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Working in a culturally diverse preschool

Focus on preschool teachers' experiences and perceptions

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Purpose: The purpose of the current study is to give the opportunity for teachers' voices, which have often remained silent, to be heard. Through teachers' personal stories, the study intends to identify patterns of similarity in order to gain valuable insights of the lived experiences of the preschool teachers working in a multicultural environment. For this reason, two research questions were formulated, as follows: "How do the preschool teachers describe their experience of working in a cultural diverse preschool?" and "What are the difficulties that the preschool teachers mention?".

Theory: The theoretical framework used in the study is sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 2003). The study embraces Rogoff's (2003) definition of culture and cultural group. Thus, the understanding of cultural diversity which is broadly discussed in the study is based on Rogoff's sociocultural theory and it is defined as different groups of people who organize their daily lives in different ways, come in contact. Patterns of similarities and differences can be identified between the culturally diverse groups. The challenge for the culturally diverse people who come in contact, work or live together is to try to understand the patterns of difference between the groups without judgments of value.

Method: The current study takes place in a culturally diverse preschool. It is a qualitative study using life-history research as main method. Five culturally and linguistically diverse preschool teachers from one school communicate and share their

personal life stories through unstructured interviews which lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. The preschool teachers discuss their experience of working with culturally diverse students and colleagues and talk about their challenges. Their life-stories are analyzed and discussed in relation to the existing social frameworks, such as the formal Swedish preschool curriculum. "Time-lines" used as a methodological tool to help the unstructured interviews. They were expected to be designed by the preschool teachers prior to the interview in order to help them organize their thoughts, reflect and prompt effectively. The data were carefully selected and systematically managed. The analysis follows an inductive approach based on preschool teachers' interviews transcriptions and the information provided was organized into thematic categories. The thematic categories were based on the relevance of the research objectives.

Results: The current study showed a number of findings concerning preschool teachers' lived experiences of working in a multicultural environment. As for preschool teachers' description of their experience of working in a culturally diverse preschool, all the participants unanimously described their working experience as interesting and enriching. In a smaller percentage, nearly half of the questioned preschool teachers describe working in a multicultural environment as a challenge for them which helped them to get developed and become better as professionals and as individuals. In addition, most of the teachers interviewed in the current study confessed a sense of belonging in the "international community" of the school and presented themselves as "international" people who feel really comfortable working in such an environment. As for the second focal area of the study, a number of difficulties that preschool teachers face in a multicultural setting discussed during the interviews. More than half of the teachers found difficult to work according to the new ideology that the formal Swedish curriculum brings in the preschools. This ideological shift introduces a more academic focused way of working with preschool students as well as designing more structured activities for them. Thus, the European model of learning in preschool which tend to replace the traditional Scandinavian model, seems to make the teachers who have been raised according to the Scandinavian school system, to feel afraid of this ideological change. Another difficulty that the preschool teachers discussed during the interviews was to work and to deal with culturally diverse colleagues. The teachers referred to communication problems caused due to their cultural differences with their colleagues were more than half. Working in a language different from their mother tongue noticed as difficulty by two out of five preschool teachers participated in the study. The last difficulty identified in the study which was marked only by a small minority (one out of five) interviewed preschool teachers was the lack of appropriate professional development and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Modern humanity faces the global reality of constant population movements. People from all around the world are forced, or choose, to chase a better future in a foreign country. The discussions and debates about multicultural education and how a national educational system can successfully handle the cultural diversity among the student population is more relevant than ever globally.

The education system plays a key role in the successful inclusion of newcomers to society. The starting point and of course the foundation of education, is the preschool. It is recognized as the foremost institution preventing societal and education exclusion as well as fostering students' future school success (Dockett & Perry, 2013). Thus, a number of studies in the field of educational research try to figure out how culturally responsive teaching and learning occurs in early childhood settings all around the world.

Sweden is not an exception to this global trend of populations becoming more diverse. According to Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyråns- SCB) the population of the country has changed dramatically during the last ten years. The following table illustrates the number of the immigrants that the country accepted among the years 2000-2014.

Immigration in Sweden. Year 2004-2014

Sex	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Men	30786	33443	50710	53628	52460	52982	52638	50824	53386	60426	69113
Women	31242	31786	45040	45857	48711	49298	46163	45643	49673	55419	57853
Sum	62028	65229	95750	99485	101171	102280	98801	96467	103059	115845	126966

(Source: Statistiska centralbyråns- SCB)

Previous research –discussed below- has adopted different perspectives and focal areas in order to examine the multidimensional and complex concept of multicultural education.

This body of work can be grouped according to their foci. Some of the studies focused on how teaching and learning practices should be transformed so that basic values and goals of multicultural education are implemented. These types of studies examine, in other words, how the educators use the values and practices of the minority families and the ways in which they manage to integrate them into the curriculum (Mitchell et al, 2015). Another study that belongs in the same approach, presents the development of specific strategies to support inclusive education in the Finnish context. These specific strategies are presented and evaluated by Ojala (2010) in the article “*Developing multicultural early childhood education in a Finnish context*” in the frame of the EU-project INCLUDE-ED.

Apart from policies and teaching techniques which may facilitate the multicultural education, the reviewed research adopted other focal areas as well. A significant focal

area used from the reviewed research in the field of multicultural education is related to refugee's families' expectations, attitudes and beliefs about the education given to their children. A family- focused approach and the support of family involvement in inclusive educational programs generally, (not only in multicultural education programs) is analyzed by Xu and Filler (2008).

Moreover, a focus on children's learning experiences used by Guo (2010) in her thesis project "*Chinese immigrant children in New Zealand early childhood centres*", in which eight Chinese immigrant students, their parents and their teachers participated in a study aiming to examine educational implications of these experiences for early childhood educators. Guo (2010) investigates how children's learning experiences in the early childhood centres are mediated by the value of their Chinese culture and by the use of familiar, for them, cultural tools. The study follows a sociocultural perspective and examines, through child observations and interviews with the children, the parents and the teachers, how children are creating intercultural learning possibilities (Guo, 2010).

Although there appear to be a relatively large number of studies, which attempt to shed light on multicultural education issues, it is important to mention that little work has been conducted for viewing multicultural education from the perspective of the educators. Researchers appear to have put little focus on how teachers feel about being part of multicultural education, how they experience it or what kind of difficulties they meet when working in culturally diverse settings. Especially in the case that teachers have on their own minority identities and immigrant backgrounds, thus even fewer studies refer to teachers' cultural and linguistic diversity.

Research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001) has showed several times that ignoring the voices and the thoughts of the classroom teachers leads to unsuccessful and unsustainable attempts to change or improve education. Hence, this study attempts to examine preschool teachers' experiences of working in a culturally diverse preschool. The cultural diversity in the preschool involved in the study applies not only to the student population but also to school staff. In the current study, through life-story interviews, five preschool teachers communicate and share their personal stories connected to cultural diversity and multicultural education. They discuss the experience of working with culturally diverse students and colleagues and they talk about their difficulties in handling diversity. The study aims to give the opportunity for teachers' voices to be heard through their stories in order to gain valuable insights from the lived experiences of multicultural education. Finally, common patterns of the preschool teachers' lived experiences and difficulties will be identified and lead to results which depict the situation as perceived across the experiences of the five participant teachers.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

The main purpose of this study is to listen to preschool teachers' life stories, gain valuable insights of the daily reality in multicultural early childhood centers and to identify patterns of teachers lived experiences and difficulties.

