

# CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHING IN LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND MULTILINGUALISM: EXPRESSIONS FROM TEN SWEDISH MUNICIPALITIES<sup>i</sup>

Linda Palla, Ann-Christine Vallberg Roth

Malmö University, Sweden

E-mail: linda.palla@mau.se, ann-christine.vallberg-roth@mau.se

## Abstract

*The aim of this research is to explore what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschools, as expressed in writing by preschool teachers and managers in 10 Swedish municipalities in 2016. The data consists of written answers to an open-ended question in a reflective document. The reflective document was sent to 243 preschool teachers and managers, of whom 222 responded. A didactically oriented analysis was performed based on three levels: practice-related action level, theoretical level and meta-theoretical level. The results of the analysis are distributed in distinctive traces that more clearly refer to the practice-related action level than to the theoretical level or meta-theoretical level. Child-centred teaching, which may or may not be delimited, is characteristic of language, communication and multilingualism. Teaching is said to be constant: spontaneous but deliberate in all contexts and situations but also delivered through planned activities, projects and themes. Verbal communication is predominant in teaching. Vague and low-frequency traces of multivoiced teaching related to multilingualism and special support have emerged. The multivoiced teaching described mainly ends with general teaching of children in preschool – a multivoiced approach in general.*

**Keywords:** communication teaching, didactic analysis, language teaching, multilingualism teaching, Swedish preschool.

## Introduction

Preschool was introduced as a part of schooling in Sweden in 2010/2011 (SFS 2010:800). In Sweden, 84% of all children aged 1–5 and 95% of 4–5-year-olds attend preschool, for one to five years (National Agency for Education, 2016), and “about one out of five preschool children in Sweden today speak more than one language” (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2017e, p. 4). Significant differences in how preschools approach the pedagogical task have emerged, and there is considerable need to clarify how teaching can be delivered in this context (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f). Teaching in preschool may refer to goal-directed actions that, led by preschool teachers, direct children’s attention to stimulate “development and learning through the acquisition and progression of knowledge and values” (Swedish Education Act SFS 2010:800, Ch 1, section 3). Education must be based on scientific foundations<sup>ii</sup> and proven experience.<sup>iii</sup> Furthermore, preschool must be equal and offer all children high-quality early childhood education (SFS 2010:800).

There is no doubt that Swedish preschools can today be regarded as arenas for encounters between different cultures and languages, as well as between different families and children. Early intervention to promote child development, learning and well-being is a field of

education and research that has attracted a great deal of political interest in recent years, from local, national, international, EU, and OECD perspectives (OECD 2006, 2012, 2017; Tallberg Broman, 2015). This research about what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool can be regarded as part of this context.

Previous early-childhood education research in Scandinavia has been oriented more towards learning than teaching, although there are examples focused on teaching (see for example Harju-Luukkainen & Kultti, 2017; Palla, 2015; Tallberg Broman, 2015; Vallberg Roth, 2017b). Studies show that children in socioeconomically disadvantaged families are not as well prepared for starting school as their peers from more privileged families (Persson, 2015a; Tallberg Broman, 2015). Likewise, nationwide inequality emerges with regard to support for teaching children with special educational needs in preschool (Sandberg & Ottosson, 2010; Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2017d). Quality audits and support materials (National Agency for Education, 2013; Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2017e), as well as research (Palla, 2004, Axelsson, 2005; Björk-Willén, 2006, Axelsson & Magnusson, 2012) indicate a need for improvement in several aspects of multilingualism teaching. In this context, teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool can be assessed as a tool for creating the prerequisites for greater equality and improving children's opportunities later in life.

Teachers and preschool managers in Swedish preschools seem to struggle with the concept of "teaching" in their day-to-day practices (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d). One of the ideas emphasised in this context is the importance of the entire governance chain (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2017f). This problem is also the focus of a three-year R&D project on teaching in preschool (see note i), of which this research is a part. Considering that the concept of teaching is made clear in national preschool policy and in day-to-day preschool activities, it seems urgent to shed light on and further develop knowledge about how teaching is understood and used by preschool teachers and managers who are responsible for delivering the preschool mandate. How preschool teachers and managers describe what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism are especially germane in relation to conditions aimed at providing children with equal opportunities later in life.

## Background

Early childhood education in Sweden is aligned with a Nordic tradition of welfare state ambitions that is highly ranked in international reports (OECD 2006, 2012, 2017). There are, however, still areas of potential improvement with regard to, for example, teachers' level of professional education (teachers in Sweden are not educated to the master's level), working conditions and pay (OECD, 2017). Sweden is below the OECD average in areas including child-to-teacher ratios (p. 43) and teaching time (ibid).

A research review of international studies, systematic reviews and other meta-studies of teaching reading and writing to younger students, carried out by Taube (2015), includes children of preschool age to a certain extent. One focus of the research and meta-studies reviewed is on interventions in areas related to linguistic awareness and furthering the processes of reading and writing development. It can be difficult to compare research from elsewhere in the world to Nordic research, which usually has aims other than measuring and comparing the effects of specific programmes with control groups (in this case, for example, teaching morphemes or phonology), other language-related interventions, or experimental studies. This applies even when such studies occur in a Nordic research context (see for example Bleses, Højen, Andersen, Dybdal & Sehested, 2015). In light of the similar systems of management by objectives in Nordic early childhood education, it is also easier to refer to, translate and use the results of Nordic research than non-Nordic studies.

Nordic research, with its connections to language and communication in preschool, is represented by areas of knowledge that relate to both linguistics and early childhood education and care. Studies examine, for example, how carefully planned and deliberate use of literature and culture can improve language comprehension in children (Spurkland, 2014), children's level of interest in language-learning exercises (Norling, Sandberg & Almqvist, 2015), how teachers create meaning through communicative tools and methods in thematic work (Ahlskog-Björkman & Björklund, 2015), or what knowledge Norwegian preschool teachers believe they need to support children's language development (Aspøy & Bråten, 2014).

Some of the Nordic research on language and communication addresses aspects of multilingualism (Boyd & Huss, 2017). A Norwegian review of the literature (Alstad, 2015), for instance, provides insight into the growing body of research on multilingualism with a focus on Norwegian preschools. A Danish study (Holm, 2015) looks at how preschools use linguistic assessments in their work and how these affect the relationship between adults and children.

Swedish and Finnish early education policies are quite similar: "In both Finland and Sweden, there is a strong belief in the benefits of full-day institutional care for all young children and in the importance of multilingual development for children who come from multilingual or minority language homes" (Boyd & Huss, 2017, p. 360). A Swedish-published review of research on multilingualism emphasises the need for inclusive organisations to develop responses to heterogeneity (Axelsson & Magnusson, 2012). However, the results of a study of multilingualism in Swedish preschools (Björk-Willén, 2006) show that a monolingual norm is predominant. An evaluation (Axelsson, 2005) of multilingual preschools in Stockholm suggests that children develop Swedish language skills and literacy in a way that promotes their continued development in school, but their native language skills and literacy are not developed to any appreciable extent. It is emphasised in research (Kultti & Pramling, 2017) that simply using a language does not suffice for effective learning of multiple languages by children: the expressions and meanings of the language must be made apparent to them at the meta-level in order to challenge them to develop linguistic awareness.

