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A comparative study of work with literacy and language development in a Swedish and an English preschool

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Abstract

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Title: A comparative study of work with literacy and language development in a Swedish and an English preschool

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Aim: The aim of this study is to ascertain the similarities and differences between one Swedish and one English preschool, with a view to develop professional competence and skills in the teaching of language and literacy. The study uses comparative observation and interview questions to quantify those differences and similarities and to gain knowledge as to how professional practice might be improved in both settings.

Method: Three staff members at each preschool were interviewed and asked what their work with language and literacy involved, and then what possibilities they could see to develop that work and finally what obstacles or problems they encountered. Once the interviews were transcribed and compared, the answers revealed several overlapping similarities and also some common difficulties as well as differences dependent purely on the specific preschool.

Independent observation of the physical setting was also carried out at each preschool for comparison purposes. This included observation of relative size, situation, organisation, decoration, resources and staff numbers.

Results: The results indicate that language and literacy development is central to both institutions, but their approaches to its introduction to the children varied. The Swedish preschool concentrated on inspiring the children to develop at their own rate, largely using a socio-cultural approach, where the English setting concentrated on progress toward milestones using more Piaget inspired, 'stage', thinking. Each setting had different strengths and weaknesses. Close analysis of the results can help the teaching profession in both countries to improve their situations, to gain ideas for more creative teaching of language and literacy, and to develop their professional practice.

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1. Introduction

This study and essay will be about the subject of literacy and language development. Language, spoken, written and otherwise expressed, is one of the chief ways in which human beings can and do communicate. Communication is a central part of human life and enables us to have a social and fulfilling life. This makes language of the utmost importance. David Crystal (1995) writes:

The language as a whole belongs to no one, yet everyone owns a part of it, has an interest in it and has an opinion about it. [...] Individual linguistic memories, experiences, and abilities enable everyone to make a personal contribution to language chat. In a sense we are all truly equal when we participate.

p. vi

This shows how important language is and how every single human has a part in its construction and usage. It is this wonderful linguistic world that our children will grow up in and become a part of. This is not an easy task for them as Crystal indicates:

The acquisition of a first language is the most complex skill anyone ever learns, and children need a great deal of help if it is to be accomplished successfully. From birth, emerging linguistic awareness needs careful fostering by parents and other caretakers. In school, the nurturing and expansion of linguistic skills needs systematic promotion across the whole curriculum, as well as in the basic area of reading and writing.

p. 437

Whilst linguistic competence thus is of utmost importance to the individual child as it grows up, it is also one of the hardest tasks the child will be asked to accomplish. We cannot expect the child to manage this immense challenge on their own. The adults surrounding the child must thus be competent to help and guide the child in this venture. Crystal also mentions how important it is that literacy and language development is an integrated part of the whole curriculum; something which this Swedish teacher also acknowledges:

Literacy is not something which stands alone in the work here in preschool but instead it is a part of the children's learning and development all their lives.

Teacher A

Language and literacy development are two great passions of mine and I believe that there is always more to be learnt, especially from other places and countries. This is an endeavour to gain such knowledge in the hope that it might further me in my professional role and further the work done with literacy and language development in Swedish preschools.

1.1 Disposition and language

The essay contains three principal parts. First is the introduction and in this passage the background of the study and the research questions will be presented. Relevant research, theories and curriculums will also be presented in the first part of the essay, as well as presentation and discussion of the methods and materials used to conduct the study. The second part contains all the major results of the study. The third, and final, part will contain a discussion of the results previously presented in part two.

Whilst the interviews have been conducted in both Swedish and English and the essay contains reference literature from both languages, the essay itself will be written in English so that both participating preschools can partake of the results. This does create some issues

when it comes to translation, most of these will be discussed in section 1.4. Quotations used in the text will be translated into English with the original in footnotes at the bottom of the page.

1.2 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim is to do a comparative study of the way a preschool in Sweden and a preschool in England work with literacy and developing the written language. The focus will be on the similarities and differences in the way they work with the written language and on what obstacles and possibilities there are in the environment and in the organizations within which they work. The research questions are therefore:

- In what way do the two preschools work with literacy and language development and what are the differences and similarities between them?
- In what way do the environment and the work with literacy and language development interact and affect each other?
- What obstacles and possibilities become apparent when working with literacy and language development?

1.3 Theoretical background, previous related research and curriculums

In this section of the essay relevant research and theoretical backgrounds will be presented. The theories and methods below will be used in the analysis and discussion of the results of the comparative study.

1.3.1 Behaviourism, constructivism and the socio-cultural perspective

One way of dividing up the theories of learning and teaching is to divide it into the three fields of *behaviourism*, *constructivism* and *the socio-cultural perspective*. In the following sections these three fields will be described and presented. All three fields will be introduced and described, and ultimately used in the analysis and discussion.

1.3.1.1 Behaviourism

In a behaviouristic theory of learning, knowledge is seen as something objective and quantifiable. Learning is thus the ability to assimilate bits of fact. The knowledge that is aspired to is something which is objective and that exists outside the individual. In order to gain knowledge about a bigger area, this area needs to be divided into many smaller bits of knowledge that then need to be assimilated, or learnt, in order; and the progress in this is evaluated regularly with different tests. In a behaviouristic view of teaching and learning rewards and punishments are central (Though they are often referred to as ‘actions and consequences’ to avoid pejorative terms like ‘punishment’). This is the way that students are motivated to learn. The ability to then evaluate and analyse the knowledge gained is not something which the students will have until much later in their development (Dysthe, 2003).

1.3.1.2 Cognitivism and constructivism

The cognitivist theory on the other hand, argues that students analyse each new bit of information that is assimilated against the background of what they already know. There are many important directions within the cognitive field, but the one of most importance for this field is that of constructivism, mostly represented by Jean Piaget. This tradition argues that new knowledge is something that is constructed in the confrontation between new and old information. In this tradition, knowledge is thus not seen as an objective object existing outside of the individual and that is only received and assimilated by the student; it is something that develops through active engagement in mentally challenging problems. Learning, within this theory, is thus a mental process (Dysthe, 2003).

1.3.1.3 The socio-cultural perspective

The third and final field is the socio-cultural perspective. It is difficult to call it just one theory as there are many different adaptations with different principal interests but the description which follows will focus on the major similarities within these different versions. The socio-cultural perspective is described by Dysthe (2003) as:

Socio-cultural perspectives are based on a constructivist view of learning but put the main emphasis on knowledge being constructed through cooperation in a context and not primarily through individual processes. Thus interaction and cooperation are seen as completely crucial for learning, and not just a positive element in the learning environment.¹

p.41

Learning, within the socio-cultural perspective, is thus situated and social. The most important aspect of learning is cooperation and the social situation of the learning. Learning is done through interaction with others and with the world. The context of the teaching and learning situation is thus of paramount importance. According to the authors in this field it is not enough to just give stimuli to the students for them to have their own individual learning processes. Learning is a social activity; and where, when and how things are being taught and learnt affects what is being learnt (Dysthe, 2003).

Another important aspect in the socio-cultural perspective is that of the significance of language. Säljö (2000) writes that:

Language is simultaneously a collective, interactive and individual socio-cultural instrument. That is why it can be used as a link between culture, interaction and the individual's thinking².

p. 87

Language is in this way essential for learning as it is the way knowledge is mediated between different persons and also between cultures. Dysthe (2003) also writes that:

From a socio-cultural perspective communication processes are essential for human learning and development. It is through listening, conversing, copying and cooperation with others that the child gets to partake of knowledge and skills from their early childhood and learn what is interesting and valuable in that culture.³

p.48

These two authors illustrate how important language is in the learning process. However, it is important to remember that language is a much wider concept than just the spoken word. It is also about the written word, pictures, symbols, body language and facial expressions and much more.

Lev S Vygotskij is a very important individual, perhaps the most influential of all, within the field of the socio-cultural perspective. Aside from the above principles, Vygotskij also

¹ Sociokulturella perspektiv bygger på en konstruktivistisk syn på lärande men lägger största vikt vid att *kunskap konstrueras i en kontext* och inte primärt genom individuella processer. Således betraktas interaktion och samarbete som helt avgörande för lärande, och inte bara som ett positivt element i läromiljön.

² "Språket är *samtidigt* ett kollektivt, interaktivt och individuellt sociokulturellt redskap. Det är därför det kan fungera som en länk mellan kultur, interaktion och individens tänkande."

³ "Utifrån ett sociokulturellt perspektiv är kommunikativa processer förutsättningar för människans lärande och utveckling. Det är genom att lyssna, samtala, härma och samverka med andra som barnet får ta del av kunskaper ända från sin tidigaste barndom och lär sig vad som är intressant och värdefullt i kulturen."

introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. This zone of development is defined as the scope between what an individual can do on their own and what the same individual can do with the help of an adult or a more competent friend (Dysthe, 2003).

Karsten Hundeide is another one of many advocates for this field. In his book *Sociokulturella ramar för barns utveckling – barns livsvärldar*⁴ he discusses the need for an interpreting attempt instead of, or together with, the traditional developmental psychology and behaviourism. This sort of attempt includes recognizing that children very quickly start to identify and learn social codes and begin acquiring 'scripts' and other frameworks that determine what is appropriate behaviour or utterances in specific situations. Children learn these in their everyday life, through interaction with and guidance by other children and sensitive adults, such as parents. These frameworks and scripts about what is appropriate can vary from culture to culture depending on what that specific culture deems the most important.

Hundeide also argues that children, and adults, always adapt their utterances and reactions for the intended recipient, based on what scripts and behaviours they think are appropriate for that specific situation. That is why seemingly incorrect and absurd answers can be completely logical and perfectly satisfactory if they are seen from the child's perspective in the given situation. This is a valuable understanding both in test situations, where you have to try to consider how the child interprets the situation, and in the pedagogical day to day work (Hundeide, 2006).