Thus, the background part of the study includes: a short definition of the notion "multicultural education" followed by a discussion about values and principles, based on significant researchers in the field, a presentation of contemporary Swedish society and education and in the context of the previous research focused on multicultural teachers' experiences in working with culturally diverse students and colleagues. The topics are analyzed in the following section.

What is multicultural education?

This study adopts the idea of one of the basic theorists of multicultural education, Banks. In his book "*An introduction in multicultural education*" Banks (2008) proposes multicultural education as the only realistic and effective solution in a world of increasing diversity in language, ethnicity and religion.

It assumes that diversity enriches a nation and increases the ways in which its citizens can perceive and solve personal and public problems.

(Banks, 2008: 1)

Thus, multicultural education is discussed as a reform movement derived from basic democratic values and human rights. The major goal of multicultural education, according to Banks (2008) is to free people from their cultural boundaries by providing them with the knowledge, skills and values needed in order to function effectively within any cultural community. Though it is considered difficult for researchers to agree on a common definition of multicultural education, the importance of developing skills such as reading, writing and math is highlighted from the vast majority of multiculturalism theorists, such as Banks, Nieto and Gay.

Although the fact that the notion of multicultural education seems to be familiar in modern societies, Banks (2008) notices that people tend to oversimplify the concept of multicultural education. The same argument is developed by Nieto (2010) who also claims that for some schools "doing multicultural education" is having some ethnic celebrations, putting posters of children with brown faces or using slogans such as "developing tolerance towards others". In order to counteract these types of misconceptions, Banks (2008) analyses five dimensions of multicultural education. According to his analysis, a range of issues is related to the implementation of multicultural education: content integration (use of information and examples from a variety of cultures), knowledge construction process (become familiar with the way knowledge is created), prejudice reduction (develop positive feelings towards other racial groups), equity pedagogy (using techniques and strategies for facilitating academic achievement of diverse students), empowering school culture and social

structure (create a different school and social culture by offering same opportunities to success)

Consequently, when someone get immersed into Banks' (2008) and Nieto' (2010) ideas and work, it is obvious that both of them conceive multicultural education as a complex and multidimensional strategy for ALL students; a strategy aiming not only to advance students' learning but also to teach them to know, to care and to act.

Knowledge is an essential part of multicultural literacy, but it is not sufficient. Knowledge alone will not help students to develop an empathetic, caring commitment to humane and democratic change. An essential goal of a multicultural curriculum is to help students develop empathy and caring. To help the United States and world become more culturally democratic, students must also develop a commitment to personal social and civil action as well as the knowledge to participate in effective civil action.

(Banks, 2008:50)

Multicultural education in Sweden

In Sweden rapid demographic change has been identified during the last twenty years due to massive migration. According to Girma Berhanu (Berhanu, 2016) around twenty per cent of the Swedish population has an immigrant background and the situation is getting more and more complex as Swedish society is becoming increasingly multiethnic and multilingual. Traditionally, Sweden stands for equity issues, education access, inclusion and universalism. But what is the situation today?

In a formal level, the Swedish national educational agency gives guidelines to Swedish preschools which are published in Lpfö 98 (revised 2010). *Läroplan för förskolan* (Lpfö) demonstrates the fundamental values that Swedish preschool is based on as well as the core tasks and goals that need to be achieved. The formal curriculum for Swedish preschools seems to clearly express the urgent need of implying multicultural education. Awareness of the rapidly changing Swedish society is obvious in the quotation below:

The internationalization of Swedish society imposes high demands on the ability of people to live with and understand values inherent in cultural diversity. The preschool is a social and cultural meeting place, which can reinforce this and prepare children for life in an increasingly internationalized community. Awareness of their own cultural heritage and participating in the culture of others should contribute to children's ability to understand and empathize with the circumstances and values of others. The preschool can help to ensure that children from national minorities and children with a foreign background receive support in developing a multicultural sense of identity.

The curriculum builds on the conceptual framework of Swedish Education Act (2010:800) which constitutes the legal frame for the entire public school system. Human rights and fundamental democratic values are at the core of the Swedish preschool curriculum as well as respect for the intrinsic value of each person. All the children attending Swedish preschools are expected to develop empathy and a sense of concern and caring for others irrespective of gender, race, ethnic group, religion or sexual orientation. Children are perceived as individuals from different living environments coming with different cultural experiences, interests, motivations and values. Thus, it is extremely important for each child to develop a sense of belonging in his/her own culture and at the same time to develop a sense of respect for other cultures. Preschool teachers should have as a starting point children's accumulated experience and build on it. A major goal of the Swedish preschool expressed in LPFÖ is to offer each child a good introduction to the preschool and facilitating the transition after the end of the preschool period.

On the other hand, despite the formal expressed acceptance of diversity and multiculturalism, research has identified a number of problematic issues concerning the Swedish educational system. A serious problem discussed by Girma Berhanu (2016) is the relation identified between the pupils' low academic achievement and their immigration background. As noted:

Students with foreigner backgrounds receive lower average grades than do their peers, fewer quality for higher education, and they have a higher dropout rate from upper-secondary education

(Berhanu, 2016:55)

Another significant issue presented in research is the over-representation of students coming from minority cultural group in special education programs. The problem of disproportionality in these programs appears mostly in areas of special education where precise diagnostic criteria are missing (Berhanu, 2016). Consequently, students from minority cultural groups end up to special education programs because of either teachers' prejudices and/or because of the general difficulties that these groups face at school. Whatever the reason is, it remains a huge challenge for the Swedish educational system of today. It is important to identify what are those political movements and policies which create contradictions and conflicting realities to the formal expressed, by the Swedish formal curriculum, values and beliefs of inclusion.

Multicultural education as seen from educators' perspective

As discussed in the introduction, little work has been done in the field of educational research concerning how teachers experience multicultural education and the types of difficulties they face when working in multicultural learning environments. Previous

research in the field is presented in the following studies, in which early childhood teachers have been asked to talk about their experiences in their culturally diverse working places and about the difficulties or challenges they face in such contexts.

The experience of being the “Other”

A significant and inspiring piece of work comes from Sonja Arndt (2014, 2015, 2016) based on collective narratives of immigrant early childhood teachers. The researcher uses the personal stories and experiences of a group of immigrant early childhood teachers in order to investigate how they experience being the “others”. At the same time, the article attempts to discuss alternatives of the conception of otherness and to open some space for rethinking (Arndt, 2015). In her article *“Pedagogies of difference: Unknowing immigrant teachers as subjects forever in process”* (Arndt, 2015) questions about our orientation towards the “other” and how we can challenge it are examined and discussed philosophically. She presents a number of cases when the immigrant teachers become unable or afraid to reveal parts of their identities and experiences (Arndt, 2015; 2016). Instead of being themselves, they try, in multiple ways, to mask their differences. In the “dominant-culture” school, immigrant-teachers are recognized and possibly marginalized by confronting a range of marginalizing techniques. This kind of techniques that the colleagues from the dominant cultural group use contain: the disapproval of using their home language, acceptance of comments about the “weird” smell of their food, suppression of wearing special costumes or getting involved in their traditional rituals (Arndt, 2015). How ironic teachers in multicultural education work to manage “richness” when at the same time they have parts of their own culture that they hide (Arndt, 2015). According to Arndt (2015,2016) being the “other” very quickly becomes difficult in the different social policy, linguistic and cultural environment and a great uncertainty and discomfort. What it is described as “cultural shock” in Rogoff’s work (2003), here in Arndt’s article (2016) is examined as immigrant teacher’s feelings of resentment and anxiety, resistance of letting her beliefs to go, questioning of her teaching techniques, incidents of hiding parts of her identity and attempts to understand the new reality. While daily life of immigrant teachers is full of incidents that indicate humiliation, rejection and selective privilege in the new place, the danger of eventually muting their sense of their very being is a possible threat noticed by the researcher.