Aspects of identity are closely linked to language development. Several researchers (e.g., Palla 2004) have emphasised the close links between language and identity for quite some time, particularly in relation to multilingualism.

Nordic research on equality issues that relate to, for example, special needs education in preschool highlights the necessity of developing skills in areas that can be related to teaching situations, methods and children with various disabilities (Holst, 2008; Hillesøy, Johansson & Ohna, 2014; Kristoffersen & Simonsen, 2014). This may also apply to a need to enhance skills with regard to the child's perspective and attitudes (Palla, 2011; Warming, 2011; Åmot, 2012).

### *Problem of Research*

Overall, there is a lack of studies that shed light on teaching in preschool in Sweden (Tallberg Broman, 2015; Vallberg Roth, 2015). There is a need here for research where the scientific foundation is not reduced to a focus on learning theory. This does not mean that research on teaching based on learning theory is irrelevant, but rather that it can be opened, widened and combined with other applicable theoretical approaches. In examples of teaching studies oriented towards primary and secondary school, it is argued that "there is actually no theory that can encompass the total teaching situation" (Arfwedson, 1998, p. 131). In this context, a need emerges for research and theory development that is also oriented towards teaching in preschool, with its relationship to the prevailing system of management by objective, and that is open to the inclusion of several (meta)theoretical approaches. This may involve shedding light on teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in relation to care, play, development and learning in preschool. There is also a need for research that examines teaching in preschool in a more comprehensive way that includes the entire governance chain, from

preschool teachers and managers to the institutional and education provider level. In this context, the collaborative project examines a large number of preschools in 10 municipalities over a period of three years, 2016–2018. In 2000, Rosenqvist studied student preschool teachers' views on the concept of teaching in preschool based on three levels of didactic thinking (see the section on theory below). The results showed, for example, that student preschool teachers had not developed their thinking about teaching at the theoretical and meta-theoretical levels. The question is how do preschool teachers and managers express in writing what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool, and which levels of didactic thinking can be interpreted as emerging from their written descriptions?

### *Research Focus*

The aim of the research is to explore what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool in 2016, as expressed in writing by preschool teachers and managers from 10 municipalities in Sweden. The research is guided by the following questions:

- What may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool, according to the written descriptions of preschool teachers and managers?
- What traces of didactic levels and didactic issues can be discerned in relation to teaching in language, communication and multilingualism, according to the written descriptions of preschool teachers and managers?

### **Methodology of Research**

#### *General Background*

The data in this research consists of written answers to an open-ended question: What may characterise teaching in language/communication/multilingualism? The question was included in a “reflective document” that was sent out in January/February 2016.

#### *Theoretical Approach*

This research is guided by critical didactics (cf. Biesta, 2011; Broström, 2012; Brante, 2016). This means that in the research questions “should” is replaced with “may”. In questions about didactics, “should” pertains more to traditional normative didactics, whereas “may” is associated with critical didactics. “May” ensures that there might be alternatives to the choices made; no claims to having definitively established “what should be taught” or “what characterises” are made, but the focus is instead on possibilities and alternatives. Critical didactics endeavours to provide support to critical reflection through alternative tools – the point being to set the stage for something alternative. In this research the term “multivoiced teaching” is used, where didactics may appear as multivoiced at the practice-based action, theoretical and meta-theoretical levels (see Kansanen, 1993; Vallberg Roth, 2017a, 2017b).

“Multivoiced” refers to many voices in many tones, which may be interpreted as multiple angles and a variety of approaches. The Norwegian linguist Dysthe (1993) launched the concept of “the multivoiced classroom”, clearly inspired by the work of Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and his colleagues. Sociolinguistic and sociocultural premises are prominent. The term “multivoiced teaching” may be inspired by Dysthe, even though a more expansive approach that aims to encompass practice- and action-based, theoretical and meta-theoretical premises can be tested. Overall, multivoiced teaching can be tested as a tool for critical reflection, which may include the perspectives of various actors, a variety of scientific foundations and proven experience.

### *Sample*

The sample is made up of 243 respondents representing their municipalities in a three-year research project (see note i). Of these 243, 178 are preschool teachers and 65 are managers, of whom 55 are head teachers and 10 are administrative managers. As no significant differences emerged between the responses of head teachers and administrative managers to the question about what characterises teaching in language, communication and multilingualism, the groups have been combined and designated as “managers” (M). The analysis is further limited to focus on preschool teachers and managers as groups, with no comparison between municipalities. In the scope of this research, interpreting and differentiating between each municipality’s preschool teachers and managers in relation to each other would entail a far too extensive and unwieldy analysis. The number of participating preschool teachers in the various municipalities ranges between 3 and 42, and the number of managers ranges between 3 and 12.

### *Instruments and Procedures*

The reflective document described above was distributed by email to all 243 respondents from the 10 municipalities. The data was generated in connection with the beginning of the project in 2016. After four reminders, there were a total of 21 non-responders. Overall, the return and response rate was 91%.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis consists of textual analysis with an expanded approach (see Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008; Åsberg, 2000/2001; Silverman, 2011). Didactically oriented analysis may operate through shifting theoretical approaches and scientific foundations – didactics as a multidisciplinary field of knowledge (Ingerman & Wickman, 2015). Teaching may thus be studied on the basis of several theoretical premises, such as variation theory, sociocultural and pragmatic perspectives, and post-constructionist premises (Vallberg Roth, 2015, 2017a). Depending upon the approach and premise, the meaning of teaching seems to vary. Traces of scientific foundations that emerge in the data are discussed in this research (see Rosenqvist, 2000). The term “trace” is used in the analysis rather than “category”, for example, because “trace” is a term that can be analytically compatible with different premises and angles that move between qualitative and post-qualitative approaches and ways of relating to and processing data. Traces can be both explicit and implicit. Explicit traces are delimited with relatively sharp and closed contours. Implicit traces have more diffuse, fuzzy and open contours, such as diffuse traces of scientific foundations representing more implicit expressions.

Kasanen’s (1993) three levels operate in this analysis – the Action Level, Thinking Level I (object theories) and Thinking Level II (meta-theory). The action level refers to descriptions of teaching acts such as planning, delivery and assessment in practice. The thinking level I, including object theories, refers to how preschool teachers and managers base their teaching practices on science and relate them to theoretical premises like variation theory and pragmatic and sociocultural perspectives. The meta-theoretical level, thinking level II, refers to preschool teachers and managers orienting themselves in and connecting to the meta-theoretical level (for example, post-constructionism). It is appropriate here to emphasise that thought is not regarded as separated and isolated from action, but rather intertwined at all three levels. In order to meet the need for tools that can expand teachers’ professional scope for action and provide support for critical reflection and science-based action, studies are required that also clarify how teaching can be based both theoretically and meta-theoretically (Vallberg Roth, 2017a).