1.3.2 Curriculums and steering documents

In the following section the curriculums that direct the work of the preschools, as well as any other steering documents used, will be presented.

1.3.2.1 Swedish national curriculum for preschool stage – Lpfö98

In 1998 the Swedish preschools got their first curriculum, Lpfö98. The implementation of this extremely important document was a historical event because through it, it became very clear what the preschools' assignment is and what the children should be offered during their time there (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 1999). There were, of course, other guidelines and documents in use before the establishment of the curriculum; however, these were far from having the same structure and clarity. The new curriculum also stated that children should have opportunities for learning and development during their time at preschool, something which was nowhere near as natural and obvious before (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2006). The curriculum, Lpfö98, is now the directive that all preschools in Sweden are expected to adhere to, and as such, it naturally has significance both for this essay and in the teaching profession.

The Swedish curriculum has two parts: Fundamental Values and Tasks of the Preschool and Goals and Guidelines. The first part of the curriculums describes the foundations upon which the curriculum is built and the values it represents. In the second part, the goals and guidelines for the preschools are described. This is comprised of goals that the preschool should aspire to fulfil and guidelines for what they should aim for the children to accomplish during their time spent at preschool (N.B. It is the teachers who should aim to fulfil the goals, not the children.) The second part has several subparts: Norms and Values, Development and Learning, Influence of the Child, Preschool and Home and Co-operation between the preschool class, the school and the leisure time centre.

⁴ Socio-cultural frames for children's development – children's life worlds

There are many statements concerning the work with language and literacy in the Swedish curriculum. However, these are scattered over the entire document and not specifically enclosed in one single place. In the first part of the curriculum there is a paragraph that claims:

Language and learning are inseparably linked together, as are language and the development of a personal identity. The preschool should put great emphasis on stimulating each child's language development and encourage and take advantage of the child's curiosity and interest in the written language. Children with a foreign background who develop their first language improve their prospects of learning Swedish as well as developing knowledge in other areas. The preschool should help to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue.

Utbildningdepartementet, 2006. p. 7

This paragraph shows the importance of the connection between language and learning as well as recognising other mother tongues' significance. The import of discovering and keeping the child's interest is also emphasized. In the second part of the curriculum, under goals we can read that:

The preschool should try to ensure that children [...]

- develop a rich and varied spoken language and the ability to communicate with others and to express their thoughts,
- develop their vocabulary and concepts, the ability to play with words, an interest in the written language and an understanding of symbols as well as their communicative functions.

p. 9-10

This is a very clear description of what the preschool is expected to do. How that mission is to be carried out is not specified in detail, but rather up to the individual preschool to decide, on the basis of the staff available and the children's needs.

1.3.2.2 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework

The preschool in England were basing their work on the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. This is the curriculum for the early years in England.⁵ It is based on four different themes: A Unique Child, Positive relationships, Enabling Environments and finally Learning and Development. Each theme has a guiding principle:

- A unique child – Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
- Positive relationships – Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.
- Enabling environment – The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.
- Learning and development – Children develop and learn in different ways at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected.

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/83936>

⁵ For more detailed information see: <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/earlyyears>

For this essay the fourth theme and guiding principle, Learning and Development, is of the most importance. Within this theme there are several different parts, but the focus of this essay will be on the part called Communication, Language and Literacy. In this part of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework it says that:

Children's learning and competence in communicating, speaking and listening, being read to and beginning to read and write must be supported and extended. They must be provided with opportunity and encouragement to use their skills in a range of situations and for a range of purposes, and be supported in developing the confidence and disposition to do so.

As well as:

As children develop speaking and listening skills they build the foundations for literacy, for making sense of visual and verbal signs and ultimately for reading and writing. Children need varied opportunities to interact with others and to use a wide variety of resources for expressing their understanding, including mark-making, drawing, modelling, reading and writing.

(http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/132712?uc=force_uj)

Both of these passages have importance for this essay as it is the framework upon which the preschool in England base their work. It emphasizes that for the children to develop their skills there is a need for a wide range of activities and opportunities.

The preschool in England also uses a tracking sheet that contains all the statements from the EYFS framework that the children and teachers are meant to achieve during the time the child spends at the preschool. This tracking document is attached to the appendix of this essay (Appendix 5.4). In this document the teachers highlight what children can do at the start of their time in preschool, halfway through the year and at the end of the year. This way progress can be tracked and problem areas discovered early.

1.3.3 Literature and theories concerning literacy and language development

In the following sections different authors, theories and books concerning literacy and language development will be presented.

1.3.3.1 Language stimulation

Hagtvet's book, *Språkstimulering*⁶(2004), describes how children's language development can be stimulated, what problems might arise in the process and how to avoid them. She writes:

With the positive experiences seen during the last 10-15 years through letting the children discover the written language on their own terms – through play and everyday activities – there is a lot that indicates that it is the child's experience of the demands that they feel before learning to read that can create socio-emotional problems rather than the early reading itself. For a positive result it seems that it is the adult's sensitivity and ability to follow the child's interest, instead of deciding and directing when it comes to material and method, that is of the greatest importance.

⁶ Language stimulation

From this it seems that the way the stimulation is done is more important than when it happens.⁷

p. 20

The adult's ability to stimulate the child's interest is thus of utmost importance as well as mitigating the possible self-imposed demands of the child. The stimulation needs to be such that it catches the interest of the child. Hagtvet also writes that children are vulnerable when they are trying to learn something new, especially if it is something as hard as reading and writing, it is thus a very important task for the adults to make sure that the learning is enjoyable, fun and non-judgemental. It is very important to make sure that the first encounter with the written language is a positive one.

Hagtvet writes that the role of the adult is also one of "scaffolding". The concept of scaffolding is very closely related to Vygotskijs zone of proximal development. The purpose of scaffolding around a child is to let the child experience and accomplish things they might not have been able to do themselves. A good scaffolding adult lets the child feel self-confidence, accomplishment and keeps up the interest of the child.

The author also writes about the importance of basing the language stimulation on the interests and needs of the individual child. This way of working also makes it possible to discover, prevent and/or counteract any problems very early on. The big pedagogical challenge is thus to stimulate each individual child's development whilst working with a whole group of children.

1.3.3.2 How children learn to read and write

Liberg (1993) describes five different principles that the child needs to learn to master in their progression towards becoming a reading and writing individual. The first principle is objectifying⁸, which means that you can make language an object that can be studied and discussed. The second principle is that of the double articulation⁹, which means understanding that you can look upon language as having two levels, one where you divide language into smaller units, words and morphemes¹⁰, and a second one where you divide the morphemes into even smaller units, letters. The third principle, the invariance of the written character¹¹, argues that each letter has a name, a form and a sound. The fourth principle is that of the linearity of the written characters¹², which means that if the letters come in a certain order, then the sounds of the letters come in the same order. The last principle, the written characters bi-uniqueness¹³, means that if the order of the letters is changed then so is the pronunciation of the word. Liberg is careful to note that the development through the different principles is

⁷ Med de positiva erfarenheterna man har sett de senaste 10-15 åren genom att låta barnen få upptäcka skriftspråket på sina egna villkor – genom lek och vardagliga aktiviteter – är det emellertid mycket som tyder på att det snarare är barns *upplevelse* av de *krav* de själva känner inför att lära sig läsa som kan skapa socio-emotionella problem mer än den tidiga läsningen i sig. För ett positivt resultat förefaller det som om den vuxnes lyhördhet och förmåga att 'följa' barnets intresse, i motsats till att bestämma och styra när det gäller material och metod, är av största betydelse. Utifrån detta verkar *sättet* som stimuleringen sker på vara viktigare än *när* den äger rum.

⁸ Objektivisering

⁹ Dubbla artikulationen

¹⁰ Morphemes are the smallest linguistic units that carry semantic meaning. For more detailed information see for example: Crystal, D. 2003. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, 2nd edition. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Skrivtecknens invarians

¹² Skrivtecknens linearisering

¹³ Bi-unikhet

neither a constant nor a permanent thing. The same child can thus display different understanding and skills at different times. The principles are conquered and tested over a long period of time.

Liberg also argues in favour of linguistic dialogues. According to the author it is important to be able to have an open dialogue with the children. In this way the child can learn from the adult and their friends. It is also important to develop rich and inspiring environments for language and literacy development.

1.3.3.3 Children's discovery the written language

Gösta Dahlgren, Karin Gustafsson, Elisabeth Mellgren and Lars-Erik Olsson (2006) have collaborated to write a book in which they present the structure and development of the written language as well as the development of literacy learning in Sweden.

The book also describes the different stages that children go through in the process of becoming literate individuals. According to the authors, the first stage is that of copying what adults do, and their behaviour in reading and writing situations. In this first stage the child only copies the outer visible behaviours, such as holding the book or the pen or turning pages in books or newspapers.

The second stage is that of thinking of reading as interpreting the pictures in the book or paper. At this stage the children can try to remember the contents of the book by 'reading' the pictures.

The next stage moves the focus from the pictures unto the text itself. In this stage the text is seen as a picture and the child will focus on how a word looks, especially if it is their own name, and in particular the first letter of the word. The typography of the word is thus seen as very important at this stage and children will look for the picture of the word or letter in other places.

The fourth stage, which often comes alongside the last stage, is learning stories and texts by heart. After memorising the text the child will then tell the story as he or she turns the pages of the book. This is then seen as reading by the child, whilst they do not actually read but rather recite the text they have memorised previously.

The next stage after this is slightly different as it tends to focus on writing rather than reading. At this stage, children will copy write and also play write. Long strings of letters and marks will be put down on paper and then the child usually will try to find someone to read what they have 'written'.