Nevertheless, Arndt (2015, 2016) intends to develop an argument by challenging the stereotype of defining the locals as “we” and the immigrants as “they”. Based on philosophical roots that support the ever-changing and evolving nature of a person’s identity and the fact that whatever we know about the “other” is always incomplete, Arndt (2015, 2016) presents an alternative conception towards “other” and otherness. Following the critical lenses of Kristeva’s philosophical work, Arndt (2015, 2016) proposes to recognize not only the other foreigner but also the foreigner that is within each of us.

...I argue that perhaps we might all recognize some of those elements of Otherness within ourselves, and follow Kristeva to stop ‘detesting’ the

foreignness in others. Recognizing that we are unknown even to ourselves might just be the key to our resistance as we realize the Kristevan dream: that it is not just the immigrant teacher, but all of us who are foreigners in what might then become early childhood places for all of us.

(Arndt,2016:8)

Dealing with diverse colleagues

Communication problems and dealing with culturally diverse colleagues' different perspectives in early childhood settings seem to be at the core of preschool teachers' experience. Preschool teachers may disagree on how the children should be taught or even how the adults should address to them. Arndt (2016) noticed that immigrant early childhood teachers are coming with totally different ideals for children which of course differ from the locals' ones. However, to what extent they are going to express them or not it is a matter of personal choice. Different views among colleagues in preschool are also expressed in a study conducted by Joon Sun Lee (2006), in which eighteen diverse preschool teachers share their beliefs about appropriate school practices and pedagogies for 4-year-olds. The teachers were asked to discuss and commend video clips of teacher centered and child centered classrooms. Through the talk and their comments, teachers expressed different criteria they think important for evaluating the appropriateness of the teaching techniques. Some of the popular criteria were the degree to which children were engaged and focus on the activity, if the activities included in the curriculum were relevant and meaningful to children everyday lives and if the children have the freedom of choice. Although the different criteria are considered to be more important for each one of the teachers, Lee (2006) noticed that unanimously the preschool teachers agreed that preschool should mainly be a funny and engaging experience for all the children, not a stressful and academic-focused one. Thus, working with culturally diverse colleagues does not seem to be an easy process. Teachers' aspirations will be understood differently by their colleagues in ways particular to the culture and the society in which they live.

Dealing with educational disparities

Educators in all levels of the school system all over the world are identifying the most significant and pressing problem facing education today; the relation between the increasingly diverse student population and the associated persistence of educational disparities. Exactly as Berhanu (2016) notices as problematic a situation in the Swedish educational system, Bishop (2010) describes as the current situation in New Zealand's educational system. The interesting point on which Bishop (2010) focuses is how educators address this situation in the challenges that have arisen from them. In most of the cases, Bishop (2010) argues that the teachers choose to blame a number of factors outside the classroom such as the child and/or the child's home, the educational system. Only a few of them realize that educational disparities caused by power imbalances within the classrooms and the only effective solution to them is for the teachers to achieve changes in the pedagogy so as to alter the power balance among the students. According to the author, by challenging the imposed dominant

status quo and understanding the students' life stories through critical lenses, teachers can then create meaningful relationships with the children. The establishment of meaningful relationships with the students is also supported by Nieto (2010) as a crucial factor for the students to achieve meaningful learning. Both of them, emphasize that teachers' ideas and actions as well as the way they relate and interact with their students may have great impact in their learning and achievement (Bishop,2010 ;Nieto, 2010).

Identifying discursive positioning involves teacher education students, staff and teachers engaging in ongoing reflection of the impact of these positions on student learning. Therefore, critical questions such as "how do we provide our students/teachers with these opportunities for reflection?" are important. This reflection needs to involve those outside of the current reference groups because consultation within a closed set of people tends to reinforce the range of discourses used rather than challenge them. Widening the range of discourses open to student teachers is vital, as is increasing the numbers of student teachers from minority populations.

(Bishop,2010: 125)

Apart from modifying the pedagogy used in classrooms, getting engaged in a critical reflective way of thinking and building strong relationships with their students, teachers meet even more challenges when trying to overcome this problematic situation and to imply multicultural education for ALL the student inspired by Banks' (2008) and Nieto's(2010) ideas.

Looking for help and support

Another difficulty identified in previous research which is related to preschool teachers' experiences in multicultural education is their constant need for help and support. The lack of effective and systematic professional development programs and the problematic relationship of pre-service, and in-service education, creates serious issues in teachers' education and practice (Bishop, 2010). As Bishop (2010) argues, new teachers begin their careers with great aspirations about implementing a range of alternative and interactive teaching techniques. However, they end up teaching in very traditional ways during at least the first year of their teaching (Bishop, 2010). Teachers strive for students' participation and achievement without having any academic feedback or access to sources of information and support. Unfortunately, there are cases of teachers who show a problematic response to criticism, but at the same time there are teachers that are truly interested in their professional development. This is the case discussed in the article "*Stories of practitioner enquiry: using narrative interviews to explore teachers' perspectives of learning to learn*" written by Thomas, Tiplady and Wall (2013), where an example of a research project aiming to immerse teachers in innovative pedagogies is presented. After analyzing the

interviews collected by the teachers who participated in the project, the authors conclude that for the vast majority of the participants, the experience of working differently, and reflectively, was a positive and challenging experience. Teachers gained an increased understanding of their teaching, became more critical about their teaching techniques, took part in the process of learning with their pupils to be seen as partners and develop skills for lifelong learning together with their students. In a constantly changing and complex world, education cannot stay stable and unchanged. For the personal and professional development of the teachers, it is necessary to ensure the existence of sources of support and information such as universities or professional learning communities directly linked to the schools.

Going even further, it is of course vital to ask the teachers to talk about their professional development needs. TALIS (Teaching And Learning International Survey), an international survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) asked around 90000 randomly selected teachers in 23 countries to talk about their professional development experiences and their developmental needs over different subject areas.

TALIS asked teachers about their professional development needs in 11 different areas: content and performance standards in their main subject field(s); student assessment practices; classroom management; knowledge and understanding of their main subject field(s); knowledge and understanding of instructional practices in their main subject field(s); ICT skills for teaching; teaching students with special learning needs; student discipline and behaviour problems; school management and administration; student counselling; and, teaching in a multicultural setting.