In other words, this can be expressed as an orientation that includes how teaching is based on both ontological and epistemological grounds. A broader approach can pick up practice-related, theoretical and meta-theoretical traces in the data, and the analysis can be expanded and transposed between different identified grounds.

At the methodological level, the analysis refers to abduction. In an abductive analysis, there is alternation between empirically loaded theory and theory-loaded empirical matter, where each is successively reinterpreted in the light of the other (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; Peirce, 1903/1990). The results of the abductive analysis, which are presented in the results section, show elements of both theory and empiricism. Abduction can also point to the creative aspect of the analysis. Abductive moments in the analysis may include suddenly seeing an alternative and discovering a previously unrevealed possibility of being (Peirce, 1903/1990)

At the data-related level, the data consist of “word data”. A selection of quotations is presented in the research to exemplify the traces in the data in the clearest and least unwieldy way. More concretely, the analysis involves identifying traces in the data that relate to the aim and question. The analysis can then be described according to the following interpretive paths (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; Fejes & Thornberg, 2009; Rapley, 2011).

#### *Evidence-based Analysis Path*

- Close reading – utterances are read in response to each question and prominent words are highlighted.

- Word frequency analysis – the frequency of prominent words is counted using the Find function in Word – quantitative processing of word data. These are words that, upon repeated reading of the data, emerge as high-frequency or low-frequency, as shown in Table 1 in the research. The term “frequency analysis” may be considered a quantitative element of the qualitative processing of data. It is not a quantitative and statistical analysis claiming that each and every word in the data has been quantified and statistically processed. The point of the quantitative element is to stabilise the analysis of the comprehensive data and to reduce source errors and over-interpretations such as confirmation bias (selectively noting data that confirm preconceived opinions) and ascribing outside significance to a detail in the data.

- Distinctive traces – analysis of how the words interact and reinforce each other in their context. Traces of meaningful units are identified, grouped, named, and exemplified in sub-headings. The analysis builds further on both high- and low-frequency traces in the second and qualitatively oriented interpretive path (see Table 2).

#### *Theory-based Analysis Path*

- The distinctive traces in the preceding interpretive path are problematised and related to research and concepts. Problematisation refers to careful examination of the distinctive traces. The outcomes in the texts written by participating professionals are then related to other texts and earlier research (see *Discussion*).

- Cohesive analysis of thematic main traces according to theoretical concepts and didactic questions – main concepts are tested in analysis with a reconstructive, hermeneutic focus (see *Didactic Levels and Issues* in the results section and in *Conclusion*).

In practice, the evidence- and theory-based interpretive paths are more intertwined than the bullet list above would indicate.

### *Situated Generalisation*

With regard to generalisation, there is an argument for the logic in a situated generalisation, according to which the results provide alternative perspectives and concepts rather than a truth (Larsson, 2009). This is an approach that is discursive, exploratory and sensitive, and one in which the reader interprets the extent to which the results can provide guidance in similar cases, situations and contexts outside this research. The generalisation is situated in the sense that it cannot be predicted and instead occurs through recognition, in other words when the reader recognises identified teaching traces described in the research and uses the results and concepts as tools in practice (see Larsson, 2009).

### *Ethical Considerations*

Research ethics principles for humanities/social sciences research have been followed (Swedish Research Council, 2017). This means in part that the respondents were informed and consulted regarding their participation. All participation is fully voluntary and can be terminated at any time, without giving any reason for doing so. All the respondents were informed and offered opportunity to give their consent. The data are being handled confidentially and will be used solely for scientific purposes. Data will be reported by the researchers in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified by outsiders.

### **Results of Research**

The results for the question of what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism are reported below.

### *Word Frequencies*

The word frequency analysis returned 8,226 words, of which managers accounted for 1,753 and preschool teachers for 6,473. The frequencies for preschool teachers and managers were added and then grouped into clusters. Clusters were given collective, characteristic names. For example, words and phrases such as “children”, “children’s” and “the children” were given the collective name “Children”. The 10 collective names that topped the list of high-frequency words are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Overview of collective names for high-frequency words.**

Collective name	Frequency
Children	(235)
Stories	(226)
Talks	(184)
Words	(125)
We	(110)
Overall	(95)
Play	(70)
Learn	(61)
Rhymes	(55)
SAAC	(51)

Words and phrases that can be designated as lower-frequency include “Bornholm Model” (7) and “Inclusive” (2). Qualitative processing, analysis and elucidation of the results based on word frequencies follow.

### *Distinctive Traces*

Nine distinctive traces for the question about what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism are shown in Table 2 below. The traces include responses from both preschool teachers and managers unless otherwise specified.

**Table 2. Overview of distinctive traces of what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool.**

Trace number	Trace name
1	Teaching is child-centred
2	The preschool teacher’s awareness, roles and actions make a difference
3	Relationships are significant
4	Teaching is dominated by verbal communication
5	The linguistic environment is considered important
6	Teaching is both unlimited and delimited
7	Teaching for everyone
8	Teaching is related to learning (process), development (process) and knowledge (goals)
9	Teaching delivery is to a certain extent based upon science

Discussion follows about what may characterise teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool. The nine distinctive traces in Table 2 are described and explained in the text and complemented with empirical examples.

#### *Trace 1: Teaching is Child-centred*

Trace 1 shows that utterances concerning children being the focus of teaching in language, communication and multilingualism in preschool clearly emerge in the data. Children in general/children in a particular group dominate, but in some contexts multilingual children are included and there are also isolated utterances in the data about children who need special support.

*Children in the Group* A picture of children as a group as the basis for teaching processes, rather than children as individuals, emerges in the data. Children are constructed in the texts as curious, interested, clever and participatory, but also as needy to some extent. Some aspects of how the utterances about children can be understood are found in the expressions “children as the point of departure”, “children as a resource” and “children as co-explorers”.

With regard to the view of children as a point of departure, this may involve using perceived needs, interests and/or knowledge as the basis for teaching. This may be brought to the fore through documentation, for example, that identifies a child’s lack of skills and knowledge



in the area of language (TRAS<sup>1</sup>, *Tidig Registrering Av Språkutveckling*, Early Registration of Language development).

Start with the children: what do they need? (T)

The programme is guided by the children's interests and knowledge ... (T)

By using TRAS we gain a picture of the challenges we need to add to the programme. (T)

With regard to children as a resource, this may involve focusing on the children's own thoughts and skills and the subjects that interest them, as well as on the differences and similarities in native languages and cultures; all may be useful in teaching.

(M) Focusing on the children's ideas, skills, interest in words, concepts, contexts, stories, and pictures.

Making use of the children's various native languages and cultures in the programme. (T)

When children are considered co-explorers, "together" is a central concept.

