

# Investing in home–preschool collaboration for understanding social worlds of multilingual children

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**Anne Kultti<sup>a</sup> & Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson<sup>b</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> University of Gothenburg, Sweden, corresponding author,  
e-mail: [anne.kultti@ped.gu.se](mailto:anne.kultti@ped.gu.se)

<sup>b</sup> University of Gothenburg, Sweden

**ABSTRACT:** In the present study, the critical role of education in promoting social and cultural sustainability is a premise for understanding learning opportunities that are actualized in the preschool context. Information and dialogue as forms of collaboration are investigated through a directed content analysis to interpret empirical data from an in-schooling model in two preschool units, with caregivers and educators with first languages other than Swedish. The analysis shows that collaboration is expressed in terms of information passed from educators to caregivers. The caregivers are not expected to have context-relevant experience to share with the educators. At the same time, however, caregivers are presented as the experts in knowing their child. The educators take the role of expert of knowing the caregivers, based on their earlier experience, and the in-schooling model is used as a tool to anticipate problems. Caregivers' 'active' participation as advocates becomes primarily a question of fitting into the preschool. Two relevant interpretations of findings are discussed: 1) educators taking responsibility for collaboration and collaboration as a communicative space for dialogue, and 2) possible innovative ways of taking the child's perspective on becoming a member within the new language and educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Linguistic diversity, immigrant parents, information, dialogue, social and cultural sustainability.

## Introduction

The aim of the present study is to gain knowledge about how home–preschool collaboration is introduced in settings where participants have different language backgrounds and experiences of early childhood education (ECE). ECE is an important institution for facilitating the social inclusion and participation of migrant families, and promoting dialogue between educators and caregivers with different cultural

backgrounds (Tobin, Arzubiaga & Adair, 2013). In Sweden, lingual diversity in the ECE context is not a novel phenomenon. However, equal learning opportunities for every child are still a pressing issue in contemporary society. For one reason, the number of recently arrived children, such as refugee seekers, has been and is still increasing, as in many other European countries at the moment. Another reason is the differences in learning conditions at the structural level. There are preschools, communities and municipalities with a majority of children who speak a first language other than Swedish, as well as communities with the opposite situation (i.e., monolingual settings). The number of educated teachers is lower in those municipalities with a large number of children for whom preschool is the primary arena for learning Swedish (National Agency of Education, 2014). In addition, the groups for children under three years are larger in municipalities where over 30% of children have another first language than Swedish than in those municipalities where less than 5% of children have a first language other than Swedish. Linguistically diverse preschools acting as learning arenas are highly dependent on educators' knowledge of, as well as their attitudes towards, early language development (Kultti, 2012; 2015; Kultti & Pramling, in press; Rogoff, 1990). Therefore, educators in each and every preschool in contemporary society need to have competence in working with groups with a diversity of linguistic and cultural experiences and knowledge.

In the present study, the pivotal role of education in promoting social and cultural sustainability is seen as a premise for analysing how conditions for home–preschool collaboration are introduced and enacted for and with caregivers who have a limited knowledge of the institutional context where their children are becoming participants at an early age. Collaboration is regarded as a way to access and respond to the child's perspectives, which is a key condition for participation and learning if understood from sociocultural theory (Hedegaard, 2009; Hundeide, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

This article is structured as follows. After the introduction, collaboration is considered in the context of education for sustainability and in terms of information and dialogue. Then the empirical study, including participants, methods and analytical process, is presented. The analysis is presented in two parts, based on the two types of empirical data used, and discussed in the last section of the article.

## **Education for sustainability**

Sustainable development is arguably the world's greatest and most pressing challenge. Questions about sustainable development are essential for the future of the planet and its inhabitants. When the notion of sustainability first appeared in the 1970s, when it

was introduced by the Bruntland Commission (1978), the focus was primarily on environmental questions. For example, we should not use more of the world's resources than what allows us to make sure that the next generation can also live healthy and happy lives. Today we know that sustainability also relates to social, cultural and economic aspects (UNESCO, 2007). We also know that education is by far the most important factor for changing the world to become more sustainable (UNESCO, 2014).

Action for sustainability in Swedish preschools varies (Kultti, Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Larsson & Pramling Samuelsson, in press). In the present study, cultural sustainability was the aspect that differed most in the three practices investigated. Although there are several preschools working with topics related to sustainability as an integration of economy, nature and social/cultural aspects today, there is still a long way to go before sustainability becomes characteristic for every child through preschool practice.

In the present study the focus is on social and cultural sustainability. According to Awopogba, Oduloowu and Nsamenang (2013), the most important factors for social and cultural sustainability are language and children's possibilities for developing their first language and cultural values. This is an ambition that puts demands on language and communication for creating opportunities for participating – a democratic question of being seen and heard. An OECD (2001) evaluation of ECE in Sweden found aspects of democracy regardless of children's age. Without language skills, participation is challenging both for children and adults. For educators to listen to caregivers is highlighted as especially important when the actors have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Tobin et al., 2013).