(Jensen, 2010:68)

The results of the study were significant showing that the fields of special and multicultural education are in high levels of teachers' professional development needs. More specifically, the results of the study indicated that one third of the teachers reported need for professional development in the area of teaching children with special needs. In addition, forty percent of the teachers on average among the countries participating in the study claimed a high need for professional development in the area of teaching in multicultural settings. As Jensen (2010) notices the reasons why the teachers reported in a so high percentage the need for professional development in the area of teaching in multicultural setting are not asked in the study. However, it is clear and evident that teachers reported great needs for training towards this direction. Thus, it is crucial for school principles, stakeholders and policy makers to be aware of teachers needs and to figure out why these needs were created (Jensen, 2010).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used in the study is sociocultural theory coming from Rogoff's work (2003). The starting point for sociocultural theory was Vygotsky's ideas. Vygotsky (1978) supported that children develop their ways of thinking through a process of socialization or in other words by internalizing ideas and processes that they observe during social interactions. The famous concept of "zone of proximal development", which Vygotsky passionately supports means that students need to have the support of someone who is already knowledgeable and through observation and participation in social interaction with this person, they learn.

Rogoff (2003) used the concept of learning through interaction and developed it further by introducing the notion of cognitive apprenticeships and learning communities which are used to describe how children learn through observation and participation in activities in their cultural group. According to Rogoff (2003), children work with the adults in order to learn to complete tasks and gradually become confident to complete independently more complicated tasks. In other words, Rogoff (2003) explains that learning occurs with no explicit teaching but through children's participation in everyday routines and practices of their cultural group.

As cultural group, Rogoff (2003) defines a group of people who share a common way of organizing their daily life and activities, who share also common tools and technologies, common values and traditions. The cultural practices within the group can be transformed and changed through generations and this fact indicates the dynamic nature of culture which often is oversimplified and expressed as a static sum of characteristics.

The study embraces Rogoff's (2003) definition of culture and cultural group. Thus, the understanding of cultural diversity which is broadly discussed in the study is also based on Rogoff's sociocultural theory and it is defined as different groups of people who organize their daily lives in different ways, come in contact. Patterns of similarities and differences can be identified between the culturally diverse groups. The challenge for the culturally diverse people who come in contact, work or live together is to try to understand the patterns of difference between the groups without judgments of value.

In this case, people who participate at the same in different cultural groups which usually overlap each other, for example immigrant students or teachers who confronts different culture at home than in school, experience "culture shock". The notion of "culture shock" is used by Rogoff (2003) when trying to understand and explain the feelings of discomfort an individual faces while trying to get himself/herself immersed in communities and settings with different cultural practices, such as language, religion, government and legal systems, ways of teaching and learning,

gender roles. According to Rogoff (2003) “culture shock” is experienced when the cultural ways of the various communities in which people participate overlap or conflict each other. A common example constitutes the situation when children with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds enter schools of a “dominant cultural majority”. When the old and the new setting conflicts with each other, it is vital to promote the understanding of the patterns of different cultural communities rather than judging their values (Rogoff, 2003).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of the current study is to give the opportunity to hear teachers’ voices, which have often remained silent, to be heard. Through five preschool teachers’ personal stories, the study intends to identify patterns of similarity in order to depict the lived experiences of the preschool teachers working in a multicultural environment. For this reason, two research questions were formulated as follows:

- 1) How do the preschool teachers describe their experience of working in a cultural diverse preschool?
- 2) What are the difficulties that the preschool teachers mention?

CHAPTER 5: METHOD

In this section of the study, the chosen methods will be presented. Firstly, the methodological approach of the study will be discussed. After which, data collection processes as well as data management and thematic grouping of information will be analyzed. At the end of this section ethical considerations and commitments, which follow the guidance given by the Swedish Research Council, will be described.

Life history research

The current study is qualitative and the main research method is life-history research. Goodson and Sikes (2001) in their book *Life history research in educational settings*, suggest that the main reason for a researcher to choose life history is because he/she believes that the personal information provided by the participants through the description of their lived experiences can help him/her to understand more deeply the topic of the study. That is because, according to Goodson and Sikes (2001), our lives cannot really be separated even if we act using “multi-selves” in our everyday life such as being professionals, parents, children, partners etc. Every part of our life interacts and influences other parts (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Especially when we examine research questions related to teaching, in which a holistic exploration of established culture, social structure and individual life is requested (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Through the holistic approach that life history research provides, researchers

can gain valuable insights into the ways that people make sense of their lives, their roles and their identities.

Participating in life history research could be seen as an additional opportunity for personal and professional development. As Goodson and Sikes (2001, 2003) argue in their work, teachers involved in these types of studies are expecting to develop strategies for reflecting upon and analyzing their life and work in teaching. By telling and discussing their story, they are inevitably engaged in a process, in most cases, of gaining a better sense of who they are while, uncovering parts of their selves, constructing their identities and feeling more confidence (Goodson& Sikes, 2001). However, there is a possibility of emotional harm of the participants as discussed in the literature, even if it is almost impossible for the researchers to predict which topic will turn out to become sensitive and/or a source of stress or pain for the informant (Goodson& Sikes, 2001). Giving space and choice to the participants for discussing any topic to the extent that they want, seems to be the answer to ethical difficulties arising (Goodson& Sikes, 2001). Researchers should always be aware of moments when the discussion may touch deeply personal, private and possibly painful matters (Goodson& Sikes, 2001). By showing personal and professional responsibility they can avoid situations such as showing unlimited personal curiosity, becoming counselors for the informants who may ask for advice or dealing with an informant's possible personal crisis after self-reflection.

Last but not least, an important reason for why the life history approach is adopted by the current study is its potential as a useful tool for educational change. When educational changes and reforms are about to happen, the technical aspects of teaching are stressed while the teachers' perspectives, personal missions and commitments are not taken into account (Goodson, 2003). Almost no reform is aiming to develop teachers' greater creativity, competitiveness, passion, purpose and inspiration for their work (Goodson, 2003). However, these aspects seem to be crucial for the sustainability and generalizability of any change in education, as Goodson (2003) in his book *Professional knowledge, professional lives* supports such a case:

As has been slowly understood by policy makers, it is difficult to deliver successful change without the involvement and enthusiasm of the teacher. (...) The starting point (of school reforming) has to be a fine-tuned understanding of the motives and missions that teachers bring to their work.

(Goodson 2003:viii)

In other words, only by taking into account teachers' stories of action within theories of context educational changes and reforms can be successful and sustainable. Consequently, researchers aiming to impact on educational change and improvement should not adopt a narrow research focus only on teachers' daily classroom practice. Teachers' roles and actions are far more active and important than simply being technicians and deliverers of government's predesigned packages, guidelines and

assessments (Goodson, 2003). Teaching and learning, as Nieto (2010) strongly supports is primarily about the relationships created in the classroom; the personal and collective connections that happen there. Moreover, based on Freire's ideas, education cannot be separated from its political dimension as it usually focuses on questions of power, privilege and access (Nieto, 2010). Thus, teaching apart from lesson plans or effective teaching methods, has also to do with teachers' political commitment and social responsibility (Nieto, 2010). Exactly for that reason, autonomous and critical research aiming to school reform requires broader lenses of inquiry by including teacher's stories and narratives, theories of contexts and critical incidents in teaching (Goodson, 2003).