After this, comes a stage where writing is seen as being able to write one's own name. In this stage an understanding of the communicative aspect of the language is developed. The child is now starting to understand that written language also has function. This can be displayed by the writing of notes and letters and words on pieces of paper. This understanding of the communicative aspect is visible also in the previous stage but is more perceptible, developed and in focus at this stage.

Some children might also have a motoric approach to reading. These children will tend to use their entire body whilst trying to read something. The process of reading is seen by them as having to originate somewhere in the body and reading is the action of trying to bring forth the word from that place out into the open. The motorics of writing is also important for all

children in other ways from the development of literacy. The letters are formed in certain ways and being able to manipulate a pen or keyboard to write them is not always easy. Letters can be inverted, reversed or upside-down when a child is trying to write them. Unfortunately in our languages this inversion can sometimes have an effect on the actual meaning of the word being written, e.g. “bed” and “ded” where the letters “d” and “b” are reversed.

Somewhere after the last stages described, the alphabetic code is broken by the child. This is where practice and repetition is likely to come into the picture. The process tends to go from being “just for fun” to being a very serious and important thing. The demands from the child’s surroundings have a tendency to change at this stage too, especially if the child is now in school.

The Dahlgren et al (2006), just as Liberg (1993), indicate the importance of an inspiring text environment for the child to explore. Books and other texts are of immense value in the process of becoming a literate individual.

1.3.3.4 Writing your way to reading

Whilst the focus for many of the others is reading, Trageton (2003) focuses on the writing aspect of literacy. He is an advocate for a turn from the traditional teaching, i.e. “read and write”, to a more contemporary learning i.e. “write and read”. Trageton also insists that competence in writing is easier to develop than competence in reading. This is because writing is a productive skill whilst reading is a receptive skill. The motivation for learning to write is thus higher and also the child is much more intellectually involved in the process of writing as they are trying to convey a message that is important to them.

1.4 Methods and materials

In this section of the essay the materials and methods used will be presented and discussed.

1.4.1 Methods

One of the methods used to conduct this study is interviews. Because the aim of the study partly is to find out what the teachers thought about their work within this field it was indicated as the most effective and the most natural way of collecting the required data (Esaiasson & Gilljam & Oscarsson & Wängnerud, 2007). This is because interviews provide a direct way of communication with the subjects of the study. There is, however, always a danger of the interviewees answering what they believe is the “right” answer instead of their honest thoughts and feelings. The introduction to the interview and the method of gaining consent are therefore vital parts of the interview process (Esaiasson et.al., 2007). A recorder was used in all but one interview. One of the Swedish teachers denied the use of a recorder and notes were taken instead. This makes that particular interview much less reliable and helpful. The use of a recorder is beneficial as it prevents the interviewer interpreting what the interviewee says in a way that the interviewee did not intend it to be interpreted. The use of a recorder therefore increases the reliability of the results (Esaiasson m.fl. 2007).

Another method that was used is that of observations. Whilst observations are considered more of an ethnographic approach, they might still be beneficial to the study, because they provide a valuable insight into the setting of the preschools (Esaiasson et. al. 2007). The observations will therefore only be used to describe the environment within which the teachers conduct their work with the children.

1.4.2 Educational setting

The preschool in Sweden is situated in a suburb to a large city. The area has a large population of immigrants as well as natives. The area is peaceful and has lots of green woods

around. The preschool accommodates children between the ages of one to six. It contains three different sections. One section has children between the ages of one to three and the other two have children aged three to six. This study focuses on one of the sections with children aged three to six. This section has a total of twenty children, some of whom are there full days all week, while others only are there just a few hours and only a few days a week. The section also has a staff of three fulltime teachers and one part time aide. The group of children has widely different needs and requirements. Other mother tongues, restraining orders, divorced parents and physical and mental disabilities are only a few of the factors influencing everyday life at the section.

This section of the preschool consists of about eight rooms of different sizes. One of these is a hallway, one is a large combined dining room and general games room, one is a small room with cars and Lego and other construction materials, one is a small doll room, one is a small room with small Lego, a sofa and a big table, one contains a big sofa and lots of books, one contains a sofa, books and toy cars and the last one is a big room with a large open space and lots of materials for painting and other types of artistic work. There is also a large backyard outside that the preschool uses every day.

Texts, language, pictures and other written material is everywhere in the preschool. Most of the texts are put up at eye-height for the children so that they can reach them and be able to look at them closely. Boxes for different types of toys are marked very clearly with both a picture of the contents and a written label. All the texts displayed seem to have a very clear communicative purpose. Apart from the labels on boxes there are also pictures and texts that the children themselves have produced, on their own or with the help of an adult.

The two areas mostly used for writing is the kitchen area and the big room with the art material in it. In the latter there is a big piece of furniture in which each child has a drawer for their pictures and their paper notebook. On the drawer is a picture of the child and also their name. Whenever the children want to, they can come in this room and draw, write or paint.

In the kitchen/general games area there are several tables that the children can sit at and play games or write. But there is also a special small table against one of the walls which is a designated writing corner. Here all the children have a special notebook in which they can write different words and draw pictures to it. There are lots of pens and other writing materials. On the wall are some laminated papers upon which pictures with a word under them have been fastened with blu-tack so that they can be taken down and used to copy from or looked at. There are lots of different words; several that have to do with themes they might be working with, but also many words that the children have asked about. When a child asks how something is spelled a teacher will show them and then later make sure that the word will be available on a note on the wall for the future. In this way it is a growing collection of the children's words.

The preschool in England is situated in a suburb of a large city, about an hour north of London. The suburb has lots of greenery around and is also an area with lots of violence and crime. The population is also very mixed with lots of immigrants from different parts of the world as well as people born in England. The preschool shares its location with a primary school. They are both housed in the same building, but are in different parts. The preschool has two different sections. One for children up to the age of three and then one for children aged three to four. The children then go to reception class in school the year they turn five. The focus in this study was the section for children aged three to four years. This section has

about 80 children and about 17 members of staff. The children do not all come to preschool at the same time, but rather attend different sessions. The number of staff that work any day is dependent on how many children are expected to come into the preschool that day. If the children are between two and three years old they need to have one member of staff per eight children, if they are three years old or above, the ratio of staff is one member of staff per four children instead.

The section of the preschool consists of about three rooms. Two of these are very large and also there is a covered area outdoors, as well as a backyard. One of the two rooms is called the messy room. In this room there are lots of paint, shaving foam, sand, water and other messy materials. The other room is called the quiet room. In here are lots of different toys, some books, puzzles, a SmartBoard¹⁴, calculators, some writing materials and much more. The children can go between the two rooms as they wish at any moment. In both rooms there are lots of pictures on the walls and mobiles hanging from the ceiling with different pictures, words and objects.

The messy room can be used as much as the quiet room for writing things, writing in the sand, in the shaving foam, painting letters etc. However the quiet room seems to be the room with the most focused writing materials and also the room the children tend to expect writing and reading to take place, and also the room they choose to do it in.

In one corner of the quiet room there are lots of papers on the walls with texts concerning the books they are and have been reading recently. There is also the letter of the week and the past weeks up on the wall, and a mobile hanging down with words that begin with or contain that letter. In this corner of the room there are also lots of different writing materials such as pens and pencils and different kinds of paper. In another part of the quiet room there is a big poster on the wall, at children's height, showing the pattern of an ordinary day at the nursery. Each part of the day is illustrated with both written text and a picture of it. In the same room is also the SmartBoard which was on every day during the time the study was conducted. The children have free access to this and can use it whenever they want to. It has different programs on it so that they can do things like painting or writing on it.

1.4.3 Collection of data

In the following section the way in which the data has been collected will be described.

1.4.3.1 Interviews

All the interviewed persons who will remain anonymous throughout the essay gave their informed consent to partake in the study (Esaiasson et.al., 2007). All of them will also have the opportunity to read the final essay. The interviewees will be referenced to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C etc, starting with the Swedish teachers followed by the English.

The interviews in Sweden were done with the three full time teachers at the chosen section. They have varying education and experience but will henceforth all be called by the title teacher, as will the interviewees in England. They were all asked if they would partake and all confirmed their willingness.

They asked to see the questions beforehand, and were allowed to do so. This turned out to be a disadvantage as they seemed to get stuck on the vocabulary used and focused on specific questions in ways that were not intended. Therefore the questions were later rewritten to make

¹⁴ <http://www.smartboard.se/>

the conversation of the interview more relevant and more constructive. Both sets of questions can be found in appendix 5.2 and 5.3. There was thus only one interview conducted, with the second set of questions, with each teacher; however the first set of questions were discussed with all three of them at an earlier point. The second set of questions were later used in the interviews with the English teachers. There is a risk that the teachers may have been influenced by the information gained from the first set of questions and may therefore have answered less truthfully than they might otherwise have. However, this is one occasion where the knowledge gained whilst on teaching practice was useful. By knowing how they generally work with literacy and language development, and the thoughts they have expressed in the past, the author can be satisfactorily certain that they have not been influenced by seeing this first set of questions.

The interviews were conducted individually in a separate room at the preschool away from the children and the rest of the staff. The teachers were each asked whether the use of a recorder was allowed. Two of the teachers said yes and one said no. In the interview with the teacher who declined the use of a recorder only note taking was used, and this interview is as such the least reliable and therefore the least useful (Esaiasson et.al., 2007). The interviews were later transcribed verbatim into written form. This process is painstakingly slow, but provides a material more easily analysed.

The interviews in England were conducted with two teachers and one other member of staff. The two teachers had more of a supervising and guiding role and did not work fulltime in the setting. The third member of staff did however work full-time with the children in the setting. All three teachers were asked if they would consider being interviewed and all three said yes. As with the teachers in Sweden they were all asked if the use of a recorder was allowed.: One of the teachers was a bit nervous about it, but after explaining that it would only be used for the sake of memory and to make sure that what they said was not interpreted in a way not intended, all three agreed to the use of the recorder.