Arrive at solutions and new ideas together and vocabulary and the ability to develop complex spoken language will increase. (M)

### *Trace 2: The Preschool Teacher's Awareness, Roles and Actions Make a Difference*

Variation in the descriptions of the role of the preschool teacher emerges in Trace 2. This section also addresses matters that specifically can be said to relate to norms and values connected to the preschool teacher's awareness, roles and actions.

*The Role of the Preschool Teacher* The texts show that the preschool teacher makes a difference when it comes to teaching in language and communication in preschool. Different voices are "crystallised", and one voice does not necessarily cancel out the others. The various roles that emerged comprise "the aware preschool teacher", "the knowledgeable preschool teacher", "the instructive preschool teacher", "the non-pressuring preschool teacher", "the supportive and encouraging preschool teacher" and "the responsive and generous preschool teacher". For example, a preschool teacher may be described as both challenging and supportive in their role. A few of these roles are exemplified below.

There are no direct utterances concerning how the native language educator's role is constructed in the preschool; the descriptions say no more than that native language educators may be involved in teaching.

- The knowledgeable preschool teacher:

Teaching is more rewarding if the preschool teacher has some knowledge of the subject.

One characteristic of all teaching is that it is more rewarding if the teacher has some prior knowledge, regardless of the subject. ... If the teacher has less prior knowledge, however, this can be compensated for by exploring together with the children ... (T)

The awareness of preschool teachers is also emphasised.

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1 TRAS (*Tidig Registrering Av Språkutveckling* Early Registration of Language Development) is a collaborative project among various centres and higher education institutions in Norway. "Professionals representing the various institutions work with children whose language and reading development is delayed" (Espenakk et al., 2005, p. 8). TRAS is observational material that surveys age-specific skills and is based on linguistics, early childhood education theory and developmental psychology (op. cit.).

Everything we ordinarily do is connected to how we think and teach in language and communication, as long as the educators do it consciously. (M)

- The non-pressuring preschool teacher:

Teaching is based on free will, with no pressure from the preschool teacher.

Let the children come together in activities based on their interests, where the children can interact with each other because they *want* [respondent's emphasis] to understand each other without "coercion" or pressure from the educator. (T)

- The supportive and encouraging preschool teacher:

The preschool teacher's intentions in teaching are to help and support the children towards learning.

What I try to do is let the children test all the languages they can and want to use and learn new ones. (T)

Helping the children put things, feelings and opinions into words. (T)

- The responsive and generous preschool teacher:

The preschool teacher is described as one who is responsive to the children and offers appropriate learning activities.

The educator responds to the children's own initiatives and presents activities that they believe are appropriate for the group and the individuals in it, activities that challenge and stimulate the children's learning and development. (T)

The role of the responsive and generous preschool teacher may also involve being a coexplorer.

Co-explorer in everyday life. (M)

*Norms and values* The role of the preschool teacher is surrounded by specific norms and values in relation to language and communication. The terms "norms" and "values" are not explicitly used in the texts. This may involve speaking correctly and being a role model.

Talk to the children a lot, and correctly, without simplifying the language. (T)

By speaking clearly and correctly ... (T)

Being good language role models. (T)

... is a role model who shows that reading and writing are important. (M)

### *Trace 3: Relationships Make a Difference*

Trace 3 addresses the importance of relationships in teaching. The relationships described are denoted as both symmetrical and mutually asymmetrical.

*Relationships* The notion of relationships as central to teaching in preschool refers to both peer relationships among the children and relationships between children and preschool teachers.

... and encourage the children to talk to each other. (T)

... shared play ... (M)

We talk to the children a lot. (T)

- Us and them

Examples are given in the texts of how the relationship between preschool teachers and

children can become asymmetrical and hierarchical. This applies to both when the preschool teacher is the one ascribed power, and when the children are constructed as those who gain influence and take control in certain situations.

(T) Learning is constant, but it is the educator's role to challenge the children in the various subjects.

Where the preschool teachers are responsible for giving the children the opportunity to be challenged to achieve all the aspirational goals of the preschool. (M)

Children who have a different native language, for example, teach us to count. (T)

- Us together

Relationships may also be symmetrical and non-hierarchical when it comes to teaching in preschool.

It is also important to find methods for learning, being interested and developing together with children and colleagues. (T)

We learn from each other. (T)

Putting a great deal of focus on the children's development of rich and complex language, where the preschool teacher discusses and reflects together with the children and asks the children to respond and solve problems. (T)

Engaging in constant dialogue with the children, not talking at them. (T)

#### *Trace 4: The Linguistic Environment is Considered Important*

Trace 4 addresses examples that can be related to the importance of the linguistic environment in the physical, material, social, and educational senses.

*The Linguistically Rich Environment* These are presented as significant in teaching contexts. The "environment" concept may include both the physical setting and materials, as well as the social and educational environment.

The preschool teacher creates an environment in which the children encounter varied language. (M)

When the learning environment offers multiple opportunities to communicate in writing, pictures and symbols, the children use this in play in their own ways. (T)

We create various environments indoors and outdoors that stimulate language/multilingualism. (T)

Communicative environments at the preschool and careful language usage are very important. (T)

#### *Trace 5: Teaching is Both Unlimited and Delimited*

Trace 5 sheds light on utterances about teaching in language and communication as something that is present "in everything" and described in terms of "the whole". Teaching is also described as something delivered through themes and projects. Both spontaneous and planned teaching are said to occur. There were no explanations in the responses of what may distinguish teaching from something else that would not be characterised as teaching.

*All Day and in Delimited Situations and Activities* Teaching in language and communication is said to take place constantly, spontaneously and deliberately in all contexts and situations, as well as through planned activities, projects or themes. There are no limits to what might be included.

There are no limits to what might be included; everything is determined by the children's interests and thirst for learning. (M)

Examples of where teaching is said to occur are provided in the responses. These include routine situations, where a few concrete examples include the cloakroom when children are

putting on their coats, when nappies are changed, at mealtimes, or during quiet story-time after meals. "Activities" in general are also mentioned, as well as sing-along and music time, reading aloud, story-time and book talks, as well as writing time, drama, dance, and art in particular. In addition to these contexts, the respondents mention times for quiet reflection and problem-solving, ordinary conversations, conflict resolution, assemblies, and play.

The responses emphasise that teaching is characterised by a wide variety of forms, subjects and materials. Teaching should be based on variation and be integrated and take place in meaningful contexts that build on the children's interests. Conversations and dialogues take place one-to-one and in small and large groups.

Teaching in language/multilingual communication occurs on an ongoing basis, through how we educators talk and put events into words, as well as in more adult-guided situations such as assemblies and activities like playing games. (T)

It takes place in everything that happens during the day such as in connection with routines and between all individuals. Deliberate activities from the educators with various linguistic events. (M)

[As] a preschool teacher you grasp the opportunity to challenge the children in mundane, spontaneous situations, as well as planned situations. (T)

The entire day is teaching. (M)

... that is, everything is teaching. (T)

#### *Trace 6: Verbal Communication is Predominant in Teaching*

Trace 6 addresses verbal communication in which words, concepts, spoken language and reading, stories and the like are frequently emphasised. The subject of children's active written language is virtually absent from the utterances.