### **Frames for social and cultural sustainability in terms of collaboration**

In line with Swedish education law (SFS 2010:800), the right to support the development of a first language other than Swedish is stated, as well as the possibility of using an interpreter—for example, during the settling-in period and in caregiver-educator meetings. Similarly, in the curriculum for preschool (National Agency for Education, 2011), influenced by a sociocultural perspective on learning and development (cf. Vygotsky, 1978), it is stated that the development of both the child's first and second languages should be supported. Another topic highlighted in the curriculum is the collaboration between preschool and home. It is stated that preschool teachers are responsible for offering parents a good introduction to preschool, holding meetings as well as making opportunities to participate and influence the planning, carrying out, and assessment of the pedagogical activities. In other words, Swedish policy documents for ECE advocate and require collaboration.

There is a general consensus in research about the importance of collaboration between home and ECE practice (Litjens & Taguma, 2010; Vandebroek, 2009). Yet collaboration may build on different forms and understandings of participation. Participation can be understood as the right and/or responsibility of an individual; as a form (a meeting) or as part of everyday practice; or as a matter of communication as information or dialogue. Similarly, the term influence in policy documents may, in different cultural contexts, refer to parents' influence over the ECE practice as well as to the ECE practice influencing the home environment. Further, reciprocity as a dimension of collaboration can be either implicit or explicit (Hägglund & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009).

## **Collaboration in terms of information and dialogue**

The introduction of home–preschool collaboration in settings where participants have different language backgrounds and experience with ECE practices is a relatively unknown research focus, even though there are related researches from diverse cultural contexts (Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Lunneblad, 2013; Patel & Agbenyega, 2013; Thomauske, 2011; Venninen & Purola; Vandebroek, 2007; Walker & Berthelsen, 2010). For example, Walker and Berthelsen's (2010) study shows that socio-economic position was associated with higher levels of caregiver involvement in ECE. There is an international research project, *Children Crossing Borders* (Tobin et al., 2013; Thomauskea, 2011), analysing the perspectives on early childhood education of caregivers and educators in preschools that serve the children of recent immigrants. The *Children Crossing Borders* project provides a significant frame of reference for the present study due to its detailed discussion of home–preschool collaboration in terms of the distinction between information and dialogue.

The comparison of perspectives on ECE shows information as the common form for communication between educators and caregivers in the five participating cultural contexts: England, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States (Tobin et al., 2013). The caregivers were informed about the ECE programme, child development and upbringing and parenting. The information about the ECE programme covered organizational issues rather than educational ones. The information about child development and upbringing was characterised by the educators helping, e.g. through giving instructions to the caregivers. It was not uncommon that matters important to the immigrant families were overlooked in the process.

Dialogue between the actors is highlighted as being missing from the communication and the voices of immigrant families are not being heard in ECE, according Tobin et al.

(2013). The study showed a lack of professional preparation for working with immigrant families on the part of both educators and directors. For instance, professional competence is needed in facilitating the transition from the home culture to the culture of the ECE programme, as well as supporting second-language learning and awareness of perspectives of the families. Another example is educators' interpretation that caregivers expressed a wish that only Swedish (the majority language) be used in the ECE practice (Axelsson, 2005). However, the caregivers had actually expressed the wish that the child would learn both their first and second languages. In addition, a perceived lack of parent involvement or interest was due to unfamiliarity with the conventions of involvement in the ECE programme, discomfort in the educational context or language barriers, distrust and fear that their opinions (complaints) would result in negative reactions directed at their child, social isolation, and economic stress (Tobin et al., 2013; Mushi, 2002; see Walker & Berthelsen, 2010, for a discussion about education as representing and promoting middle-class values).

Collaboration requires not only knowledge of the educational system in the new country but also educators' knowledge of ECE system globally. Initiating a dialogue is less demanding for educators with cultural context knowledge (Tobin et al., 2013). The educators should therefore facilitate and support the immigrant caregivers' involvement and allow their voices to be heard (cf. Mushi, 2002). In a reciprocal relationship, with dialogue and listening to each other, both differences and similarities need to be acknowledged (Tobin et al., 2013; Vandenberg, 2009). Through dialogue, something new can be created which neither educators nor caregivers by themselves could accomplish. Dialogue opens up knowledge about language use, expectations and wishes.