The interviews in England all took place at the preschool, but in different parts of it. One took place in a separate room away from the nursery, one took place first in a room used for sleeping children while there were none there, and then in another empty room, and the third one took place in the main room of the nursery with children around, but at a separate table. As with the Swedish interviews, the interviews were later transcribed verbatim to facilitate further analysis by use of hermeneutics as well as the socio-cultural perspective.

1.4.3.2 Observations

Another method used to conduct the study was, as mentioned above, observations of the environment. In Sweden these took place during the months of teacher training at the preschool. In England these took place during the time spent there, around two full-time days. This means that the insight and observations into the Swedish preschool are considerably more in-depth and much more comprehensive. However, the observations of the environment of the English preschool will hopefully prove useful anyway, as it at least provides a small insight into the conditions of the pedagogical work done there (Esaiasson et.al. 2007). Also, while the time spent in the two different settings were not equally long, the thing observed, the setting and environment, was being noted as it was on the day of the interviews, disregarding any changes it may have gone through in the past.

1.4.4 Method of analysis

In the analyses hermeneutics was used as a method. This enables a closer analysis of both the whole and the details (Gilje & Grimen, 1992). Hermeneutics is about interpreting and

explaining different meaningful phenomena. One of the foundational ideas in hermeneutics is that to understand something, you have to have a pre-understanding, or preconceived opinions about a certain phenomena. We always understand new knowledge against the background of what we already know, we have a pre-understanding. Nils Gilje and Harald Grimen describe the basics of hermeneutics in their book *Samhällsvetenskapernas förutsättningar*¹⁵ (1992) and point out that the social sciences often are based on what can be called double hermeneutics. This concept is used to indicate the fact that the people who take part in research often already have done their own interpretation of the phenomenon that they are later interviewed about. When we interview a certain human about a certain phenomenon they have already done their own interpretation about how they experience this phenomenon and it is this interpretation that we as scientists get access to and then interpret again. This then becomes double hermeneutics; a double interpretation. The hermeneutic circle, or spiral, is another concept that shows how details and the whole belong together in an analysis process. To be able to say something about the whole, one must explore the details, and to say something deeper about the details one must explore the whole. The details and the whole are thus inextricably linked in an interpretation or analysis and are a prerequisite for each other. The picture of a circle can be misleading, because it indicates that we end up in the same place that we started. The picture of a hermeneutic spiral might be more helpful, since our analysis and interpretation is constantly moving us forward towards a better understanding and greater knowledge. This is done by exploring the details and the whole and the connections between the two. Quite naturally this has had great importance for both the collection of data, and the analysis of the collected material.

The method of hermeneutics has been used by analysing first the general picture of the preschools and the answers of the teachers. Then the analysis has concentrated on the details, in both the environment and the answers provided in the interviews, before finally going back again and looking at the whole of the data collected. The analysis, results and discussion will be based on the influences of the third field presented above, the socio-cultural perspective.

1.4.5 Methods discussion

An aspect that may have affected the results is that all the interviewees were women. This leads to the gender-aspect being completely missed out. However, this is not an aspect that has been a focus of this study, neither is it mentioned in the aim of the essay nor in the research questions. It is also a fact that the profession of preschool teachers has historically been dominated by women (Vallberg Roth, 2002).

Another aspect that may have some effect on the results is the language. The Swedish interviews were naturally done in Swedish and most of the reference literature is in Swedish as well. This leads to me having to translate both of them to the best of my ability. This does contain a risk of the utterances and quotations being interpreted wrongly by the author in the translation. However, the author is very keen that all the participants are able to partake of the final essay, and this makes the use of English as the written language necessary. Also, the same risk would have existed if the English interviews were being translated into Swedish instead.

A factor which may affect the results is the site where the interviews took place. Whilst most of the interviews took place in separate rooms away from children and other sources of sound, one of them took place in the setting with children and other staff around. Whilst this did not

¹⁵ The conditions of the social sciences

seem to impede the interview at the time, and seemed to be a good solution as it led to the teacher not having to find anyone to replace her in her work, it proved later to be slightly less fortunate. Having recorded the interview in an environment where there was so much sound led to it being very hard to later transcribe. A few passages were hard to hear and some completely inaudible. There is also a risk of the teacher feeling unable to answer truthfully as she was risking other members of staff hearing her answers. However, as she was the one choosing the setting, and because the questions were not of a sensitive nature, this risk does not seem so great.

2. Results

In the sections below the results of the interviews will be presented. The results have been divided into three main sections in accordance with the research questions for the essay.

2.1 Working with literacy and language development

One of the Swedish teachers describes their work with literacy like this:

Mine, and our, ambition is to work with the written language like we work with everything else. So that the written language is not a thing on its own but that it happens in an interaction, in communication. It should come on the child's initiative. [...] That when the children work with a theme, literacy will be a natural part of it, just like mathematics, construction and all of these things. That is the ambition that we have. Literacy is not something which stands alone in the work here in preschool but instead it is a part of the children's learning and development all their lives.¹⁶

Teacher A

The way of working with literacy described here is one where the children are very active in their own learning and where the child's interest is of the utmost importance. It is also considered very important that the work with literacy should not be something that stands apart but rather something which is a natural part of any theme that is being worked with, or in the games the children play. It is very important that work with literacy has real relevance and meaning for the children, if it is to have any positive effects.

Another of the Swedish teachers focuses on giving the children a multitude of ways to express themselves and to communicate:

To talk. To tell. Letting the children talk. It is about giving them possibilities and to lay a good foundation. Also by having music and different materials available. Through singing, reading books, creating. There are pictures and texts everywhere. It is striving towards letting the children communicate in many different contexts.^{17 18}

Teacher B

This teacher's focus thus seems to be on making sure the children have many different ways of expressing themselves, of communicating, out of which written language will be one possibility.

The third Swedish teacher describes their work in the following way:

¹⁶ Min och våran ambitioner med det är ju att arbeta med skriftspråk som vi jobbar med allting annat. Att skriftspråket inte är en enskild sak heller utan att den skall i ett samspel, i kommunikation. Den skall komma utifrån barnets eget initiativ. [...]Att om barnen jobbar med tema så skall skriftspråket vara en naturlig del, precis som matematiken och konstruktionen och sådan här saker. Det är ju den ambitionen vi har. Skriftspråket är ingenting som står för sig själv i verksamheten på förskolan utan det är en del i barns lärande och utveckling hela livet.

¹⁷ Att prata. Att berätta. Låta barnen komma till tals. Det handlar om att ge dem möjligheter och att lägga en bra grund. Även genom musik och att ha olika material tillgängligt. Genom att sjunga, läsa böcker, skapa. Det finns bilder och texter överallt. Det är en strävan att låta barnen kommunicera i många olika sammanhang.

¹⁸ From notes, not a direct quote!

That it's playful. And that you can see the children where they are and catch them where they are. And that you can make it fun. And that you can do things that the smaller children take part in and so they become curious. [...] You make it sort of exciting. Some of them become interested and then you can continue working with it and some others may just float by. [...] And that we lay a good foundation for them to have good conditions with the work we do. I think that's important so that they have it with them later on. They might not be able to take it in at the moment but it'll still be there somewhere in the back of their mind that we have done these things, gone through it. So you can use it later¹⁹

Teacher C

From this teacher's description it is evident that the important thing is not necessarily to engage all the children at the very same time, but rather to make sure that they all have the same, and the most maximised opportunities to develop their language and literacy. She recognises that all children might not be interested in written language at that time, and emphasises the need to make sure that none of the children feel any pressured to be able to read or write by the time they leave preschool. However, it is clear that interest in literacy seems to be something which spreads in the group of children. Once a few children have started exploring it several more tag along and become interested as well, according to the teachers.

One of the English teachers refers to the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum in the following manner:

Well, our early foundation stage curriculum, that is the base for everything, is quite clear in differentiations in different colours as they get older, so that's probably our first reference document. We're really trying to find as many ways as possible of doing that through play, so it's the pre-reading and the pre-writing skills. So it's really just about getting children confidence and access to resources that they wouldn't access at home. [...] So it's making things interesting for them and a different way of learning. So that would probably be how.

Teacher D

It is very clear that this document is a very important guide in the work with literacy, and everything else. The tracking in different colours is also seen as a very important part of it. This teacher also talks about the importance of giving the children access to many different tools and resources that they might not have the possibility of accessing anywhere else. The same teacher also talks about the importance of planning and communication between staff:

But it is about our careful planning, we've always got a very clear idea of the objective that we want to achieve through that particular activity. I mean you can use one activity in lots of different ways but it depends on what it is that you want to get out of it. The practitioner will be supporting the children to reach that end goal. And obviously sometimes the children are accessing things without adult support so then,

¹⁹ Att det är lekfullt. Och att man kan se barnen där de befinner sig och kunna snappa upp där de är. Och att man kan göra lite kul omkring det, man kan också göra saker som de mindre barnen deltar i och blir nyfikna på det [...] Man gör lite spännande omkring det. En del blir ju intresserade då kan man fortsätta jobba med det och andra kanske bara flyter in. [...] Och att vi lägger en bra grund för att de skall få bra förutsättningar med det arbetet som vi gör. Det tror jag är viktigt så att de har med sig det sen. Man kanske inte kan ta åt sig det nu, men att det finns här nånstans bak att vi har gjort de här grejorna, gått igenom det. Så man kan plocka fram det.

you can set up for everything but the children might not use it like that. But if you're working with the children then to have that very clear idea. I think that's about communication of the planning that we do.

Teacher D

Having a clear purpose with the activities that staff do is thus seen as very important. It is the role of the teacher to try to plan different activities that are suitable for developing the required skills, and then to communicate this planning to the rest of the staff working in the nursery.