*Verbal Communication* Voices on verbal communication become predominant in the texts and this is clearly a distinctive trace.

- Conversation, storytelling and reading:

Teaching in language and communication occurs primarily through conversation, reading and storytelling. Words and concepts take on significance in verbal communication.

Language/multilingual communication may be characterised by communicating with the children, naming various things when talking with very young children to strengthen their word comprehension. (why/goal) (T)

Talking about books is another example, when the teacher might, for example, choose a spread in a book that the children like and discuss what they see in the pictures. (T)

Talking with the children, letting them tell stories, describe, explain their thoughts and ideas. Giving them many words without simplifying by naming things correctly so that the children build a rich vocabulary. (why/goal) (T)

Conscious dialogue, challenging talks, giving room to speak, conscious reading. (M)

- Words, concepts and spoken language:

With regard to verbal communication, one voice on words and concepts emerges as particularly distinctive. This may involve vocabulary building, word comprehension, concept formation and the like.

Learning may be directed at language sounds, words or storytelling. (T)

Developing their spoken language, vocabulary and concepts. Including for multilingual children (native language instruction). (M)

This may also involve sentences.

Teaching in language and multilingual communication may involve us as educators building long sentences with many adjectives, adverbs and attributes when we talk. (T)

*Communication with Various Modes of Expression* Verbal communication is not, however, regarded as the only option, and the children are given scope to express themselves in various ways.

It might also involve offering many different modes of expression such as art, dance and drama so that every child can find their favourite way to express themselves. (T)

Let the children communicate in various modes of expression and use the language in a light-hearted way. Listen, argue, express thoughts, reflect, etc. (M)

- Body language:

One way to express oneself is through the body, which can be listened to and interpreted.

Listening to and interpreting body language. (T)

- Written language:

Utterances on children's active written language do not occur to any significant extent. Where written language is mentioned, the utterances deal mainly with offerings, access and the environment, as well as something the children do on their own, in play for example.

The written language, for example, here you need access to tools to develop and try out graphic expression – the first step towards writing. (T)

When the learning environment offers multiple options for communicating with the help of writing, pictures and symbols, the children use this in play in their own way. (T)

Written language is mentioned in one utterance in a list with other examples.

... written language ... (M)

There is no direct expression of active and deliberately planned teaching in relation to children's active use of written language; the utterances found concentrate more on the environment.

Have a stimulating reading and writing environment. For example, demonstrate written language by writing down the children's stories. Have letters, the children's names, words all over the play environment. (T)

### *Trace 7: Education for All*

Trace 7 addresses examples that can be categorised under the general concept of "education for all". This involves inclusive education as well as multilingualism and diversity.

*Every Child and All Languages* The concept of "all/every/everyone" appears in the utterances in various contexts, along with play, development and inclusion of languages and children, for instance.

Organised games so that everyone has a frame of reference. Everyone can join in and understand rules. (T)

Promote the development of every child ... (M)

Including all languages, ... to work inclusively with all of the children. (M)

*Inclusive Education* Explicit expressions that can be linked to inclusive education are low-frequency. "Inclusive" as a concept is used in two utterances: first in the sense that pre-

school is for everyone, and second in relation to music and arithmetic, for example.

That the language is included in all contexts and that the subjects above [music and arithmetic] include the language ... (M)

There are no descriptions of non-inclusive education in the data.

*Special Support* A particular tool is distinguished in the data and can be said to have originated in special education – using signing as support, or, more specifically, the Signing as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (SAAC) method.<sup>2</sup> It emerges in the texts that this is commonly used and can thus be regarded as a method in the intersection between general education and special education.

We have to help the children who do not yet have any language. ... We help those who need it to communicate in other ways. At our preschool, we have a boy with Down's Syndrome who needs support in the form of signing and sometimes pictures. (T)

SAAC is becoming a teaching method that can benefit all children, not only those assessed as in need of special support. This support can then be used in ordinary teaching and be considered a way of differentiating the teaching rather than the individuals. Sign language, which is not the same as SAAC, is included in lists, but is not something that is further elucidated in writing.

Signing support to improve children's opportunities to communicate. (T)

We also use SAAC to support children's language development. (T)

Work with SAAC, TRAS and other support materials. (M)

*Multilingualism and Diversity* Content that can be related to multilingualism and diversity is addressed in some of the texts and can be included in the "Education for all" trace. This often involves bringing up different languages in teaching.

- Various native languages:

This may involve making children aware that various languages are spoken by children in the group.

Showing interest in children's native languages and learning what certain things are called in another language, bringing this up in the group. (T)

Paying attention to children's native languages in our procedures and in assemblies such as naming colours, days of the week and numbers in the languages spoken by the children in the class group. (T)

- Swedish as an additional language:

Swedish as an additional language is not explicitly found in the data, but the following can be regarded as an example of how such teaching could be arranged.

Multilingual staff (if there are any) are used continuously and daily in all contexts to strengthen and enrich the native language. When native language teachers visit the preschool once a week, the support is planned with the preschool teachers. The content is goal-oriented, based on the needs of the child and the preschool programme. In this way, the child gains greater understanding of the Swedish language

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2 In the SAAC method, spoken language is augmented with the hand movements of sign language to clarify what is expressed verbally. The staff speak and sign simultaneously (Tisell, 2009). According to Heister Trygg (2010), the most important aim of SAAC is for the child to acquire tools for linguistic interaction before speech has developed. The aim of SAAC is thus "to foster and build communication and language in harmony with each other" (p. 16).



and that which takes place in connection with themes/projects. The child learns the same words and concepts in their native language and in Swedish. With the help of a native language teacher, the child can be supported in making their voice heard and thus build their self-confidence in using Swedish as an additional language. (T)

- The Swedish language:

Although it is evident that the focus is on Swedish for teaching in language and communication, the Swedish language is described several times as one of the areas of content that is presented along with other languages, which may be interpreted as an expression of an inclusive, multilingual approach.

The characteristics of teaching in language/multilingualism are words, Swedish, body language, additional languages, sign language. (T)

Different cultures, native language practice, listening/doing in both languages, for example twinned books. (M)

Work deliberately with vocabulary and communication in Swedish and other native languages. (T)

- Other languages and cultures:

This may involve conversations about different languages, cultures, countries or specific concepts.

Conversations about different languages, cultures and countries. It can be fun to learn how to say hello in different languages, for example. (T)

Having the opportunity to get acquainted with other languages (including languages other than the native language). (M)

*Resources in Multilingual Education* In the following, utterances on who can be characterised as resources in teaching situations involving multilingualism are addressed. The people mentioned include Swedish-speaking and multilingual staff, including native language support workers, parents/guardians and interpreters, and the children themselves.