### **It is all about language**

Language was related to most topics concerning preschool, by immigrant parents and teachers (Tobin et al., 2013). For example, the caregivers expressed a wish that their child would be fluent in both their first and second languages. However, they were not keen on the prospect of a bilingual education but they did approve of bilingual staff. The reasons given concerned a fear of children not learning the majority language and therefore becoming academically disadvantaged (see also Thomas, 2011); language confusion by using two languages; a belief that teaching the first language was the responsibility of caregivers; and a stigmatization of the child speaking the first language in the majority language context. In other words, pragmatic concerns, instead of theoretical understanding of language learning, were uppermost in the caregivers' reasoning: what the child needed at that particular moment, from the perspective of the caregivers in considering both their hopes and fears, and the fact that the children would soon be entering a monolingual primary school.

## Empirical study

The aim of the study is to gain knowledge of how home–preschool collaboration is introduced in settings where participants have different language backgrounds and experiences of ECE. An in-schooling<sup>1</sup> model as a way to introduce this collaboration is analysed through the following research questions:

- What topics are brought up in the communication within the in-schooling model?
- How do information and dialogue characterize the communication?
- What roles are ascribed the actors in the communication?

These questions highlight collaboration as a communicative phenomenon, in terms of *what* is communicated, *how* it is communicated, and what *roles* are created for the participants.

## Method

The study was conducted in two preschool units at two preschools located in an area where 44% of the residents are born in a country other than Sweden. About 13% are unemployed and 36% of the women and 30% of the men have a tertiary education.

The research interest is collaboration through an organized settling in period, a model called in-schooling. The in-schooling model analyzed includes an introductory meeting, attendance of both caregiver and child during three days, and a follow up meeting approximately six weeks later. This condition implies an institutional responsibility to introduce collaboration.

Three caregivers (mothers), their children (boys), and five (female) educators participated in the activities analyzed. The caregivers had first languages other than Swedish. Two of them used two or more languages other than Swedish in their everyday life. One of the caregivers did not speak Swedish; she had her older daughter with her serving as an interpreter during a meeting. The children were one to two years old and the caregivers did not use Swedish in communicating with the children at home. The educators also had first languages other than Swedish. One of these educators shared a

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish term “*inskolning*” refers to an organised period of entering preschool. In this article, the Swedish term is translated as *in-schooling* to stay close to the cultural context. This unconventional translation of this term (used only in the preschool context) also expresses what the caregivers who are in preschool for first time encounter. If in-schooling was translated as ‘transition’ or ‘settling in’, the complexity of the analytical interest in the study would be diminished.

common language other than Swedish with the caregiver who did not speak Swedish. The educator served as an interpreter for that caregiver in a meeting.

The analysis is based on empirical data in the form of observations of: a) an introduction meeting between two caregivers, two educators, and the daughter serving as an interpreter; b) two follow-up meetings between a caregiver and an educator, with the educator serving as an interpreter, about six weeks later; and c) observations of activities and informal talks between the actors occurring during the three-day attendance window for caregivers and children in the preschool setting. The conversations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The observations and informal conversations are documented as field notes.

The study follows the ethical considerations of the Swedish Research Council regarding informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. The caregivers and educators were informed about the study and how the empirical data would be used. The information was offered in the caregivers' first language and also in Swedish. The educators and the caregivers were given an agreement of participation to sign (along with one for the child's participation).

### **Analytical process**

The study is the basis for the qualitative analysis. A directed content analysis is used to interpret meaning from the content of empirical data produced during the in-schooling model in the two units. A directed content analysis takes a starting point in a theory or relevant research findings to identify key concepts for initial coding of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The data analyzed may contribute new categories or subcategories of the codes used, along with revising and refining the initial coding.

The directed content analysis is used because the research interest concerns an under-studied field and a communicative practice, including taken-for-granted and implicit aspects. The analytical process in the present study includes the following steps (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005): a) formulating research questions based on the project reported by Tobin et al. (2013), b) gathering the data for the analysis, c) defining key words in line with the previous research (e.g., Tobin et al., 2013), d) outlining and implementing the coding process (categorization of the content), and e) analyzing the results of the coding process. The initial key concepts are collaboration, information, dialogue, language and ECE programme. Collaboration as a general concept is understood against both theoretical and research backgrounds. Information and dialogue are understood as communicative tools for collaboration. Information may, for example, give opportunities for caregivers to know about the new education institution and therefore become a contribution for participation and influence. Dialogue may, for

example, open up to create a collaboration that is preferred by the actors. This form of collaboration can be planned for in advance and may have different meanings to different individuals. From the theoretical standpoint of the study, one could describe this in terms of collaboration as unique.