One of the English teachers also makes references to the curriculum and the tracking document:

We have in England something called a tracking system. So we'll have three year olds have a document like this and we'll highlight three times a year everything they can do. [...] So we can see how they progress during the year and which things we need to plan further. These statements all come from the early years' foundation stage document and that's like the curriculum for all early years' settings. [...] If you highlight, then you can see where the gaps are, so then you can plan for the gaps and see what progression they've made as well. And the other literacy document we use is this: Letters and sounds. And it's got activities you would do with the children. [...] So my role is to really input this document, making sure the staff know what they're doing with it. [...] They've got a weekly page and given a book to read to the children and some activities that they can do with that. And then we say we'll next week we're gonna do, we've given them a letter and a book and try to input that into their planning so that leaves a bit of a structure to what they're teaching.

Teacher E

The role of the teacher in this setting is very clear, and very much one of planning and organisation. One of the things this preschool does in their work with language and literacy development is to work with an alphabetic letter, and that letter's sound and form, each week. They also read a book each week that has something to do with this letter or with a word that has that letter in it. They also express that they sometimes aim to have whole days dedicated to work with literacy or mathematics. The work thus seems to be very structured and planned and the big challenge is the communication of the planning between the teachers and the rest of the staff.

The third English teacher focuses on the communication and interaction with the children. This is how she describes the work with language development:

It's being a role model. And it's using language, and language is interaction. So it doesn't necessarily need to be verbal communication, the interaction. Cos it's facial expressions and your hands and all of that. It's all about communication, but it can be communication in various formats. [...] And a lot of it is about relationships as well. If the children come to you and they trust you, then all the other learning can take place too. And then you can have verbal communication as well. And we do a lot of visual stimulation as well. Things on the walls and lots of visual. Using all the available and not focusing on just one form of communication. All the children are communicating with you at their level, and you need to be able to adjust yourself to their level to be able to communicate. And as they get older, as I say, we will introduce and start looking at the formal side of things. Letter sounds and the like. But a lot of the time it's just having a pencil and make a mark on their paper.

One of the important things expressed by this teacher is the need for a wider language and communication concept. It is not just about being able to speak, or read, or write. But it is also about body language and facial expressions, music and art and all the other forms of communication that a child is born with. In our striving to develop a child's language and their literacy it is thus important to start from a common ground and a common understanding of each other. The teacher also expresses that when the children become older there will be more focus on the formal side of work with literacy, with the forms and sounds of the different letters, but this is not the start of the work.

2.2 Possibilities in the environment and organisation

One of the possibilities in the environment that all the Swedish teachers mention is the Mac-Books they are going to receive. They sent in an application to gain them. This was very successful and they are currently waiting for the computers to arrive. The teachers are hoping to use the computers for working with all sorts of subjects and their aim is to make them a natural part of the work and play for the children at preschool. One of the subjects that they expect will benefit from the Mac-Books' arrival is the children's literacy and language development. One of the teachers is worried about how the computers might come to be used: "I think it is very important that when we get this opportunity that we also have the organisational possibilities around us to use them in a good and positive way so that it does not just become a thing, an object." (Teacher A)²⁰ This is something that several of the Swedish teachers express, the wish to use the computers in a productive way that will encourage the children's development.

Another possibility or benefit in the environment that one of the Swedish teachers sees is the rich text environment. This is seen as very beneficial because the children have the opportunity to meet the texts and letters over and over again. One teacher depicts it in this way:

And that you have a rich text environment, which I actually think we have in many ways. There is a lot of text. That they have the opportunity to meet text and decode them and make it into words I think that's... And then it can look really messy, but that messiness and the texts are on the children's initiative. They are there because the children have said let's write it and put it up. It's not just pretty words.²¹

Teacher A

An environment with lots of displayed works and texts is seen as a very helpful and useful thing as it leads to the children being surrounded by this and growing accustomed to having an affluence of written text around them.

Materials are an aspect that the Swedish teachers very clearly stated was not an issue. One teacher explains: "Material is really not an obstacle because there is so much we teachers and the children can do together with the material we do have. We don't need anything pre-

²⁰ Jag tycker det är väldigt viktigt när vi får den här möjligheten att vi även har de organisatoriska möjligheterna runt oss att kunna använda de på ett bra och positivt sätt så att det inte bara blir en pryl, en grej.

²¹ Och där är ju att man har en rik textmiljö, som jag faktiskt tycker att vi har i mångt och mycket. Det finns mycket text. Att de får möjligheten att möta texter och kunna koda av dem och få det till ord, det tycker jag är.. sen kan det se otroligt rörigt ut, men ja.. och mycket av den här rörigheten och texterna är ju på barns initiativ. De är ju där för att de har sagt att vi skriver det och så sätter vi upp det. Det är inte bara vackra ord.

fabricated” (Teacher A)²². The focus is thus mainly on the materials they already possess, in terms of paper, pens, colours, scissors etc, and not upon other materials they may wish to have. Focus is also on what you, together with the children can do with the materials, rather than on what the material is, on how you can use it in your teaching or in the children’s development or learning.

Another Swedish teacher says that she thinks that they have a lot of possibilities in the environment in which they work. Her focus is also mainly on what can be done in the surroundings they have to work with:

I think we have pretty good possibilities. That you can create conditions for them. Sitting and writing, or if you do things in activities, or if you just speak to them and make them think in a special way, that they can do it themselves, and with pictures and words and things.”

Teacher C

Her focus is thus on what she as a teacher can do in the environment in which she works to let the children have the best conditions possible to develop their language and literacy.

One of the English teachers mentions the backyard and the possibilities for working with language and literacy outdoors. She describes it this way:

We do lots in the garden as well, and outside spaces become more important recently hasn’t it, the government is recognising that we can learn more and that’s why we got that lovely big garden now. So lots of the writing and things, water and paint brushes, you know, and the squirty bottles when you’ve had a drink of water, and we use those to write on the ground as well. So try to be quite creative.

Teacher D

The outdoors environment is, by this teacher, seen as a place where language and literacy development can also take place by using other tools than you might have done indoors. Water bottles and other objects can be used to challenge the children and further their development.

The same English teacher also mentions that they have recently spent some money on acquiring materials, puzzles and games that deal specifically with literacy and maths. These materials are seen as a benefit towards the work they want to do, and something which has been felt to be missing earlier.

Another thing that the English teachers mentioned as a positive influence on the work with literacy and language development, as well as the general every day work of the nursery, was the government’s Early Years Professional Status Qualification (EYPS Qualification). This is a scheme for giving the preschool staff higher status and training. One teacher explains:

That was introduced probably about two, three years ago, and the idea is to raise the standard of practitioners in the early years setting, so the government put a lot of money into developing that. And the idea is that anyone in the early years can go on this course and there are longer or shorter versions depending on how much training you need, and when you finish the course, the course will finish at degree level. [...]

²² är egentligen ingen begränsning för det finns så otroligt mycket som vi pedagoger och barn kan göra tillsammans med det materialet vi har. Vi behöver inga färdigköpta. [sic]

And it's really about understanding how children develop as a whole, including literacy and all those skills, really from birth to five. And obviously people with that qualification are more highly regarded and sought after and having EYPS people in the setting is a bonus, and we've got several in the setting now. [...] And it's something people are working towards and that in itself, the better understanding, is also raising standards.

Teacher D

The course gives staff some insight into children's development in the early years and what you, as a teacher or staff member, can do to further their progress, in literacy and maths but also in all the other areas that are important at this age.

Another of the English teachers focuses more on the small details of the environment:

Most things can be based on literacy if you think of the listening and developing their vocabulary. [...] And also reading, if you put lots of signs around, children will ask 'what does that say?' Even on a table you might put 'can you make a mark?', well children can't necessarily read it, but they might say 'what does that say?' Getting their interest in what is text and what do we use text for, what's the purpose of it? And lots of opportunities for writing as well. Mark-making-opportunities around the nursery. Just giving them lots of opportunities to develop those skills and it doesn't always have to be a pen to mark-make. It could be a paint brush, it could be a bucket of water outside.

Teacher E

In this way even the smallest things, like a notice on a table or bucket of water, can be of use in the work with literacy and language development. It is about using all the available tools in the environment to do the best work possible under the conditions that are present.

2.3 Obstacles

One of the Swedish teachers talked about the fact that the group of children is rather large.

It is an obstacle that the group of children is so large. That you don't have time to catch all the children but instead constantly have to remind yourself to look at the child that doesn't make lots of sound and isn't visible and noticed and always in the front. So that child can also have the possibility to come into this wonderful world of written language.²³

Teacher A

This obstacle is thus the seeing of every individual child, even when they are a member of a very large group.

Another obstacle that the same teacher mentions is that of having a lack of space in which to display the works of the children. She expresses a wish to have a whole room dedicated to working with literacy and to have more space for displaying texts and pictures that the children have produced. "We have such a lack of space for the children to be able to display their works, to be able to meet these texts and language again and again" (Teacher A)²⁴.

²³ Det är ju ett hinder att det är en stor barngrupp. Att man inte riktigt hinner fånga alla barn utan att man på något sätt får påminna sig om det att titta även på det barnet som inte låter och syns och märks och är längst fram hela tiden. Så att den också får i alla fall möjligheten att komma in i den här skriftspråkande underbara världen.

²⁴ Vi har så dåligt med plats för barnen att kunna sätta upp sina alster för att möta de här texterna och språket om och om igen.

As always, finances and economical conditions are an issue. This is something which both the Swedish and English teachers have talked about in their interviews. The teacher above wishing for more space also mentions the fact that it is an economical question. She says:

And it is an economical question as well that this environment that we work in an old preschool is not really adapted to today's teaching methods. It is adapted to the teaching methods that were when it was built.²⁵

Teacher A

The problem, that the environment is not very helpful to the teaching of today, is therefore based in the cost of renovating and refurbishing the old buildings. The English teacher mentioning finance and economics also did so in the context of wanting to develop the environment in which they work. For their part, it was the desire to develop the outside area more, to inspire more work with literacy and language development. She says "So we've got those ideas but it's the money, it's always the money isn't it?" (Teacher D).

