstensögon. (The Hare with Amber Eyes.)* Stockholm: Albert Bonnier.
- Elmeroth, E. (2008). *Etnisk maktordning i skola och samhälle. (Ethnic Power Structure in School and Society.)* Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Fanon, F. (1971): *Svart hud, vita masker. (Black Skin, White Masks.)* Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Gough, N. & Rheddiog-Jones, J. (2007). Commentaries and Conversation on J. Reading Jones' 'Monocultural constructs'. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry*, 4(2), 55-64.
- Hübinette, T. (2012). Ord som sårar. (Words hurt). I K., Goldstein-Kyaga, M., Borgström, M. & T., Hübinette. *Den interkulturella blicken i pedagogik. Inte bara goda föresatser. (Intercultural Look in Pedagogy. Not just Good Intentions.)*. Södertörn: Södertörns högskola (Södertörn University).
- Hyltenstam, K. (1996): Att tala svenska som en infödd eller nästan. (*Speaking Swedish as a Native or nearly.*) In K. Hyltenstam & I. Lindberg, (Eds). *Första symposiet om svenska som andra språk. Vol I. (First Symposium on Swedish as a Second Language. Vol I.)* Stockholm: Centrum för tvåspråkighets forskning (Centre for bi-lingual research): Stockholms universitet.
- Lindberg, I. Myter om tvåspråkighet. (Myths about Bi-lingualism) *Språkvård* (4) 2002. Stockholm: Språknämnden.
- Lunneblad, J. & Asplund Carlsson, M. (2009). De komma från nordost. Om skolkonkurrens och elevidentitet i ämnet svenska som andraspråk. (They come from the Northeast. School competition and student identity in the subject Swedish as a second language.) *Utbildning och Demokrati (Education and Democracy.)*, 18 (2), 97-103.
- May, S. (1999): Critical Multiculturalism and Cultural Difference Avoiding Essentialism. In S., May. (Ed.) *Critical Multiculturalism Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education*. London: Falmer Press.
- McLaren, P., Macrine, S., & Dave, H. (red.) (2010). *Revolutionizing Pedagogy Educating for Social Justice Within and beyond Global Neo-liberalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Milani, T. (2007). *Debating Swedish. Language Politics and Ideology in Contemporary Sweden*. Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet.
- Ministry of Education and Science (2006). *Komma till tals. (Be heard)*. Stockholm: Myndigheten för skolutveckling.
- National Agency for Education (2008). *Läroplan för förskolan, Lpfö. (Preschool Curriculum, Lpfö)*. Stockholm: Skolverket.
- National Agency for Education (2010). *Läroplan för förskolan, Lpfö. (Preschool Curriculum, Lpfö )* Stockholm: Skolverket.
- National Agency for Education (2011). *Barn, elever och personal på riksnivå. (Children, Pupils and Staff at the National Level.) Rapport (Report) 357, del (part) 2*. Stockholm: Skolverket.

- Persson, S. (2010). *Barndomens förändrade villkor. Förutsättningar för barna lärande i en ny tid. (Childhood's changing conditions. Prerequisites for Children's Learning in a new Era.)* Stockholm: Skolverket (National Agency for Education).
- Persson, S. (2012). *Förskolans betydelse för barns utveckling, lärande och hälsa. (Preschool's Importance for Children's Development, Learning and Health.)* Malmö: Malmö University.
- Petersson, A. & Åhlund, A. (2007). *Ungdomar och identitet. (Young People and Identity.)* In A. Peterson & M. Hjelm, (Eds.) *Etnicitet. Perspektiv på samhället. (Ethnicity. Perspectives on society.)* Malmö: Gleerups.
- Ronström, O., Runfors, A., & Wahlström, K. (1998). *Det här är ett svenskt dagis. (This is a Swedish Preschool).* Tumba: Mångkulturellt centrum.
- Said, E., W. (2004). *Orientalism.* Stockholm: Ordfront.
- Sommer, D., Pramling Samuelsson, I. & Hundeide, K. (2009). *Barnperspektiv och barnets perspektiv i teori och praktik. (A Child's Perspective and the Child's Perspective in Theory and Practice.)* Stockholm: Liber.
- Torpsten, A.-C. (2010). *I hela Malmöstad är det bara en skola som erbjuder modersmålsundervisning inom skolans ram. (In all the City of Malmö only one School offers Native Language Instruction within the School.)* Kalmar: Linnéuniversitetet.
- Torpsten, A.-C. (2013). Second-Language Pupils tell about School Life. How Pupils relate to Instruction in a Multi-Lingual School. *Citizenchip, Social and Economics Education, (12)1, 37-47.*