- Swedish-speaking staff:

Monolingual, Swedish-speaking staff can be resources in teaching by learning words in languages other than Swedish or by talking about other languages.

Learn a few words in the child's language. (T)

Talking about the children's native languages. (T)

- Multilingual staff:

People with multilingual skills become resources in multilingual teaching.

Encouraging and supporting curiosity about all languages spoken at the preschool. Using technical aids and people who are skilled in working with multilingualism. (T)

- Native language support/teaching:

The native language support worker/native language teacher is a teaching resource.

Native language support workers (who support children for whom Swedish is an additional language and make other children aware of other languages and cultures). (T)

Also, for the multilingual children (native language teaching). (M)

- Parents/guardians and interpreters:

The child's parents/guardians or interpreter may be regarded as resources in the work with multilingualism.

... regarding multilingualism, it is important to get off to a good start by learning a few words and phrases in the child's native language via the parent/guardian or interpreter. (T)

- The children:

In teaching in multilingualism, the children themselves become resources.

Use the children who speak other languages to help us learn languages other than Swedish, for example. (T)

*Trace 8: Teaching is Related to Learning, Development and Knowledge*

Trace 8 shows that teaching is related primarily to learning, but development and, to an extent, knowledge, also occur in the utterances. In this context, the concepts of learning and development can be understood as processes, while knowledge can be related to goals.

*Aimed at Learning, Developing and Gaining Knowledge* In the texts, teaching is related to learning, development and knowledge, where the first two concepts are aimed at processes and the latter at goals. The concept of learning is more central in the texts than knowledge and development.

A great deal of learning happens in spontaneous, ordinary communication. (T)

Play as a tool for learning. (M)

... linguistic awareness is the goal. Language can be used in various ways. It is important that every child is given the opportunity to explore and develop language in their own way. (T)

Expanding and developing children's language skills through various teaching methods. (T)

The concept of identity, which must be regarded as intimately connected to learning and language development (see for example Palla, 2004), is conspicuous by its absence in the texts.

*Trace 9: Teaching Delivery is to a Certain Extent Based Upon Science*

Trace 9 shows that, to a certain extent, the delivery of teaching is based upon science. The scientific foundation<sup>3</sup> is unpacked through expressions concerning how preschool teachers use specific models, methods or materials such as the Bornholm Model (see for example Sterner & Lundberg, 2010), SAAC (see Trace 7), and TRAS (see Trace 1), which can be considered research-based. This may also involve more implicit expressions that can be traced back to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, in other words the pedagogy of its founder, Loris Malaguzzi.

*Science-based Methods* Traces of scientific foundations emerge in the responses from teachers. Some clearly express that knowledge of and research in the subjects are necessary.

Knowledge and research into all subjects is required.... (T)

The trace on scientific foundations primarily involves the Bornholm Model.<sup>4</sup>

We also work with Bornholm with all five-year-olds. (T)

Our preschool works with the Bornholm Model from an early stage. (T)

The SAAC method emerges as a voice in this trace (for a more detailed account of

3 Scientific foundations are used in the arguments on distinctive traces in the sense that scientific support exists in the form of empirical research that underpins and problematises the method, model or philosophy in question.

4 The Bornholm Model, according to the website [www.bornholmsmodellen.se](http://www.bornholmsmodellen.se), first appeared in 1994 and has since stimulated children's linguistic awareness and prepared them to read. The model is based on the Danish Bornholm Project in which researchers followed two groups of six-year-olds for one school year. One group was the experimental group, who were given daily language games for eight months. The other group was the control group, whose teachers were given no special instructions on language games. There were pupils in each group who had been identified as potentially having dyslexia.

SAAC, see Trace 7. See also for example Johansson, 1990; Andersson, 2002; von Tetzchner & Martinsen, 2002). TRAS is also mentioned in some of the responses (for a more detailed account, see Trace 1).

A low-frequency trace with one explicit and three implicit expressions can be related to a philosophy or educational theory that can be identified as based on a post-constructionist theoretical orientation: the Reggio Emilia philosophy (see for example Åberg & Lenz Taguchi, 2005). Within this branch, a specific expression of “the hundred languages of children” is central.

We are a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool. (T)

I also think about the hundred languages that we use for various forms of expression .... (T)

### *Didactic Levels and Issues*

Based on the three didactic levels it is possible to interpret traces of a practice-based action level that are clearer than those of a theoretical level or meta-theoretical level. The utterances and the distinctive traces are primarily, clearly and closely aligned with a practice- and action-based approach. This applies to both managers and preschool teachers in the data (see for example Traces 6, 7 and 9). Multivoicedness, as described in the practice- and action-based approach, mainly ends at general teaching of children in preschool and can thus be regarded as a generally oriented multivoicedness.

The didactic issues show the following:

- **What** – concept formation, vocabulary, verbal communication, listening, self-expression, discerning thoughts and opinions and, to some extent, written language.

- **How** – integrated in the daily work in the group and in the preschool, the whole, all of the time, as well as in delimited, goal-oriented projects or themes; the language as predominant in everything that occurs at the preschool and in planned and spontaneous teaching.

Playful, based on the children’s interests and challenging.

Nursery rhymes, songs, stories, signing as support.

- **Who** – children, we/together, educators/preschool teachers, and the relationships between them; native language workers/teachers, parents/guardians, interpreters.

- **Where** – preschool group (micro) and institutional level.

- **When** – in everything that happens, spontaneous everyday situations and planned activities. The linguistic environment. Characteristic of teaching in language and communication in preschool is that it can be summarised as unlimited, but also delimited in time and space.

- **Why** – the goal of teaching has to do with learning, development and knowledge. The importance of verbal communication in particular is apparent.

### **Discussion**

The results of the research are problematised below in relation to current research and are discussed in a context that includes applicable governing and policy documents, as well as government audits of preschools.

#### *Teaching in Language and Communication: Always and Everywhere*

Analysis of the reflective documents gives the impression that teaching in language and communication is omnipresent. The notion that language teaching is embedded in everything that is done in preschool, can occur at any time and takes place throughout the day seems to be a prevailing norm or discourse. Verbal communication, which is predominant and ascribed central importance, is another norm – as opposed to written language, for example.

No specific expressions are provided that indicate teaching in language is distinguished from other things that cannot be considered teaching. It is interesting to consider the possible consequences of such a perspective: is there risk of undermining the very concept of teaching, or are these simply normative traces of the distinctive nature of early childhood education theory, with an integrative approach based on the trinity of “development, upbringing and learning”?

It becomes interesting to apply another trace to these expressions, that of teaching as a process rather than in relation to a specific goal such as linguistic awareness. Learning and developmental processes are more clearly emphasised as goals with regard to the characteristics of teaching. While teaching is seen as something that happens throughout the preschool day and in what can be interpreted as a broad and diffuse, verbal and communicative ongoing process, this picture is augmented with utterances describing teaching as a wide variety of delimited and planned activities and situations. In this way, teaching is presented as unlimited and spontaneous, but beyond this it is also characterised by being delimited and planned. Both approaches are based on the preschool teacher’s awareness. If the preschool teacher is pedagogically aware, spontaneous and seemingly mundane routine situations that arise in the preschool can also become teaching.