One of the Swedish teachers also feels very limited in her work by the context in which she works. She expresses it thus:

I feel limited by the very context of the preschool as it is today. I feel that there is so much more one could do, but that you have to hurry slowly in order not to frighten people. [...] And with a management that is not there at all. That doesn't understand. That really doesn't understand any of us, or our ambitions, but instead they still have that 'stage' thinking that you have to be able to this before you can do that, which children [...] prove that you don't.²⁶

Teacher A

There is thus a wish to be more in control of the curriculum they teach. To be able to develop the work they do with the children without having to wait for a slow management to catch up with the research constantly being done. Also there is a wish for a more open communication with management and a better understanding of the situation concerned.

Time is an obstacle that the Swedish teachers mention in their interviews. There is a wish for both more time to actually work with each child and also to plan, analyse and research the work they do. One of the Swedish teachers says:

Time for planning, to be able to sit down and find out, research, really being able to reflect, really being able to analyse. For example all the pictures and movies that the children make. That we have so little time to sit down and analyse where we are, and where the children are, and how we can challenge and how we can advance and how we can help them one more step.²⁷

²⁵ Och det är ju en ekonomisk fråga alltså att den här miljön vi jobbar i en gammal förskola inte riktigt är anpassad efter dagens pedagogik, den är anpassad efter den pedagogik som var när man byggde den här förskolan.

²⁶ Jag känner mig begränsat av själva kontexten, förskolan som den är idag. Jag kan känna att det finns så mycket mer man kan göra men att man får skynda långsamt för att inte skrämman. Och med ledning som inte alls är där. Som inte förstår. Som faktiskt inte förstår nån av oss och de ambitionerna vi har utan att man fortfarande har det där stadietänkandet att man måste kunna det innan man kan det, vilket ju barn [...] bevisar att det behöver man inte.

²⁷ Tid för planering, att kunna sitta ned och leta reda på, forska, verkligen kunna tänka efter, verkligen kunna analysera. Tex alla de bilder och filmer som barnen gör, att vi har så ont om tid att verkligen kunna sitta ned

Teacher A

Time is, in this way, seen as an important ingredient in being able to challenge the children's thinking and being able to help them develop further. The teachers feel the need for more time to be able to analyse where the children are at the moment, and what they can do to help them move on in the process of learning.

Another of the Swedish teachers cannot see any obstacles to the work at all at first. After thinking a while however, she mentions that perhaps the only limitations as to the work one could do is that of one's own fantasy. She says that

I don't see any obstacles. Maybe just one's own fantasy in that case. To always think so that you can get new things and so. It is one's self one has to really think of. So that you can come up with new things that are fun. That catches their interest.²⁸

Teacher B

This teacher seems to have a very positive outlook upon the environment within which she works and sees many possibilities rather than obstacles. She, however, recognises the need to constantly reflect upon the work done, and to find new ways of engaging the children, catching their interest and inspiring them to further development.

One of the English teachers mentions the environment of the English preschool. At this time they have two big rooms and mixed two and three year old children in those two areas. The children can go between the different areas as they like and whenever they like. The teacher calls it a very 'free-flow' nursery. This has many benefits, but also some down-sides. The teacher explains:

I think because we've got a greater emphasis now on the literacy and the math skills than we've probably had before, we're finding it difficult to set up activities for the older children and not having the little children come along and use that activity or recourses in the, not the 'wrong' way, but not in the way we've set it up with an objective in mind, and they're using it for something else, stopping other children learning from that.

Teacher D

She says that they are now looking at separating the two ages into the two different rooms and thus being able to gear the activities more towards that specific age and giving the children maximum possibilities to develop their language and literacy.

An English teacher briefly mentions that other mother tongues can be an obstacle sometimes. But she moves on to say that it does not necessarily have to be that way.

We have families that have English as their second language [...] So you could say that's an obstacle, but again if you look back at communication being all those other things, it doesn't have to be that obstacle. You can work together with the parents. And the children can understand you and communicate their needs to you however. So you could say it's an obstacle, but you know we try to act as professionals, like we are,

och analysera var vi är, och var är barnen, och hur kan vi utmana och hur kan vi avancera, och hur kan vi hjälpa ett steg till.

²⁸ Inga hinder ser jag. Bara sin egen fantasi i så fall. Att tänka hela tiden så att man kan få nya grejer och så. Det är faktiskt en själv som man får tänka till om. Så man kan hitta på lite nya saker som är roliga. Som fångar dem.

and how interaction is so important. It doesn't need to be an obstacle. We do have children here who English isn't their first language and we have parents where English isn't their first language so, but you still are able to communicate with them. You develop a shared understanding.

Teacher F

Having another mother tongue can thus be a problem *if* you let it. This teacher clearly shows that this need not however be so. There are other ways of communicating and developing a shared understanding from which you can start work with other areas.

3. Discussion and concluding summary

In the following two sections a discussion of the results of the essay will follow, as well as a concluding summary.

3.1 Discussion

There are obviously many differences and similarities between the two preschools in Sweden and England. This goes for both the environment and the work the teachers describe doing.

One of the similarities between the two when it comes to the environment is the fact they both have a type of writing corner. In Sweden this is placed in the kitchen/general games area and in England in a corner of the quiet room. In both corners there are lots of writing materials like paper, pens and pencils. Apart from that, there are also some big differences when it comes to the area surrounding it. In England there are big posters on the wall beside it with the letter of the week and the book of the week, whereas in Sweden there is a laminated paper upon which different words the children have asked about can be fastened with blu-tack. The environment in the English writing corner is thus much influenced by the teachers' planning and their planned work, and in Sweden mostly influenced by the children's interest in different words and their spellings. The environment in the Swedish writing corner thus originates from the children's interests and can in that way stimulate them to continue their literacy development (Hagtvet, 2004).

The whole area that the preschool in England have at their disposal is considerably larger, but so is the group of children who attend the sessions. There are also more staff employed at the English preschool than in the Swedish one, but again this is motivated by the large number of children. The sound level is, as follows quite naturally, also very much higher in England. This should have consequences for the working environment, in terms of what can be done in an environment with lots of sounds. It seems hard to make your voice heard, both for staff and children, and it leads one to wonder if this impedes the children's ability to communicate with staff and each other or whether it forces them to develop assertiveness.

The text environment in both places is very rich. There are many texts on the walls in both places. However, there still seems to be more of them in the Swedish preschool. As mentioned before, in the passage about the writing corner, the texts in England are mainly those that have influence from the work of the teachers or that carry information for staff and parents. The texts in Sweden are mainly such that the children themselves have produced, either on their own or with the help of a teacher or more competent friend. The other texts on the wall are mostly ones that have a communicative function towards the children and their parents, whilst some of course also are information for the staff only. The texts in Sweden are almost all at eye level for the children. This means that they can look at them and try to read and decode them whenever they want to and also meet the text again and again (Liberg, 1993). In England there are very few texts that seem to be at the children's height. One big exception is that of the poster of the process of an ordinary day. This is a big handmade poster that sits at eye height for the children and with text and pictures depicts in what order things happen at the preschool each day.

Both preschools seem to have access to a lot of technical equipment. For example, in Sweden they have a PC, a camera and are waiting for the arrival of the Mac-Books and in England they have a bilingual pen and a SmartBoard. The camera and PC are two very integrated pieces of technology in the work at the preschool in Sweden. Pictures are taken regularly and

printed out on the computer. Sometimes the computer is also used to write different texts. However, both of these are things chiefly being used by the teachers, and very rarely by the children. They are hoping to change this a bit with the arrival of the new Mac-Books. In England the technology seems to be a much more integrated thing in the children's world. They have access to and can use the SmartBoard when and how they want to. In this way, whilst both have access to different technology, there is a big difference in how the technology is being used.

The role of the teacher is very different in Sweden and England. In England it is very clear that the teacher's role is to plan and organise the teaching, whilst other staff may carry it out. The teachers usually do not spend their full time in the nursery, whilst the other members of staff do so. In Sweden this is very different, and the role of the teacher is to work together with the rest of the staff as a team. Whilst a lot of the planning and organising is still part of the teacher's task this is also something that is usually done in a team setting during their planning time each week. Each of the staff members can plan teaching and carry it out; it does not just have to be the teacher. It seems to more a team effort the way the Swedish teachers at the preschool work. One way in which the difference between the two ways manifests itself is that the Swedish teachers feel that there is a lack of time to plan and to analyse. This time restraint is not something which is mentioned at all by the English teachers. Perhaps this is because the Swedish teachers all work in the setting fulltime, whilst the English ones have the opportunity of stepping out. There are benefits and disadvantages with both ways of working. In the Swedish preschool all the members of staff seem to be much more involved and engaged. The English way, however, has the advantage of the teacher having a better chance to see the bigger picture and see what needs to be done at a higher level to make the everyday labour effective. This way of working does however run the risk of not seeing all the details and seeing what each child's needs and interests are. Perhaps the best thing would be to find a balance between the two (Kernell, 2002).

In both countries there is a very strong focus on the literacy and language development being a fun, enjoyable and exciting experience for the children. Both seem equally concerned to make the situation something very positive as literacy is seen to be an extremely important factor for the children's future and lives.

A big difference between the environment in England and Sweden is the existence of the messy room. This has no equivalence in Sweden. The only access to sand and other messy materials in Sweden is outdoors and there it is not an organised meeting with these materials the way the teaching in the messy room in England is done. In England the children have the opportunity to meet literacy in a wildly different way from just pen and paper, and can try mark making in many different materials such as sand and shaving cream.