In the presentation of the findings, citations from the empirical data are used to strengthen the validity of the analysis. These are therefore not necessarily coherent conversations. We have chosen to address the actors cited in terms of educator and caregiver to avoid giving the impression that a particular person is pointed out. This is especially important when the data only includes a few actors. Therefore one cannot follow a person, an educator or a caregiver through the analysis. In addition, also for ethical reasons, the findings are presented as a story of collaboration, rather than as generalized knowledge or as individual opinions, based on the theoretical understanding of knowledge as situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The empirical data based only on a few actors is strengthened by using the study from five other cultural contexts (Tobin et al., 2013) as an analogue case. A contribution of the present study is to empirically and closely analyze issues concerning children's, caregivers' and educators' influence and participation within the frame of a particular in-schooling model of communicative practice.

## Findings

The analysis of the content in the communication is divided into two parts based on the type of empirical data used. The first part concerns the data from the introductory and follow-up meetings (i.e. empirical data of conversations). The second part is based on the data from the three days of attendance in activities (i.e. empirical data of talk and physical actions).

The findings show that communication during the model of in-schooling analyzed concerns four topics: 1) the in-schooling model as such, 2) the ECE programme and activities, 3) language contexts and learning, and 4) routines in case of illness (an emerging topic).

### A. Introductory and follow-up meetings

Firstly, the content of communication during the introductory meeting, and afterwards during the follow up meeting, is analyzed.

### ***The in-schooling model during the introductory meeting***

In the beginning of the meeting, the term in-schooling is noticed as being a typical term within the Swedish preschool context but atypical outside of this setting. This linguistic focus on a Swedish word is introduced by an educator posing a rhetorical question.

Educator: *What is in-schooling? That one will get used to this context/environment.*

Then the model is presented as follows. Children and caregivers are expected to participate together in the on-going activities during three days. Caregivers are encouraged to be active in all the activities. Caregivers are told that each child is unique. This statement can refer, on the one hand, to noticing possible changes of the model, or on the other hand to noticing children's individual needs.

The time spent in preschool is shorter on day four, which also is the first day the child will stay in preschool without the caregiver. This is presented by the educator as meaning different things to the actors: For the child, it signals to become sad and cry when the caregiver leaves; for the caregiver, a need to be consistent when saying goodbye; and for the educator, to offer ways for the caregiver and the child to handle the situation.

Educator: *The child will cry but it is important that you (just) leave. Call instead to the staff and ask.*

The idea of every child and in-schooling as unique, which was expressed earlier, becomes invisible. The caregivers, who are expected to be worried about leaving the child, are offered a way to cope with the situation based on the educators' experience of children being upset only for a short time. In the interpretation of feelings as being sad or upset, they are made synonymous with crying. Being quiet or not involved in activities is not discussed as an expression of feelings or as a part of the settling in period.

The caregivers express themselves non-verbally, looking worried, in response to the information about leaving a crying child. The educators respond by describing how being worried is a common feeling when leaving a child at preschool for the first time, and how a child without spoken language may express himself or herself by crying. It is added that the separation sometimes is more difficult for the caregivers than for the children. The caregivers are reminded that they should avoid being unsure of what to do and whether to leave or to stay.

Caregiver (through the daughter): *He will cry. He doesn't know Swedish.*

Educator: *It is common. It is their way of talking. It is sometimes the parents who have difficulties with leaving the child.*

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Caregiver (through the daughter): *If he is crying after three days, should mother stay longer?*

Educator: *We will discuss that later but it will go well!*

Day four within the model leads to a topic concerning upbringing and parenting. It is mentioned that caregivers might have difficulties saying 'no' to their children. It is also explained that just saying 'no' is not enough. An explanation for what is denied will be needed. The caregivers are also told that 'no' should not be said in an angry tone but should still show determination.

Educator: *It is important to explain why you say no.*

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Educator: *It is not bad to cry. Don't say it angrily but with determination.*

Upbringing is connected to Swedish norms and practice and educating the caregivers about being caregivers in a Swedish cultural context by the educators. Then the educators express a wish for the caregivers to share information and influences because of their knowledge of their child. The caregivers are quiet. The educator asks if the caregivers have any questions or answers for them.

Educator: *You [caregivers] are really important. Nobody knows your child as you do.*

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Educator: *We have to collaborate. Do you want to ask about something? Not right now.*

### ***The in-schooling model during the follow-up meeting***

The follow-up meeting is framed as an arena for the caregivers to express themselves and share their experiences with the in-schooling. In one of the preschools, the caregivers are given a form with questions they are asked to answer before the follow-up meeting. This form is then used to structure the meeting. The conversation is introduced by the educator to encourage the caregiver to follow the form. At the other preschool, the meeting is introduced by the educator saying that she will talk about their pedagogy and activities and their experience with the child—what happens between the time the mother leaves and when she later returns to pick up the child. After that it is the caregivers' turn to tell about the child's experience of being in the preschool. One of the educators serves as an interpreter during the meeting.

A topic brought up by the caregivers is how they felt and their concerns about leaving a (crying) child.