Document analysis

The primary intention of the current study is to make the teachers' voices and life experiences to be heard. Consequently, the main data collection method adopted was life history interviews. As a supplementary source of data, the formal preschool curriculum (LPFÖ) was considered to be helpful for the researcher to understand the sociocultural, political and economic context. This kind of knowledge is necessary for the interviews to be "located" and discussed as social constructions (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, Goodson, 2013). Therefore, document analysis used together with life-history research acts as a means of contextualization. Triangulating research methods by combining research data coming from different sources is a complex procedure. The data will not always agree, which does not necessarily mean that some sources of data are wrong or erroneous (Gillham, 2005). Rather, in this study, the different sources work to offer a richer and deeper understanding of the cultural and policy context for the enquiry.

Sample selection

The teachers who participated in the study were selected "purposefully" in order to cover a range of factors: different sex, different age, and different backgrounds (Cohen et al, 2011). The number was decided to reach up to five people so as to dedicate more time to each one of them instead of interviewing a larger number of teachers in a shorter time and perhaps at a more superficial level of discussion. None of the selected teachers has English as a mother tongue and all of them were equally qualified to work both in Swedish and in International preschools. Additionally, all the selected teachers were individuals already known to the researcher. Relationships between the interviewer and the interviewees were already established before the interviews since the researcher had been working in the school as a substitute teacher. Personal relationships and familiarity between the interviewer and the interviewee are considered to be important factors that create a safe and warm environment and help the discussion to be deeper and substantial and the participants to discuss openly about their life experiences and feelings. Nevertheless, as it has previously been discussed, familiarity can create problems during personal interviews (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). It makes unclear the limits between from one side the researcher's level of intervention and curiosity and from the other side the participant's willingness to

talk about sensitive topics. Finding a balance between these two sides and consequently avoiding causing a possible emotional harm to the participant seem to be even more tricky when it comes to interviews with someone already known. The current study, in order to face these ethical difficulties, attempts to give space and choice to the participants for discussing any topic to the extent that they want.

Data collection

Data used in the study came from two different sources: life-history research interviews and document analysis applied to LPFÖ (Swedish curriculum for preschool).

Empirical data was collected through life-history research interviews with five preschool teachers. Interviews give the opportunity to the participants to express their opinions about the world, presenting them as their lived experiences. (Cohen et al, 2011). The audio-interviews were recorded after the participants being informed and agreed for. The interviews were unstructured and they followed a progressive focusing pattern. During the first stage, as Goodson (2013) explains, it is important to give the informants the opportunity to tell their story as they wish with as little invention as possible. For this reason, a type of unstructured interview is chosen. Unstructured interview is mainly used in cases:

Where the interest is in some dimension of an individual's life experience, and where the significant themes can only be elicited by allowing the individual to give their account in their own way, without the fragmentation of structured questioning which may lose the thread of the narrative

(Gillham, 2005: 45)

Of course each one of the five interviews followed a different path and the need for prompting for each participant, so as the level of intervention varies from one interview to the other. As the intention was the interviewee to guide the discussion and to talk about the experiences and the feelings that are important for him/her, the ease and the comfort that the participants showed during the interviews was a crucial factor to determine how much the discussion will last. The duration of the interviews varies from 20 to 40 minutes, regarding the situation. The interviews took place in some free and available, at the time of the interview, room in the school building. Talking in their work place was a choice considered to help the teachers talk and reflect about their job and personal experiences.

In addition, inspired by Goodson (2001) and the strategies proposed by him for facilitating the process of the life history research interviews, the idea of using "time-lines" was adapted in the study. Time lines are considered to be a useful methodological tool which gave the opportunity to the interviewees to organize their thoughts, to reflect upon them, to decide which parts of his/her life story are to be

spoken about (Goodson, 2001). Moreover, time lines were seen as a means of empowerment for the participants helping them in the process of getting prepared for an unusual type of interview which follows a narrative style.

All the participants in the study, they were approached in October 2015 and asked personally to participate in the study. Since they expressed their willingness to participate, they got some information about the purpose of the study and they were asked to prepare a time-line before the interview. An informative letter which explains with details the process of the interview and what is expected from the interviewees was distributed up to a week before the interview. The informative letter given to the teacher stressed among other things:

(...) Using a time-line of the key events in your life would be really useful in prompting memories and concentrating attention. For that reason I will invite you to construct a time-line prior to the interview. The sort of information that can be included is a personal choice. Time-lines usually include among other information: place and date of birth, family background, parents' occupation, childhood, community and context, education, school experiences, general work history, changes of jobs, types of position and status, marriage and own family, other interests, future ambitions and inspirations.... There is no right or wrong way to construct a time-line. You can include as much information as you want especially if you think it will be useful for me to understand your current identity and your life choices (...)

(part of the letter given to teachers prior to the interview)

As it was expected, each of the responders reacted differently to the instructions given to him/her.

The first of them, T1 followed step by step the instructions described in the informative letter. She was really punctual and she constructed the time line prior to the interview. Moreover, during the interview she used it as a map that helped her to talk about her experiences and beliefs concerning multicultural education.

The second teacher, T2 decided to construct the time line during the interview while he was talking about his life experiences, probably because he found this way more effective in order to organize his thoughts. He proved to be productive enough when he was talking and writing at the same time.

The third and the fourth teacher claimed that they forgot to prepare the time line but they were willing to construct it afterwards and send it to the researcher's mail address. Of course, it was meaningless for the study to incorporate time lines constructed after the interview as tools for data collection. The main reason for using time lines as methodological tools of the study was- as it has been said already- to help the process of the interview and to concentrate responders' attention. Thus, there was no reason for asking responders to prepare the time lines afterwards.

The fifth teacher did not agree with the idea that constructing a time line will be useful for the study. Since having herself an academic background, she was well-informed about research topics and issues. Influenced by the phenomenographic approach which assumes each researcher comes with her/his own understanding of reality, constructing this time line seemed pointless to her simply because “key-events” would probably mean different things for her and for the researcher. Thus, she offered to the study a rich narrative of her personal story and she hoped to help the study by letting the researcher free to apply his/her own understanding and analyze the data by using his/her personal lenses.

Apart from the interviews, data used in the study came also from document analysis applied in the formal curriculum for the Swedish preschools which proved to be a rich source of data regarding multicultural education and how are the teachers expected to behave in multicultural settings. During data selection, the researcher followed a process of re-reading and reviewing the data provided from the document (Bowen, 2009). The selected data related to the central research questions of the current study.

Data management and analysis

During the next step of data management and data analysis, the interviews were transcribed and the information provided was organized into thematic categories. After reading and re-reading the transcriptions several times, key elements identified through the interviews transcripts. As Gillham (2005) explains after capturing peoples’ stories in a narrative style your research purpose guides you to keep certain elements of what has been said. Consequently, the common elements which were found among the interviews helped the researcher to construct categories of meaning and to apply thematic analysis of data. To put it simplest, the content of the interviews were organized under different category headings (Cohen et al, 2011).