As for the teaching or work with literacy and language development, there seems to be different focuses for the English and the Swedish preschool. In Sweden the focus seems to be mainly on catching the children's interests and challenging their thinking. It is their aim that all the work that is done with literacy, words and letters should have real relevance for the children. In England the focus seems to be mainly on giving the children access to many different materials, tools and ways of expressing themselves. While some of the teachers from Sweden also mention this, it does not seem to be their main focus in quite the same way. One of the things the Swedish teachers mention is that their aim with working with literacy is that it should be a natural part of any other subject or theme that they might work with. In England the aim does not so much seem to be integration. One of the teachers also describes how they

sometimes aim to have entire days focused on literacy or maths. This difference is reflective of the curriculums. Whilst in the Swedish curriculum statements about literacy and language development are spread throughout the entire document and cannot be found in any one single place, the statements about literacy in the English curriculum can all be found under the same heading in the document (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2006; http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/132712?uc=force_uj). It is interesting to note that the English teachers are the only ones who explicitly mention the curriculum in their interviews. Two out of three of the English teachers mention the curriculum whilst none of the Swedish do so. This could have been indicative of a lack of understanding of the importance of following the curriculum. But based on the content of their interviews, which clearly reflect the contents of the curriculum, and past experiences at the preschool it seems more likely to be a case where the curriculum is a natural part of the work they do, and in their planning. As such it is no longer anything they have to consciously make sure they include, but rather it is automatically the thing they follow and plan from.

The tracking the children's progress on the tracking sheet is something which seems very important to the English teachers and several of them refer to this document as something very helpful. There are both benefits and disadvantages to having a system like this. One of the benefits is that you can see what needs to be worked more on with that particular child and also try to prevent any future problems (Hagtvet, 2004). It also represents a way of thinking that is consistent with both behaviourism and constructivism (Dysthe, 2003). Knowledge is, in this way, seen as something which is developed in a predetermined order and process. Knowledge development and learning becomes a linear thing and something which can be clearly tracked. Whilst there are these Piaget-influences affecting the teachers' work there are also some clear influences from the socio-cultural field in the English preschool. One example of this is the structure and aim of the different activities the teachers set up. They express that they have a specific aim that the children are to achieve with a specific activity. However, they are not expected to achieve this on their own, but rather with the help and guidance of a member of staff. This is very closely related to Vygotskij's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. As mentioned in the theory chapter above, this zone of the scope between what an individual can do on their own and what they can do with the help of an adult or a more competent friend (Dysthe, 2003). As the children are not expected to achieve the aim of the activity all on their own, but rather with the help of an adult, this concept is very applicable. The concept of scaffolding presented above is also very closely related. In this the adult guides the child and so builds a scaffold around the child's learning. In the beginning the scaffold has to be very strong but as the child grows more secure in their knowledge the scaffold can start to be taken away until finally the child can achieve the aim on their own (Hagtvet, 2004).

In the Swedish preschool the influences from the socio-cultural field seems to be the pervading ones. This manifests itself mainly in the interviews; when the teachers describe their work with literacy and language development. It is clear that it is, for them, very important to catch the interest and attention of the child and to challenge their way of thinking about objects and phenomena. They also talk very much about the children learning from each other and being inspired by each other in their development. They describe how the interest in things like literacy and the written language can spread in the group of children. Whilst only a few children might be interested with the subject when it is introduced in some way, these children may later inspire the other children by their own interest. This way of thinking of learning as a very social process is very aligned with the socio-cultural perspective.

One of the other aspects that both the Swedish and English teachers mention is the need for a wider language concept. It is very easy to think of language as just the spoken or written word. But it can be so much more. It is also body language and facial expressions, music and other artistic expressions (Hagtvet, 2004). These other aspects of language are also very important as they provide the starting point from which all other language development can be done. There is a need for this common ground and shared understanding before literacy development can take place (Dahlgren et.al, 2006).

There seem to be quite different views of the need for materials. In Sweden all the teachers seem content with the material they have. They focus on what they, together with the children, can do with the materials that they already have at the preschool for other purposes. One of the teachers in England instead told about the new materials especially developed for work with literacy that they had recently bought, these included both games and puzzles for the children and method materials for the teachers.

The English teachers mention the possibilities of learning outdoors. This is something which is not mentioned by any of the Swedish teachers and something which seems not to have been thought of as a possibility yet. The English teachers describe how working with sand, buckets of water, brushes and squirty bottles outside can be a way of introducing literacy as well. It gives the children access to tools and materials that they might not otherwise use in this way (Dahlgren et.al, 2006). Since there is the absence of a messy room in Sweden, which could also have been used in this same way, this might be a good way of developing the work with literacy to give the Swedish children access to other tools and materials as well.

One of the benefits of the organisation that the English teachers mentioned was the Early Years Foundation Stage Qualification. This course of further education was, they argued, raising the standards in the preschool, both in literacy and other subjects. Whilst Sweden, naturally, does not have the same thing, there are similar courses. At the moment there is a course that aims to validate members of staff to the title of preschool teacher and there are other shorter courses that members of staff can attend. These courses do not, however, seem to be as individually adapted as the EYPS Qualification. The existence of all these different courses shows the importance of further education and continued professional growth (Kernell, 2002).

Finances and economics was something that the teachers of both preschools found to be an obstacle in their work. They felt that what they wanted to do to develop their work and the environment was being hindered by one restraint: money. This seems to be a prevailing factor in all professions and part of the practice of the profession is therefore to balance the work one wants to do with the work that is possible to do under the given conditions, something which both preschools obviously manage to do well, even if they do not enjoy the constraint.

One of the Swedish teachers mentions that the large group size of the children is sometimes an obstacle in the work with literacy. It is sometimes hard to make sure each child is seen and challenged. It is interesting to note, that it is only the Swedish teachers that mention this difficulty, when the English teachers are clearly those with a larger group of children. Perhaps this difference stems from the different views of learning presented above. Whilst the English preschool seems to have prevailing influences from behaviourism and constructivism, where knowledge is often seen as something transferable, the Swedish teachers seem to be mostly influenced by the socio-cultural field where learning is a very social process and each child's learning process in a social context is thus very important (Dysthe, 2003).

Another example, of how these differences in views of learning manifests itself, is the management of space. Both the English and Swedish teachers mention the lack of space or the design of the preschool being a hindrance in their work. The Swedish teachers think that the space and design of the building is a problem because they would have wished to display even more of the children's work and maybe even have dedicated room to this and to literacy. For the English teachers the design is instead a problem because they have two ages together, two and three year olds. They wish to be able to separate the two ages a lot more to be able to set up activities especially for one age. This way of thinking is very clearly Piaget-influenced (Dysthe, 2003).

It is clear that both preschools are constantly striving to become better and to develop the work they do. So much so, that one of the Swedish teachers mentions the very context of the Swedish preschool today being a constraint to their work. She feels that their management is not at all understanding of what they want to achieve in their work. Whilst the teachers have a very socio-cultural approach to their work, the management seems to still be thinking in terms of stages of development. This collision is unhelpful to the teachers in their striving towards better teaching methods.

One of the English teachers mentions that having many children with another mother tongue can sometimes be an obstacle. Some of the Swedish teachers also mention this difficulty. However, both the English and Swedish teachers agreed that this did not have to be an obstacle unless you make it one. As mentioned in the passage about a wider language concept above, there can still be a shared understanding of each other to build on, even when there is no shared language to start with (Eriksen Hagtvat, 2004).

3.2 Concluding summary

There are thus both many similarities and differences between the two preschools. One of the very biggest of these is the difference in the view of how learning is done. It seems that the Swedish preschool is mostly influenced by the socio-cultural field, whilst the English preschool seems to be mostly influenced by the behaviourism and constructivism, predominantly the thinking of Piaget. The socio-cultural influences includes the thinking that learning is a social process and that children learn both from adults, from each other and by themselves. All the learning is done in interaction with someone else or an inanimate object. In the Piaget-inspired thinking children learn in predetermined stages and what a child can learn is dependent on their age and maturity (Dysthe, 2003).

One of the ways this manifests itself is through the text environment at the preschool. Whilst both preschools have lots of texts displayed on the walls, the difference lies in what type of texts these are and their purpose. In the English preschool most of the texts are for, and written by adults and are displayed high up on the wall at adult eye height. In the Swedish preschool most of the texts are instead written by children, for themselves, are displayed at eye height for them and have a clear communicative purpose.

Another way in which this takes expression is the tracking documents used in the English preschool. These show signs of thinking in 'stages' and the children's development is marked three times a year in different colours.

Yet another manifestation of this difference in the view of how learning is done is the English teachers' wish to be able to redesign their premises to be able to separate the two ages. This is

because they wish to be able to gear the activities to one of the ages and make material and tools adapted to one age. This would not be so in the Swedish preschool as it is very important in the socio-cultural context that children of different ages can learn from each other and further each other's development. This is why the large group of children is seen as a problem in the Swedish preschool, but not in the English one, where the group is actually bigger. Because every child's learning is important and furthers other children's development, it is important to see each child, and where they are in their development, in order to be able to help them forward and to challenge their thinking. Teachers of both preschools mention that the premises they encompass have a lack of space. For the English preschool this is because they wish to redo it, and for the Swedish preschool this is because they wish to display more of the children's work.

The description of some of the work done is one exception for the English preschool that leans more towards the socio-cultural field. One teacher described how the activities are planned very carefully and that there is a clear aim with each activity that the children are expected to achieve. However, they are not expected to do it on their own, but rather with the help of a guiding adult. This leans very much towards Vygotskij's Zone of Proximal Development and also the concept of scaffolding (Dysthe, 2003; Eriksen Hagtvvet, 2004).

Both preschools have access to quite a lot of technology, but these are used very differently. In the English preschool the technology is mostly available to, and used by, the children whereas in the Swedish preschool it is mostly the teachers who have access to and use the technology. The Swedish preschool seems to have something to learn from the English here when it comes to integrating the technology into the world of the children. Perhaps this will be achieved with the arrival of the Mac-Books.