Caregiver: *The first day I left him and he was crying, I went home and cried, and called my mother. // I just think about how he is doing when I'm at the school.*

Caregiver: *I did not think he would be able to stay by himself, but it worked out well, much better than I thought. // I did not think that I would be as satisfied as I am. It is my first child and I was worried how it should be for him.*

Educator: *Yes, you were worried but it all went well. // The child cries in the beginning [when the caregiver leaves] but he will soon stop crying.*

The caregiver follows the protocol and moves on to the next question, which is about the first meeting. Her interpretation of the purpose of the meeting is to give information and she finds the information given to be of relevance.

Caregiver: *The information we got was good. When we came for first time and you told us about illnesses. Good information, I got to know all I needed to know.*

The caregiver connects the information about preschool rules to collaboration and says that they are following the rules at home, such as washing hands before a meal and saying thanks for meals. She thinks that this cooperation works really well.

The focus on the part of the caregiver in collaboration is developed. When the caregiver tells about her expectations of preschool and experiences of collaboration (in their home country), the educator replies by talking about some of their joint activities with immigrant caregivers in the past: having breakfast, painting and music activities and excursions together.

Educator: *We have had a parent from Iraq who came and played music to all the children, or parents who came and read fairy tales from their home cultures and in their language.*

The caregivers participating in the in-schooling process are, in the present case, mothers. Another aspect of focusing on the role of caregiver is explicitly talking about fathers. Educators express their experience of fathers “from other cultures” not being active in preschool and explain how they try to include these fathers. The mothers say that their husbands are involved in the child’s everyday life in preschool even though they did not have an opportunity to participate during the in-schooling. One of the mothers expresses a wish to include her husband by showing him a recording of the child in preschool, as promised earlier by the educator.

Caregiver: *I also tell the father about what you are doing at the preschool, what has happened during the day. // Yes, he is involved.*

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Caregiver: *The father would also be here but he is working.*

Educator: *Another time. We are glad if you both come and visit.*

Caregiver: *Maybe a DVD recording [to show the father]?*

Educator: *Maybe later, we will do it later.*

Caregiver: *My husband is also curious.*

### ***The ECE programme and activities during the introductory meeting***

The caregivers are informed about their ECE programme and activities. The need for pieces of extra (clean) clothing is noted. The notion of clothes is related to the idea of how the classroom should look in the entrance: nice and tidy, clean clothes neatly put in the child's compartment. The importance of labeling (naming) the child's clothes is pointed out. This topic also includes routines during the day, such as at what time they will have activities indoors and outdoors, lunch and so on. The outdoor activities are a part of the programme that is particularly noticed. The educator explained why they have this activity and how to prepare for it by referring to the cultural context.

Educator: *It is good to spend time outdoors in Sweden. // You need [to provide the child with] appropriate clothing. Shoes need to be the correct size. Measuring the child's foot can be done in the store when buying a pair of shoes.*

The first question posed to the caregivers concerns the children's food habits during a preschool activity: meal time. The caregivers become verbally involved, also for the first time, when a question about their child is asked. They share what their child likes and dislikes, and then broaden the topic to discuss other actions and habits of the child. For example, naptime is discussed in terms of 'sleeping' and a distinction in language skills is pointed out: to understand spoken Swedish is different from being able to express oneself verbally. In addition, the caregiver continues that skills in understanding a language are not always as implicit as speaking a language. Similarly, non-verbal behavior might be difficult to understand without knowing the particular child.

Caregiver (through her daughter): *He doesn't eat milk.*

Educator: *OK, what does he eat? Halal food?*

Daughter: *Yes.*

Caregiver: *He doesn't like milk. Eats all kinds of food. // Doesn't sleep.*

Caregiver (through her daughter): *He sleeps.*

Caregiver: *He understands Swedish.*

Caregiver (through her daughter): *He has his own pillow, and he will hit if somebody tries to take it away from him.*

Educator: *We have had several difficult cases.*

These actions are an expression of what the caregivers consider as important to share with the educators as well as topics they have extensive knowledge of. It is unclear what the reply of the educator, telling about 'difficult cases' she has met, is meant to shed light on. The reply is not further developed by anyone.

### ***The ECE programme and activities during the follow-up meeting***

When the educator informs one of the caregivers that her child communicates a lot with one other child, the caregiver tells her that these children are relatives. Then the educator shares her impression of the child's knowledge of Swedish, and more specifically the child's understanding of Swedish words, based on her observation that the child imitates what the others are doing. The educator asks whether the child is used to being outside, which the caregiver confirms. Then the educator speaks about what the child does when they are outside.

Caregiver: *He loves being outside.*

Educator: *We have noticed that. He pays attention to lots of things outside, little things.*

The analysis implies that the educators' acquisition of knowledge about the child occurs in a different manner during the follow-up meeting than in the introductory meeting. The way used during the follow-up meeting also functions for sharing stories about the child's actions and participation in the preschool activities.