Documentary data follow a similar analytical procedure. The researcher follows a systematic procedure of reviewing the document in order to make sense and synthesize the information contained in the Swedish formal curriculum for preschool. Finally, the researcher used the data coming from document analysis in order to describe the social context and expectations that Sweden has from the preschool teachers working in multicultural education. In addition, the data coming from document analysis were compared to those coming from interviews (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis followed an inductive approach which entails identifying patterns in data and constructing categories of meaning. Interviews data used to check documents data and vice versa (Bowen, 2009).

Ethics

The Swedish Research Council has formulated and published a number of ethical factors needed when a study is conducted. Following the ethical principles, in this study: all the participants took part according to their willingness, they were already informed about the content and the purpose of the study and finally they were aware of their right to quit the process any time they wanted to, communicated via a letter of permission. In addition, all the teachers referred to in the study, as they shared their personal and sensitive life stories, agreed to stay anonymous. For this reason, teachers are mentioned with the initial T following by a number which corresponds to each one of them (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5). The number allocated for each participant was a random choice. Participants' names and interview data provided by them are protected for privacy and are used only for the purposes of the study. Access to the material collected during the study and the use of it for other unscientific or commercial purposes has not been given.

Critique and limitations of life-history research

Life history methods, as well as narrative research in general, has frequently been questioned and challenged about its status and value compared to other research genres. In the field of education, life history research is often used as a research methodology aiming to examine teachers' biographies and to answer research questions through teachers' personal narratives. As a consequence, a number of criticisms have been raised.

Firstly, a strong opponent of the life history methodology is the dominant empirical tradition, which is based on traditional conceptions of epistemology and objectivity of knowledge and truth (Dhunpath, 2000). Among the empiricists, the belief that in life history research "anything goes" is common and any narrative approach faces the enduring critique of relativism of truth when it comes to construction and analysis of personal life stories. Dhunpath (2000) tries to address these questions and concerns by adopting a complementary approach to the relationship between life history methodology and the empirical tradition. Contrary to a traditional positivistic research approach which aims to quantifying teaching performance of students' achievement, Dhunpath (2000) supports methodological pluralism, an approach which includes life history. He suggests that, teachers' and students' voices that have been ignored and silenced for decades, reveal social dynamics and can offer different ways of conceptualizing educational issues concerning teaching, learning or forming curriculum (Dhunpath, 2000). In educational research, the "outer" truth of the environment should be combined –rather than remaining isolated- with the "inner" truth of the educators working in it (Dhunpath, 2000).

Another important limitation related to narrative approach adopted by research is the small samples that it uses. The number of the educators participating in a project/study which applies life history research methodology cannot be as large as for

instance in an empirical research project/ study. Nevertheless, this kind of research as Dhunpath (2000) emphasizes, provides rich and deep information through extensive interviewing of individual subjects.

In addition, Dhunpath (2000) refers to the danger of the researcher transforming into a journalist during a life history research project/ study. He suggests that questions concerning how personal information is used according to researcher's purposes and what kind of relationship is established between the researcher and the interviewer are critical (Dhunpath, 2000). He also poses questions as such: is there shared ownership and control between them, what is the degree of researcher's mediation and finally, who tells the story? It is clear that all of the above constitute ethical and epistemological considerations related to life history research that the researchers should be aware of and ready to face. Biographers, according to Dhunpath (2000) should be extremely responsible professionals and sensitive about the data they obtain. They should give an unconditional promise to the participants that they can talk about the stories they want, to the degree they want and they can also protect themselves by having total control of what will be seen in published form (Dhunpath,2000).

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

Before presenting the results connected to each one of the research questions, it is useful to add a table with some characteristics that synthesize the profile of the interviewees.

The following table summarizes up some basic characteristics of the preschool teachers that participated in the study. This includes data the teachers provided during the personal interviews which were used in order to create the table below, are related to preschool teachers' sex, age, country of origin, country in which they attend school and university, their studying and working experiences and finally the years of their working experience in the culturally diverse preschool.

Each one of the columns which is presented in a different color accumulates the characteristics of one participant. The column allocated for each participant was a random choice. Thus, cases cannot be identified, as this could be problematic given the small sample of the current study.

TABLE OF TEACHERS' CHARACTERISTICS					
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female
Age	35	30	48	29	33
Country of origin	Denmark	Sweden	Iraq	Egypt	Belarus
Education	Denmark	Sweden	Iraq	Sweden	Belarus, Russia
Teacher Education	Denmark	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden
Work experience	Sweden	Malta, Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Germany, Sweden
Number of years in the sample school	2,5 years	2 years	13 years	2 years	3,5 years

Research question: How do the preschool teachers describe their experience of working in a cultural diverse preschool?

The five teachers participated in the current study were asked to talk about their personal stories concerning their experiences in multicultural education. The first research question focuses on the descriptions that the teachers offered during the interviews about their experience of working in a cultural diverse preschool. Teachers' descriptions followed some patterns that are demonstrated in the following thematic categories. According to the following categories, the preschool teachers experience working in a cultural diverse preschool:

As an interesting and enriching experience

It is important to mention that all the participants in the study, unanimously, described working in multicultural education as a really interesting and enriching experience for them. As it is showed by their interviews, they realize how many things they gained

from this and in which ways working with diverse colleagues and students affected their professional and personal lives.

T1 and T3 explain what is more interesting when working in a multicultural environment and how a teacher can use the obvious differences between the students as a starting point and as a vehicle for teaching children to accept and respect the differences:

...it's been interesting...to teach the children...I believe what is important children to learn to accept the different cultures that we don't have to be the same all of us, but we can still accept each other...now I'm working with some of the smallest children and we don't need to do a lot...we just teach the children to be friends, to share and show tolerance towards each other...

(T3)

...It's very good for the children from an early age to be mixed. I wish I was like that even though I am happy with my upbringing in the countryside. I wish we were more mixed...for example, if you wanna teach about how we are all different in all kind of stuff, here it is already shown. You have fourteen kids with more or less difference in where they are coming from, how they are speaking...so, it's already there, so much easier to work with. You don't need to teach them. It's already there!

(T1)

In addition, T4 and T2 say with enthusiasm how they like to work with people from different countries and backgrounds and how important is for them to learn from others' experiences:

...I loved it! And I loved see children from everywhere all around the world...and the teachers, I wanted to learn from all the teachers from different countries...so, it was really fun and nice...I love my job a lot and I m enjoying it...I feel I'm young when I'm with children, I feel young!

(T4)

...I wanted to see other stuff... I was more interested in multicultural schools...that's why I applied here actually. I like to work with people from different countries. My motivation is working with the staff. To have their experiences...my colleague (for example) is from New Zealand, she is working here for a long time...

(T2)

T5's experience of multicultural education when she was a child differs from the one she has as a teacher. Based on her past lived experiences when she felt the school in

the new county to be an unfriendly place for her, she explains how vital is for the children to feel welcomed in the new school environment. And exactly this, creating a warming and friendly environment for all the children is considered to be, for her, the most interesting part of her job.

...I feel the environment very interesting for sure...and I feel we need more people from different countries...you have to be prepared for your life...you have to have a broader perspective...here we meet the children with a warm welcome. It was worked out for them...because if you don't have a warm welcome, from my skin, I knew that the school would not work for me in R., so as my mother...and then in the end after the 10th grade, put me out and getting me home schooled...I mean, why even to have a school then? Put child in home school...you make the children sit at home and study by themselves...why to have a school?