The role of the teacher is very different in the two preschools. In the English preschool the role of the teacher is mostly to plan and organise, and in Sweden it is to both plan and carry out the plan, always in cooperation with the rest of the teachers and staff. It is interesting that only the Swedish teachers mention having lack of time to do the careful planning and analysing they really wish to do. Perhaps this has something to do with the English teachers being able to step out of the setting and thereby gaining a view of the bigger picture and also being able to take time to plan away from the children. Both preschools have something to learn from each other here.

One of the things that the teachers at the English preschool mention, that the Swedish do not seem to work with, is the messy room and literacy and language development outdoors. This is an area in which the Swedish preschool could really get some inspiration from the English one.

Teachers at both preschools mention the need for a wider language concept. They, and many of the authors referred to above, argue that language is not only the written or spoken word, but so much more; and it is in these other ways of communicating that we have a foundation for further language work (Eriksen Hagtvvet, 2004).

The focus in the work with literacy and language development is slightly different in the two preschools. In the English preschool the focus seems to be on giving the children as many opportunities as possible for expressing themselves and access to as many different materials and tools as possible. Also they express that they sometimes aim at having entire days dedicated to work with literacy. In the Swedish preschool the focus instead seems to be on

getting the child's attention and also to discover what their interests and needs are and to plan activities based on those. The teachers are also very keen to make sure the work with literacy and language development is a natural part of any theme or project that they work with, and to ensure all the activities have real relevance for the children. This difference, where the Swedish preschool wishes to integrate the work with literacy into everything, and the English preschool have it separate, is also reflective of the curriculums. Both preschools do, however, agree that the process of learning to read and write need to be fun, enjoyable and exciting for the children and that work with literacy and language development is something very important, both for the children now and in the future.

There are thus many differences and similarities between the two preschools and both have many things they may learn from each other. By learning from each other the preschools can develop their work with literacy and language development. Because every child is an individual that learns in their own way, it is important that we as teachers have a wide arsenal of methods and tools that we can use to further each child's development (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2004). One way of widening our resources is through studies such as this, where we can compare the methods and materials used in the work within a certain teaching area, or in the teaching profession as a whole. This comparative knowledge is important so that we, as professional teachers, never stop learning and never stop developing ourselves and our professionalism.

3.3 Further research

There are many ways in which this study could be redone or improved. One way and also a suggestion for further research is to see whether the results presented above are viable on a wider scale. As this study was only conducted with the help of one preschool in each country, and only three teachers at each preschool, it would be interesting to conduct the same sort of study with more preschools and more teachers and see whether the results would be the same.

Another suggestion for further research is to do more observations and look at how the teachers and children actually do work with literacy. The use of interviews, as in this study, whilst enabling an analysis of the way teachers speak and reasons about their work, gives a limited insight into the actual work performed.

A third way of gaining more knowledge about this field would be to conduct a similar study but using different methods to analyse the materials collected. As the theories and methods applied to the collected data provide different results, it would be interesting to see what results would be produced with the use of a different theory as a basis for analysis.

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5. Appendix

5.1. Communication, Language and Literacy

Requirements

Children's learning and competence in communicating, speaking and listening, being read to and beginning to read and write, must be supported and extended. They must be provided with opportunity and encouragement to use their skills in a range of situations and for a range of purposes, and be supported in developing the confidence and disposition to do so.

Aspects of Communication, Language and Literacy

Communication, Language and Literacy is made up of the following aspects:

Language for Communication – is about how children become communicators. Learning to listen and speak emerges out of non-verbal communication, which includes facial expression, eye contact and hand gesture. These skills develop as children interact with others, listen to and use language, extend their vocabulary and experience stories, songs, poems and rhymes.

Language for Thinking – is about how children learn to use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences and how they use talk to clarify their thinking and ideas or to refer to events they have observed or are curious about.

Linking Sounds and Letters – is about how children develop the ability to distinguish between sounds and become familiar with rhyme, rhythm and alliteration. They develop understanding of the correspondence between spoken and written sounds and learn to link sounds and letters and use their knowledge to read and write simple words by sounding out and blending.

Reading – is about children understanding and enjoying stories, books and rhymes, recognising that print carries meaning, both fiction and fact, and reading a range of familiar words and simple sentences.

Writing – is about how children build an understanding of the relationship between the spoken and written word and how, through making marks, drawing and personal writing children ascribe meaning to text and attempt to write for various purposes.

Handwriting – is about the ways in which children's random marks, lines and drawings develop and form the basis of recognisable letters.

What Communication, Language and Literacy means for children

To become skilful communicators, babies and young children need to be with people with whom they have warm and loving relationships, such as their family or carers and, in a group situation, a key person whom they know and trust.

Babies respond differently to different sounds and from an early age are able to distinguish sound patterns. They use their voices to make contact and to let people know what they need and how they feel. They learn to talk by being talked to.

All children learn best through activities and experiences that engage all the senses. Music, dance, rhymes and songs support language development.

As children develop speaking and listening skills they build the foundations for literacy, for making sense of visual and verbal signs and ultimately for reading and writing. Children need varied opportunities to interact with others and to use a wide variety of resources for expressing their understanding, including mark-making, drawing, modelling, reading and writing.

http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/132712?uc=force_uj

5.2 The original interview questions

Erfarenhet/utbildning?

Varför skall/skall inte barnen utveckla sitt skriftspråk?

Hur viktigt anser ni att arbetet med detta är?

Varför?

Varför kan det vara viktigt?

Varför inte?

Hur arbetar ni med barnens skriftspråkande?

Vilka metoder/teorier använder ni er av i ert arbete med barns skriftspråsutveckling?

För och nackdelar med dessa?

Om inte, varför? Hur skulle tillgång till sådana utveckla arbetet?

Vilka möjligheter att utveckla sitt skriftspråkande ger miljön och organisationen?

Vilka svårigheter eller hinder kan ni se?

Vilka färdigheter inom detta område anser ni att barnen bör utveckla under sin tid på förskolan?

Vilka olika faktorer påverkar ert arbete med detta?

5.3 The final interview questions

How would you describe your work with literacy and language development?

What possibilities for this work can you see in the environment and organisation within which you work?

What obstacles or hindrances can you see?

(plus follow-up questions depending on their answers)

5.4 The tracking document

		EYFS							
		← 40 months	← 30 months	← 36 ← 22					
Early Learning Goals	Stepping Stones/Development Matters			Language for Communication					
	Green	Blue	Yellow	Language for Thinking	Linking Sounds and Letters				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join in with repeated refrains and anticipate key events and phrases in rhymes and stories. Listen to others in one-to-one or small groups when conversation interests them. Use vocabulary focused on objects and people that are of particular importance to them. Respond to simple instructions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use simple statements and questions often linked to gestures. Use intonation, rhythm and phrasing to make their meaning clear to others. Listen to stories with increasing attention and recall. Describe main story settings, events and principal characters. Begin to experiment with language describing possession. Build up vocabulary that reflects the breadth of their experiences. Begin to use more complex sentences. Use a widening range of words to express or elaborate on ideas. Question why things happen and give explanations. Have confidence to speak to others about their own wants and interests. Use talk to gain attention and sometimes use action rather than talk to demonstrate or explain to others. Initiate conversation, attend to and take account of what others say. Extend vocabulary, especially by grouping and naming. Use vocabulary and books of which they are increasingly interested. Link statements and stick to a main theme or intention. Consistently develop a simple story, explanation or line of questioning. Use language for an increasing range of purpose. Use simple grammatical structures. LC2— <i>Influences communication with others, displaying greater confidence in more informal contexts.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use action, sometimes with limited talk, that is largely concerned with the 'here and now'. Use language as a powerful means of widening contacts, sharing feelings, experiences and thoughts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy listening to and using spoken and written language, and readily turn to it in their play and learning. Extend their vocabulary, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words. LC4 - <i>Listens with enjoyment to stories, song, rhymes and poems, sustains attentive listening and responds with relevant comments, questions or actions.</i> LC6 - <i>Interact with others. In a variety of contexts, negotiating plans and activities and taking turns in conversation.</i> LC8 - <i>Speak clearly with confidence and control showing awareness of the listener.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LC9 - <i>Takes and listens confidently and with control, consistently showing awareness of the listener by including relevant detail. Uses language to work out and clarify ideas, showing control of a range of appropriate vocabulary.</i> 				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LC5 - <i>Use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences.</i> LC7 - <i>Use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events, exploring the meaning and sounds of new words.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to use talk instead of action to rehearse, reorder and reflect on past experience, linking significant events from own and from stories, paying attention to how events lead into one another. Begin to make patterns in their experience through linking cause and effect, sequencing, ordering and grouping. Begin to use talk to pretend imaginary situations. LC3 - <i>Talks activities through, reflecting on and modifying actions.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use talk to give new meanings to objects and actions, treating them as symbols for other things. Use talk to connect ideas, explain what is happening and anticipate what might happen next. Use talk, actions and objects to recall and relive past experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy rhyming and rhythmic activities. LS17 - <i>Joins in with rhyming and rhythmic activities.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguish one sound from another. Show interest in play with sounds, songs and rhymes. Repeat words or phrases from familiar stories. 				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words. LS14 - <i>Link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet</i> LS15 - <i>Hears and says sounds in words.</i> LS16 - <i>Blends sounds in words.</i> LS17 - <i>Uses phonic knowledge to read simple regular words.</i> LS18 - <i>Attempts to read more complex words, using phonic knowledge.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue a rhyming string. Hear and say the initial sound in words and know which letters represent some of the sounds. LS13 - <i>Links some sounds to letters.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise rhythm in spoken words. LS12 - <i>Show awareness of rhyme and alliteration.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses knowledge of letters, sounds and words when reading and writing independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Above 9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Above 9 			