The talk about the children's actions also concerns their way of 'succeeding' in response to what is expected of them as 'preschool children': independence during mealtime, skills in dressing/undressing themselves when going outside or coming inside, and so forth. The caregivers reply by telling how the child has changed his way of acting at home. Educators connect this topic to pedagogy.

Caregiver: *He tries to zip the jacket at home but he doesn't try to put the shoes on.*

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Educator: *I will give an example. You said that he wants to do more things by himself. Our way of working aims for children being able to do things by themselves. Sometimes that is not the case at home. We are close to the child, helping out with the shoes and saying: "You made it!" when the child with our help manages. We tell the children what is needed, comments such as 'pull a little more'. We are helping children so they can feel that they manage things.*

### ***Language contexts and learning during introductory meeting***

The notion of human rights as part of Swedish society and pedagogy is used to introduce a topic concerning language: language contexts and learning. One example given is the educators' knowledge and views of language learning. Languages other than Swedish

are called 'the home language'. The educators express that these languages will be learnt and developed at home. By referring to languages other than Swedish as 'home language' and 'your language', rather than the official terms mother tongue or first language, the relationship between the languages is pointed out. Swedish is clearly the language belonging to preschool, while any other languages are a matter for the home and caregivers. Against this background it is not unexpected that the caregivers are not asking for first-language support or whether there are educators who master the child's first language.

*Educator: You give [use] home language at home. Continue to talk your language at home. It is really important!*

The caregivers do not explicitly express a concern about the child spending time in an unknown context and with adults they do not share a language with. The focus is rather on fitting in as Swedish-speaking children, like the rest of the group. However, the majority of children in the group are second-language learners and speakers. Instead, the caregivers' concern of their child being sad and cry<sup>2</sup>, implicitly relates to the child's lack of skills in Swedish. As a reply to this, the educators present themselves as 'more knowledgeable' through the use of 'we' and by replying to the caregivers' concerns with theoretical knowledge of child development.

*Educator: We know by experience that bilingual children might be slow in their language development.*

The need for interpretation for the caregivers with first languages other than Swedish is actualized by the participation of the daughter in the meeting. This is noted by the educator, who regularly pauses when talking and asks the daughter: *Can you tell that to your mom?* In other words, interpretation is a present issue, and yet the caregivers' possibility of using an (adult) interpreter for participation and involvement in the ECE setting regardless of language background is not brought up as a topic of concern.

### ***Language contexts and learning during the follow-up meeting***

During a follow-up meeting, one of the educators tells the caregiver about children's right to first-language support in preschool. The educator also shows interest and knowledge about second-language learning and learners. In reply, the caregiver expresses her wish that the child first learn Swedish (cf. above—against the background of communication during introduction meeting, it is not surprising that the caregivers advocate using and learning Swedish in preschool). The educator continues, explaining

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<sup>2</sup> See the findings above concerning the in-schooling model during the introduction meeting.

that children are able to learn two languages and she points out the other educator (the one interpreting the conversation) as an example of how people can use their multiple languages. She also mentions that they have books in several languages, and that educators who have mastered these languages read these books to the children. The caregiver keeps expressing that Swedish should be used and learned in preschool, and that learning two languages (besides Swedish) already occurs at home. The educator explains herself further saying that children can learn more than two languages simultaneously.

Educator: *But children have the ability of learning several languages at the same time.*

### ***Routines in case of illness during the introductory meeting***

Being informed about illness is expressed as one of the most important aspects from the perspective of educators. It is already brought up during the first meeting. Illness is presented as a part of everyday life when participating in preschool. The information given concerns the practical matter of the routines to follow in case of illness: how to call in sick, the need for the child to stay at home when ill and for the caregiver to be rapid when picking up a child who has become ill during the day. A Swedish word, *allmäntillstånd* (*general state of health*), that cannot be presumed to be known by second language speakers is used to describe how to decide whether the child needs to stay at home or not. These actions seem to be built on the earlier experiences of the educators.

Educator: *It is important to let us know if your child is ill, so please call us early in the morning.*

### ***Routines in case of illness during the follow-up meeting***

The routine of informing the preschool about illness is brought up by one of the caregivers at the beginning of the follow-up meeting. She says that she has tried to call the preschool several times without luck. The educator replies that their rules have changed: caregivers need to call before 8 am to get in touch with educators. She also tells the mother where she can find this new piece of information.

## **B. Attending the activities**

The participation during the three-day attendance in the preschool includes both talk and physical actions. Still, three of the topics for communication shown above characterize the participation: The content of the in-schooling model, the ECE programme and activities, and the language contexts and learning. However, communication about the fourth topic, the rules in case of illness is not visible at this time.