(T5)

As a challenge for becoming better

Two out of five teachers sharing their thoughts and experiences through personal interviews described their experience of working in a multicultural environment as a challenge. A challenge that they were aware of from the beginning concerning either the use of a language other than their mother tongue in their work place or finding a way to deal with the culture mix among the school staff and the students. Either way, they chose this challenge in order to become better in language, communication or social skills. T1 and T2 seem to realize how this working experience changed them as professionals and as individuals and how they became better as they went through this.

...I ended up here (in the preschool) because when I came back to Sweden I wanted to keep my English and I also wanted to get more of the mixed culture...here I got more comfortable with my English and I always being also someone who likes challenging...so both in my professional and my private life I always try to push myself...it's a challenge, an extra challenge when you have different cultures and you need to get to know when you are acting in a special way, is it something connecting to specific culture or is it something that maybe doesn't have to do with the culture...I think that if you see people, different people with a big variety, you get more empathy for people and the understanding can only be better...not only maybe, but it is a bigger chance you have a more open minded (person)...

(T1)

By using fewer words and speaking in a simple way, T2 explains also how this challenging experience helped him to become better on professional and personal level.

...learn from others' experiences...it was a challenge for me...(also) I speak more English now...I'm getting better...

(T2)

As being members of the “international community” of the school

Three out of five teachers participating in the current study presented their choice to work in a multicultural environment as a choice strongly connected to their lived experiences, personal and professional identities. Moreover, they express in many ways how comfortable they feel in the school and they confess their sense of belonging in the “international community” of the school. They present themselves as “international” people and talk about the similar experiences they have with their students. Through their interviews, they seem to support that working in a multicultural environment appears to be a “natural choice” for “international people”.

...I chose it (the preschool) because I am international! I thought an international preschool as the best choice because I am bilingual and I think it is an interesting thing for me because I am raised in two languages...

(T2)

T5 describes how close she feels with her students because of the same experiences they share.

...I feel at home...I can tell when looking in the children's eyes, I find myself...they go through what I have gone through...and it's so interesting because you click extra more at this point with the children...you just have to know to understand what they experience...their problems those moments when you find themselves lost or have a hard tension for things...you can be there in the moment for them to see from which perspective you should approach them...

(T5)

T4 explains why she is not thinking to ever change her working environment from a multicultural to a monocultural one.

...I get comfortable, very comfortable in this job...I thought this like my home...I know all the teachers, the old ones and the new that they are coming, the children, the parents...and even some times when I meet children from my country, then I can help them with the language...even more help them, I can do something for them...

(T4)

Research question: What are the difficulties that the preschool teachers mention?

The five teachers talked openly during the interviews about the difficulties they face in the classroom and offered valuable insights from their perceived realities in cultural diverse settings. The interview data have been proceed carefully and repeatedly so as the following thematic categories to get formed. These thematic categories depict the five preschool teachers' difficulties when working in the culturally diverse setting of the specific preschool where the study occurred.

Differences between European and Scandinavian model of learning in preschool

The preschool participated in the study is an international preschool located in Gothenburg, Sweden. Consequently, it works according the guiding lines given from the Swedish government as they are expressed and published in the formal Swedish curriculum for preschool (LPFÖ). Traditionally, Scandinavian countries used to adopt a more romantic perspective about how learning in preschool is occurred compared to other European countries (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010). According to this traditional view which seems to have supporters even today, it is enough for preschool students to be present in a rich learning environment and free playing there. Then, children's learning will be achieved as self-initiating and explanatory (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010). Nevertheless, the revised formal curriculum for preschool which was published in 2010 introduces a more complex and broader perspective about how children learn in preschool. In the new curriculum there is an obvious intent to make preschool more learning-oriented and of a higher quality (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010). This new perspective comes closer to the current preschool's perspective which is influenced by the English way. According to this, it is expected from the teachers to be more focused on structured activities which aim to academic achievement rather than leave children play free.

This ideological shift in Swedish education, as analyzed by Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan (2010) in their article "*A turning-point or a backward slide: the challenge facing the Swedish preschool today*", seems to be at the core of preschool teachers' difficulties. As it is showed by their interviews, three out of five teachers participated in the study expressed difficulties in working in a more structure and academic focused way as it is expected from them. It is worth mentioning that these teachers had attended school, as students, in Scandinavian countries. Thus, they experience as teachers the new perspective which contradicts their lived experiences as students. T3 says:

...it's more English school here...we have more education for the children or more focus on teaching...In Swedish preschool I think they are more...we believe and we say that children are learning through playing, when free playing...here, we have to arrange...teaching the letters maybe from two years old. I don't think they do that in a Swedish preschool...

(T3)

T1 has some experience of working in a preschool in Malta during an exchange European program. Thus, she had the opportunity to experience the differences between the different models as a teacher in a European school as well. She states about the differences between the Scandinavian and the European way of working in preschool:

...I was like to taste Malta...so, I ended up there in an international private catholic boys' school...which has a huge difference from Swedish school system and also from how you teach children and how you treat them...it's a lot about academic from a very young age and not so much of the social behavior and skills...like in Sweden if you look at the curriculum it is important for the kids to be able to play all the way up to the primary (school)...and in Malta they don't believe in that in the same way...(here) we are more influenced of the English way...(how) the English school works. So, I found it a good mix between how the Swedish (school) works and the English one here...

(T1)

T2 when the discussion during the interview comes to the point of sharing the difficulties he faces while working in the culturally diverse preschool, he says:

...difficulties...only the English and the English system...how they work... it is a bit different from the Swedish preschool...more structured...

(T2)

Working with culturally diverse colleagues

Another difficulty mentioned, and discussed, by the majority of the interviewees (three out of five participants) was working with their colleagues many of whom are coming from totally different cultures and educational systems, with different beliefs and approaches to childhood and education. Undoubtedly, finding a way to communicate, take common decisions and work together is for the culturally diverse preschool teachers not an easy process. The staff in the school is so diverse that sometimes creates problems. The majority of the teachers participated in the study see their colleagues as a bigger challenge to communicate and cooperate with rather than the students' parents.

T3 mentions during the interview:

...I think that one of the biggest challenges for me has been not to work with children or parents but my colleagues...all the different cultures we bring into this, it is a big challenge, you have to understand your colleagues, how they

are acting...we have different education and different understanding of what is in a child's interest...but it's been interesting as well...

(T3)

T1 presents the same point of view when she talks about the difficulties she faces:

...the biggest challenge actually is not with the kids or the parents. For me is with my colleagues sometimes... because we all have raised up in different ways and we all have different education and that can create problems... for example, how you address a child or how you talk to a child, how you meet the person can be very different depending on what kind of culture you are from...

(T1)

T5 explains the way she handles the difficulties in working with culturally diverse colleagues:

...difficulty...a lot of women that I'm working with ...you see all the different colors...how they say...they see different path on our walking... (but) in the end we are all equal...with all different goals searching for in real life... so I think that everybody has to try to come together with all their different theories and backgrounds and culture, families...and they have just you know be there and teach each other...