That children in the preschool are the focus of teaching emerges from the data as a strong voice or norm, as does the importance of the linguistic environment. Relationships in particular are building blocks in teaching.

#### *Teaching as Multilingual or Monolingual*

As mentioned, the preschool can be seen as an arena for multilingual and multicultural encounters, as well as one where families and children from various backgrounds and circumstances meet. Opportunities are found in preschool teaching to create the conditions necessary for each and every child’s evolving knowledge within the target areas, here in relation to language, communication and multilingualism, and regardless of the backgrounds and living conditions of children and their families.

Support materials prepared by the Swedish National Agency for Education (National Agency for Education, 2013) emphasise that “The preschool’s task is to create a language environment that stimulates and promotes the development of every child, regardless of whether the children are monolingual or multilingual. As the proportion of children who speak Swedish as an additional language is constantly rising, it is a matter of urgency that preschool staff gain access to and familiarise themselves with new research findings and developmental ideas in the field” (p. 75). Based on the analysis of the responses, it can be concluded that languages other than Swedish provide scope in teaching language and communication in preschool to some extent. This occurs through voices that include, for instance, concepts and thinking about multilingual children, native languages and native language support in utterances on teaching. The voices also address a multicultural or intercultural approach (see Lahdenperä, 1997; Palla, 2004). These can be related to voices on the awareness of preschool teachers and the importance of the linguistic environment, as well as less abstract expressions concerning methods, activities or available teaching materials.

Examples taken from the analysed data may include the existence of literature in several languages available to the children at the preschool, or that preschool teachers consider it fruitful to learn a few words in the child’s native language, which could help create the rich linguistic environment described.

It is worth thinking about whether what has been described can constitute a sufficiently stimulating and challenging linguistic environment for multilingual children and, by extension, whether it is possible for preschool teachers who speak only Swedish to meet this aspirational goal of the curriculum. Several staff resources for working towards this goal emerge in the analysed data, including native language teachers, multilingual staff, parents, interpreters, and the children themselves.

Researchers (Kultti & Pramling, 2017) posit, for example, that using the language is not sufficient for children's learning of additional languages, and that it is instead when the expressions and meanings of the language are unpacked that children are challenged to develop linguistic awareness, in what the authors call "translanguaging". The authors argue that metatalk is one route to this awareness. Based on this argument, the various staff/human resources described above may constitute significant support.

Utterances related to the concept of identity are conspicuous by their absence in the reflective texts. The Swedish preschool curriculum notes, "Language and learning are inseparably connected, as are language and identity formation" (Swedish ordinance on the preschool curriculum, SKOLFS 1998:16, p. 4). The close links between language and identity creation have also been emphasised in research (Palla, 2004) for some time.

In addition to targets related to language and communication, the preschool curriculum (SKOLFS 1998:16, 2016) also states that the preschool should endeavour to ensure that children "whose native language is other than Swedish develop their cultural identity and ability to communicate in both Swedish and their native language" (p. 7).

A study of multilingualism in preschool (Björk-Willén, 2006) shows a monolingual norm that is strongly prevalent in children's interactions with each other and with preschool teachers. The conclusions of an evaluation study (Axelsson, 2005) performed in multilingual preschools in Stockholm point in the same direction. The children develop Swedish language and literacy in a way that facilitates their continued development in school. Native language skills and native language literacy, on the other hand, are not developed to any significant extent. A quality audit (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2017e) clarifies the personal understanding of staff in areas where pedagogical work is not particularly advanced. Good outcomes are reported for language development in Swedish, but the performance of the preschools with regard to native languages other than Swedish is assessed as fairly poor or very poor. A majority of staff referred to shortcomings in their own knowledge about the language skills of multilingual children in addition to Swedish, and that children were rarely encouraged to use these languages while at preschool.

The results of this analysis point in a similar direction to earlier research and audits to a certain extent, but they also differ in some ways. In the high-frequency distinctive traces, Swedish emerges as the norm, but awareness emerges in the low-frequency traces containing utterances in which multilingualism and native languages are mentioned. The utterances describe an approach that has embedded the children's various languages as a point of departure in teaching, and there may be significant differences in the choice of teaching arrangements and delivery depending upon the approach. A research overview on multilingualism emphasises the need for an inclusive organisation to develop the capacity to embrace the heterogeneity that multilingual individuals represent (Axelsson & Magnusson, 2012). However, one conclusion in relation to the results of this research is that when traces include utterances claiming that language teaching is embedded in everything and occurs throughout the day, this applies mainly to the Swedish language.

### *Multivoiced Teaching for Children in General*

In relation to the child-centred approach to teaching in language and communication in preschool expressed in the data, a special education perspective should also be considered. The analysis indicates that it is primarily children in the general group who are described, which may apply to inclusive expressions like "all children", while only a few isolated utterances contain concepts that can be related to a more individualised perspective. This latter perspective is seen in the curriculum, for example, through the expression "every child", which is a point of departure for teaching that is more focused on the individual. The current preschool curriculum emphasises that the preschool must, for instance, endeavour to ensure that every child "develops complex spoken language, vocabulary and concepts as well as their ability to



play with words, tell stories, express thoughts, ask questions, argue and communicate with others” (p. 10). What might this “every child” mean in less abstract terms in relation to teaching? There are, for example, no descriptions of non-inclusive forms of education in the data, but does the absence of exclusion mean that teaching is inclusive? Examples of inclusive education in the data include isolated utterances about “all children”, helping children who do not have language, or including all languages.

When it comes to children who are perceived as being in need of special support, the curriculum expresses a joint responsibility in the work team to “pay particular attention to and help children who need support in their development for various reasons” and to “provide stimulation and special support to children who are experiencing difficulties of various kinds” (SKOLFES 1998:16, p. 8).

A quality audit (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2017d) shows that “there are qualitative differences in how the audited preschools work with children who have special support needs and that, as a result, children do not enjoy equal opportunities to benefit from preschool education” (p. 5). A larger study (Sandberg & Ottosson, 2010) makes it clear that there are significant differences between preschools with regard to knowledge about and motivation to provide the additional support that many children are assessed as needing. Special support in teaching in language and communication emerges in the data through a specific, distinctive method: SAAC.

It seems that there is both knowledge of and motivation to provide this specific type of support; SAAC emerges in the responses as an established method used in teaching. This applies to both the needs of specific individuals and descriptions of teaching in general. The SAAC method can be described as being in the intersection between general education and special education, as it was originally used for children with hearing impairments, in Special Educational Needs schools, in connection with learning difficulties or in specific special education contexts. The method seems to have been widened or developed to cover more or even all children in a preschool group.