The content of the attendance analyzed from the perspective of the three actors is presented in the form of a table. The choice of presentation form is based on a need of expressing extensive empirical data of both talk and actions of several people during three days with an aim of understanding how the attendance in the same activities is done differently by the actors with their experiences and expectations of the institutional setting and the role they are taking in this context.

The analysis presented in Table 1 implies that several issues connecting to the three topics, mostly relating to the first, the ECE program and activities, include opposite meanings not only for the different actors but also for a single person. This can be understood against the background of individual interests, ways of acting and views. For example, some of the children may become interested in the toys no one is playing with, while some may be more interested in a toy somebody else is using, as indicated in Table 1. The caregivers, with their wishes, experience, views and language skills, also have different ways of participating. For example, whether they are used to feeding their child or not, or whether their child is interested in toys somebody else already has.

TABLE 1 Content of the attendance during the three days from the perspective of the actors

	Participation from the perspective of the child is understood as		Participation from the perspective of the caregiver is understood as		Participation from the perspective of the educator is understood as		
<b>1. The in-schooling model</b>	Staying close to the mother. Observing. Being quiet. Waiting.		Being quiet. Sitting by herself. Taking pictures of the child. Sending SMS.		Involvement in activities with the children in the group.		Involvement in activities with the 'new' children.
			Deciding on the time for physical attendance on the actual day.		Deciding on the time for the physical attendance of the child/mother.		Reminding about day four and the need to pick up the child immediately if needed.
							Clarifying rules when there is a conflict between different systems.
<b>2. The ECE program and activities</b>	Being able to move around between and change activities.	The need to finish an activity in order to participate in another activity led by an educator.	Waiting for the educators to initiate and organise activities	Acting during one of the activities, mealtime: Set the table; talking with the children; feeding the child.	Expecting the children to participate in the group activities and to be independent at mealtime: take the crockery and eat by themselves.	Giving instructions: if the mother participates, the child will participate as expected.	Telling that the child does not want to be helped at mealtime because he will manage.

			Dressing the child especially nicely for the first day.		Informing about proper clothing for the outdoor activity.
	Having own pillow at naptime.		Telling educators specific information about the child connected to the preschool activities such as clothing, a pillow.		Asking about songs, activities and books the child knows and likes.
	Playing with toys by himself or with the mother.	Taking toys the others are having.	Following the child. Playing with the child.	Resolving conflicts involving the child.	Instructing caregivers to play with the child. Asking if the mother wants to paint with the child (the others are not painting).
<b>3. Language contexts and learning</b>			Using several languages: When directing the child, the first language is used. When explaining or participating in a common activity, using Swedish words (known).		Inviting caregivers to use their first language (counting to three) in a group activity.
			Being able to make herself understood in the first language with an educator.		

Participation from the perspective of the educator seems to include several contradictions they need to manage. One of these seems to concern how they can both include the caregivers and give them space to participate, and at the same time make the programme and activities visible for the caregivers and the children. Participation from this perspective concerns keeping with the in-schooling model but also changing the model if it seems more appropriate, for example, if a child is very tired before lunch. They also encounter the need to clarify rules based on two different systems: the in-schooling model and the child's participation in preschool when the caregiver is unemployed (i.e., continuity in the in-schooling process from the perspective of the child and the hours/week that can be offered). How these issues are encountered and managed is highly dependent on the individual educators and their professional knowledge and values. It is noteworthy that all the educators have personal experience of being second-language learners in Sweden.

## Discussion

In this study we have analysed an in-schooling model, seen as a way to introduce the home-preschool collaboration, in the context of the actors having very different notions of the institutional setting of preschool. The findings show the following topics as characterizing the communication during the model of in-schooling: 1) the in-schooling model, 2) the ECE programme and activities, 3) language contexts and learning, and 4) routines in case of illness. The last topic was not expressed during the three-day attendance. There are two relevant interpretations of the communication and participation between the actors within the in-schooling model. On one hand, the educators' actions illustrate professionalism. In-schooling and collaboration are part of educators' commitment and they do take responsibility for it. The collaboration is introduced through information about topics in which the educators have expertise. On the other hand, the communication opened up for, through doing this, does not characterize listening and dialogue. The findings will be discussed in this final section.

### Collaboration through information

In-schooling is the first step in creating a relationship between the actors. One tool used for this is clearly information from preschool to home. From the perspective of the preschool/educators, this means distributing information to caregivers for young children who are going to preschool for the first time. Educators appear as the 'owners' of this first arena (see Vandebroek, 2007, on excluding parents' views about what is good for their children). An intention expressed is to inform caregivers about as much as possible as early as possible. Some of the information given relates to knowledge that is expected to be cultural, such as being outdoors regardless of weather and labelling the clothes, but also relating to upbringing in terms of setting boundaries and managing the space for the clothes. These topics are related to the research of Lunneblad (2013), Tobin et al. (2013), and Venninen and Purola (2013). The expectations are strongly based on educators' experiences with caregivers and include an aim of anticipating problems, which is connected to findings of a study concerning educators' talk about immigrant parents (Lunneblad, 2013). The preschool location is in an area with families living on welfare support, which might influence upbringing and parenting as topics of communication within the in-schooling model. However, caregivers without experience of Swedish preschool are also expected to have similar experience and knowledge, questions, views and concerns. One consequence is that a rather generalised view on caregivers and families creates a frame for what caregivers are able to bring up during the in-schooling.

In addition, caregivers are presented as the experts when it comes to knowing their child. Yet educators seem to expect themselves to be experts when it comes to knowing caregivers—fathers in particular. Providing information about equality between men and women in the cultural context might be an expression of a professional standpoint. It can also be viewed from a historical perspective when educating parents from various families was one of the tasks as a preschool teacher. At the same time, one may ask how educators can build up a relationship of trust between families and preschool by bringing up questions that have taken generations to change, like equality between women and men. One cannot but wonder whether topics such as handling an ill child, fathers' engagement, and the requirement for outdoor activities, are directed especially to caregivers with cultural backgrounds other than Swedish.

### **The part to play as caregivers**

As a caregiver you are expected to listen and absorb the information given, and to participate but within a frame that is mostly communicated implicitly. Caregivers in this study became engaged in topics concerning the child. The analysis shows that direct questions are a marker for what caregivers are expected to give information about. This marker was important for giving the caregivers a voice. Without directed questions, caregivers' opportunities for verbal participation are decreased. In addition, caregivers are expected to participate in the preschool activities; however, the activities are expected to run as usual. The (so called active) participation is to a large extent a question of fitting into the preschool.

The communication analysed implies that caregivers are generally not expected to have knowledge and skills about certain issues, such as illness or second-language learning—both of which are presumed to be part of their everyday life. One of the caregivers was involved in a discussion about the child's right to first-language support in preschool, a topic of great importance for social and cultural sustainability (Awopegba, Oduloowu, & Nsamenang, 2013). It is also interesting how the general term of language development is used to refer to the development of the second language, Swedish. First language learning and development is, instead, expressed as an individual process and the fact that some of the children are learning several languages during their first few years is not considered. These expressions differ from the view on language development in communication and activities as stated in the curriculum (National Agency of Education, 2011). Expressed views of language learning forms a complex issue and needs to be investigated further.

## **Curriculum, pedagogy and education as topics**

When relating the findings to the background of a curriculum and preschool teacher education based on sociocultural theories on learning and development, some issues are highlighted. For example, collaboration in terms of influence and participation as stated in the curriculum, is not pointed out. Neither are caregivers' opinions or views about collaboration or the in-schooling explicitly stated during the introduction meeting. Instead, it seems as caregivers are given a voice about it afterwards when the actors know how the settling in process turned out. In addition, caregivers seem to be expected to follow the line of the preschool when it comes to views of language use and learning. What language learning might mean to the child is missing in the analysed data. This can be understood in relation contemporary research findings (Tobin et al., 2013; see also Venninen & Purola, 2013) showing that the caregivers did not get a say in curriculum, pedagogical or didactical matters, and when projecting communication problems to *immigrant* caregivers, educators do not need to concern themselves with whether they are struggling with caregivers in general.

## **An alternative approach to introducing collaboration**

It is important, again, to point out that the findings are based on limited amounts of data, and that communication (and therefore the kind of data analysed) is situated. In addition, the findings also showed individual differences in the participation and communication. The analysis does not say anything about the actors' intentions or that this is a way they communicate regardless of situation. However, the assumption is that caregivers and educators are both doing what they assume is good for the child. The findings illuminate a picture of how communication within an in-schooling model may appear. This picture is very similar the one that Tobin et al (2013) have shown. Therefore, we argue that awareness of the distinctions between information and dialogue in communicative practices for caregivers and educators can contribute to collaboration and educators' perspectives and understanding of multilingual children's social worlds in the Swedish ECE. A crucial tool for creating sustainable practices includes facilitating dialogue between the actors (Tobin et al., 2013). If we want to build a more sustainable society where all can and will participate, the work has to begin when children are transferred from home to preschool. During this period, caregivers are sensitive to what preschool expects from them, and what is the best for their children. This is a unique opportunity to invite caregivers to take part in society via the preschool. An alternative approach for communication within an in-schooling model could be to focus on the child, both in communication with the caregiver and with the child. The child's perspective must be allowed and supported for learning to take place.

This may be a first step for creating dialogue and considering the in-schooling model as unique.

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