SAAC is used mainly by children with language difficulties, autism, functional CP disorders or learning difficulties, but it has come to be used in most preschools for children whose native language is other than Swedish, as well as generally for the youngest children in the preschool, as a support for more rapid speech development (Tisell, 2009). This reinforces our supposition that SAAC has evolved from special educational support to become a general method used in many preschools.

Another method, or model, that occurs in the responses is the Bornholm Model, which can also be described as residing in the intersection between general education and special education, partly because it involves identifying and helping those with reading and writing difficulties and dyslexia. There is very little description of other methods or expressions that can be related to special education.

Research on special education in preschool highlights the need to develop skills in areas that can be related to teaching situations, methods and children with various disabilities (Holst, 2008; Hillesøy, Johansson & Ohna, 2014; Kristoffersen & Simonsen, 2014). There may also be a need to enhance skills related to the child’s perspective and attitudes (Palla, 2011; Warming, 2011; Åmot, 2012). The focus of this research is not explicitly on perceived needs or skills development opportunities from a special educational perspective in relation to teaching. It is, however, possible that needs similar to those presented by researchers in the field of special education would also apply in the 10 studied municipalities, considering the lack of descriptions that can be related to special education. The pedagogical diversity or multivoicedness, that is described mainly does not go beyond the general education of children in preschool – a generally oriented multivoicedness.



## Conclusions

An overall approach might be to aim the spotlight at themes where teaching in language, communication and multilingualism can be brought together as “education for all”. A variety of aspects have been problematised and discussed as examples in relation to the goals of early childhood education in Sweden of ensuring equality and that preschools meet the needs of all children. In sum, it can be emphasised that diffuse and low-frequency traces of multivoicedness in relation to multilingualism and special support are making themselves felt. The multivoicedness stops at a general orientation of what may characterise teaching.

Multivoiced teaching, co-assessment processes and improved teaching skills among preschool teachers can be seen as tools for achieving greater equality and an inclusive attitude, where differences and diversity are considered resources and even more clearly constitute points of departure and input in teaching than is evident from this data.

Such processes become relevant to creating the conditions to deliver teaching that can foster children’s learning, knowledge and development, while encouraging well-being and emotionally secure identity creation. Such teaching and assessment practices in language and communication may be especially important for children who are in need of additional, individualised support and challenges in preschool, as well as for multilingual children, families and preschools.

Finally, the research makes no claims to present a comprehensive and complete list of theoretical and meta-theoretical orientations. It should rather be seen as an outline discussion of certain tendencies related to teaching based on (meta)theoretical variation interpreted in the data. Kansanen’s level model was used in this analysis, but not as literally exemplary and hierarchical levels. The levels are instead regarded as potentially intertwined. Kansanen does not link his model of didactic levels to multivoicedness.

With regard to the qualitative processing in the analysis, quantitative elements were used to stabilise the analysis of the evidence-based, distinctive traces in the comprehensive data. In other words, this does not involve a quantitative and statistical analysis purporting that each and every word in the data has been quantified and statistically processed. Rather, the quantitative element aims to reduce sources of error and over-interpretations such as confirmation bias and ascribing outside importance to a detail in the data.

It is also likely that preschool teachers and managers have ideas about teaching that were not expressed in words in the data. They may, for example, be theoretically informed even though they do not explicitly refer to theories and theoretical concepts when they write about teaching. Although explicit and implicit traces emerge in the data, the analysis is focused on explicit traces. The responses of preschool teachers and managers vary in length, breadth and depth, and it was considered essential not to over-interpret the responses. The research makes no claim to cover all interpretive possibilities in the wide panoply of traces. In the ongoing project (see note i), a follow-up and comparative analysis of the teachers’ and managers’ descriptions of teaching has been planned for 2018, which may make further interpretations of the traces possible.

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## Endnotes

i This specific research presentation is based on a larger research project (Vallberg Roth, 2017b). In collaboration with preschool teachers, preschool head teachers, administrative representatives, and researchers, the project aims to further develop knowledge about what may characterise teaching and co-assessment in relation to scientific grounds and tested experience in about 130 preschools and/or preschool classes situated in 10 municipalities in Sweden. The project is being carried out in partnership between Ifous (a Swedish acronym for “innovation, research and development in schools and preschools”) and Malmö University (MU). The project complies with the Swedish Research Council’s principles of research ethics (2002). A total of about 3,385 participants consented to participating in the project in the spring of 2016, including about 2,700 children/legal guardians and about 670 preschool teachers/child care workers/preschool head teachers/administrative managers. Of these 670 participants, 243 represent their municipalities on development teams that participate at joint national seminars and workshops at least twice a year. Of these 243 participants, 178 are preschool teachers and 65 are managers, of whom 55 are preschool head teachers and 10 are administrative managers. The project design is based on parallel case studies (series of cases) of teaching arrangements and didactically oriented analysis. Textual analysis is performed on the participants’ written thoughts on what may characterise teaching and co-assessment in connection with the project start in 2016 and at the end of the project in 2018. The participants’ plans/preparations, video-documented teaching, and follow-up and co-assessment of the teaching arrangements are also analysed. The researchers involved are Professor Ingegerd Tallberg Broman, Dr Camilla Löf, Dr Linda Palla, and university lecturer Catrin Stensson. The project director is Dr Ylva Holmberg and the scientific director is Professor Ann-Christine Vallberg Roth.

ii Teaching on scientific grounds means that teaching must be based on research. “Generally speaking, research-based knowledge can be said to be knowledge that has been systematically tested and assured using rules and procedures that have been developed by the scientific community over many years” (RFR10, 2012/2013, p. 17). “Science is the systematic exploration of life, whose ultimate objective is to provide understanding of and perspective on the same. Questioning and problematising are the engines of science. Scientific work strives to critically examine, test and put isolated factual knowledge in a context. Problematisation of various types provides scope for discussions and makes new ways of regarding reality possible. Science entails the endeavour to achieve theoretical support and further development as well as an empirical basis. Interchange between theory and empirical evidence is a central element” (National Agency for Education, 2013, p. 10).

iii Tested experience may be “something *more* than experience, even if it is of long standing. It is *proven*. This requires it to be documented, or at any rate communicated in some way so that it can be shared with others. It must also be examined, in a collegial context, based on criteria that are relevant in relation to the operational content of the experience. It should also be tested on the basis of ethical principles: all experience is not of a benign and thus worthy of emulation” (RFR 10, 2012/2013, pp. 19–20).

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*Linda Palla*

Ph D, Senior Lecturer at Malmö University, Faculty of Education and Society, 205 06  
Malmö, Sweden.

E-mail: [linda.palla@mau.se](mailto:linda.palla@mau.se)

*Ann-Christine Vall-  
berg Roth*

Professor of Early Childhood Education at Malmö University, Faculty of Education and  
Society, 205 06, Malmö, Sweden.

E-mail: [Ann-christine.vallberg-roth@mau.se](mailto:Ann-christine.vallberg-roth@mau.se)