(T5)

The English language

Using at the work place a language different than their mother tongue could be experienced as a difficulty by everyone. Although none of the teachers participating in the study - as it has been noticed again- has English as a mother tongue, only two out of the five discussed during the interviews the difficulties and feelings of discomfort they had concerning the use of the foreign language when they started working in the school.

T4 explains during the interview the feelings and the thoughts she had when she started working in the school:

...I tried it here (in the preschool) and I loved it because there are children from all over the world and everybody knows a little of English but not perfect... so I didn't feel like "oh they are much better than me"...they are people from other countries but not only English...so you don't feel like with somebody whose nature language is English...so I felt more comfortable...even if I make mistakes with my language, it's fine...because all people (here) they are in the same situation...

(T4)

T2 is also discussing how he felt at the beginning about using the English language at work:

...when I came (in the school) I didn't feel comfortable with my English...that was an issue...

(T2)

Need for in-service education

It is a fact that educational research is a complex and evolving scientific field. Research findings bring new data everyday about situations that teachers face in their classroom. Are the teachers familiar with the progress of research? Do they have the knowledge that the research findings bring in order to overcome difficult situations? Surprisingly, only one out of five teachers participating in the study noted a need for professional development and support. During her interview and while talking about the difficulties she faces in the multicultural preschool, T4 expressed her feeling that she has limited knowledge about special education. She said that when she meets a student with special needs in her classroom, she feels uncomfortable and unable to help the student in the more effective way. As she clearly put:

...difficulty is like you have children with difficulties...and you don't know how to treat them, you don't know how to help them, what you can do..what is good or not good to do with them...so it sounds like big challenge for me because I didn't know anything about special education...that was a reason for making me (to do) something more...you know...what's going on, how can we help them..

(T4)

Dealing with this situation, T4 decided to take part in a short time training program in special education. When the interview was taken, the teacher was still attending the program in GU which lasted for one term. It is important to mention that T4 take the initiative to educate herself more. This training program was not offered by her job or by some professional organization aiming to professionals' development and support.

...it was my choice...because you know, nowadays we are having more children, more and more in a group...more than one or two...that's why I felt like I need to help, that I need to do something...

(T4)

Summary

Summarizing up the results' section, the thematic categories that came up after the data analysis and are used to answer the research questions are illustrated in the following tables:

Research question 1: How do the preschool teachers describe their experience of working in a culturally diverse preschool?			
	As an interesting and enriching experience	As a challenge for becoming better	As being a member of the “international community” of the school
T1	✓	✓	
T2	✓	✓	✓
T3	✓		
T4	✓		✓
T5	✓		✓
In total	5/5	2/5	3/5

Research question 2: What are the difficulties that the preschool teachers mention?				
	Differences between European and Scandinavian model of learning in preschool	Working with culturally diverse colleagues	The English language	Need for in-service education
T1	✓	✓		
T2	✓		✓	
T3	✓	✓		
T4			✓	✓
T5		✓		
In total	3/5	3/5	2/5	1/5

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

In this section, the results of the current study will be discussed in relation to previous research findings. Most of the results seem to agree with the research that previously has been done in the field, but there are some conclusions that differ from what has been studied before.

Starting with the description of the preschool teachers' experiences in multicultural education, it is worth mentioning the fact that all the teachers participated in the study, unanimously described working in a culturally diverse preschool as an interesting and enriching experience for them. In a higher level of analysis and critical thinking forty per cent of the teachers questioned, seem to realize not only how interesting this working experience is but also how many it offered to them and how it changed them as professionals and as individuals. Thus, forty percent of the teachers participated in the study described during the interviews their experience of working in the culturally diverse preschool as a challenge for them to get better. Similar to the case presented in the article "*Stories of practitioner enquiry: using narrative interviews to explore teachers' perspectives of learning to learn*" written by Thomas, Tiplady and Wall (2013), there is a significant number of the participant teachers in the current study as well, who show a great interest in their professional and personal development. These preschool teachers present themselves as people to like challenging themselves and finally as people who like keep on learning in professional and personal level.

Continuing with the results of the study regarding the preschool teachers' experiences of working in the culturally diverse school, it is important to discuss that more than half of the teachers interviewed, expressed a sense of belonging in a kind of "international community" of the school. Although the fact that English language which was spoken in the school was no one's mother tongue and the fact that all the teacher were coming in the school with totally different cultural backgrounds, none of them seems to feel "the other", marginalized or rejected. In contrast, they talked about how comfortable they feel in the job and how they see their work place as their second home. Opposed to immigrant preschool teachers' experiences presented by Arndt (2015, 2016) teachers in the current study did not referred to any attempt of masking their differences with the rest of the school staff. No "dominant culture" appeared in the school so as to make the teachers feel afraid or unable to reveal parts of their cultures and identities. The school participated in the current study seems to approach the alternative view of diversity which is analyzed and proposed by Arndt (2015, 2016) seen simply as a natural part of our existence. The teachers naturally characterize themselves as "international" individuals during their interviews. In addition, they express their intention to use the differences between the students and the school staff in general, as starting point and vehicle, to talk with the children about how different we are all in various ways. In other words, the students are pushed to

explore what Kristeva's philosophical work proposes, "the foreigner that is within each of us" (Arndt, 2015; 2016). The school seems to realize that this is the only effective way to handle diversity, as a natural part of our existence (Arndt,2014) . Otherwise, as Arndt has clearly stated:

You wonder: How can you nurture children from different backgrounds, when you feel so un-nurtured yourself? How can you contribute 'richness', when you are not even really sure yourself, which parts of your culture you can, and which you can't share? Or do you even want to?

(Arndt, 2014 :6)

Apart from the preschool teachers' descriptions of their experiences of working in a culturally diverse preschool, the current study intends to capture through the teachers' life stories and personal interviews, the number of difficulties that they face in their work place.

The first difficulty for the preschool teachers that participated in the current study showed is the differences between the Scandinavian and the rest of Europe model of learning in preschool. As has already been mentioned, Swedish preschool faces a turning point in ideology about what is the appropriate pedagogy to be applied in order for the best learning outcomes to be achieved (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010). This ideological shift, which is obvious in the new formal Swedish curriculum for preschool seems to reject the traditional Scandinavian view according to which it is enough for preschool students to be present in a rich learning environment in which there is "free play" (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010). In contrary, the new curriculum introduces a more complex view about how children learn facing them as constructing individuals (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010). This debate and dichotomy which takes place in Swedish society seems to affect the preschool teachers' beliefs as well about what is more important in preschool for the children; to participate in free play activities or to teach them in a more structured way with a more academic focus. From the teachers participated in the study, those who were attending Scandinavian school systems as students, seem not to be convinced that a more academic perspective and a more structure way of designing activities in preschool will be proved to be more helpful and effective for students' learning. Thus, they are expressing difficulties in working in the more structured, and influenced by the English- European way, that the school is expecting from them. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties referred by the preschool teachers, it is important for the Swedish preschool to face the big challenge of today and tomorrow:

...to keep preschool as it is, with a broad view of children's learning, turning more towards traditional school subjects but combining this with a preschool pedagogy, with the goal of making preschool the start of lifelong learning.

(Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2010: 226)

Previous research has also identified, analyzed and discussed a number of difficulties in communication when people from different cultural backgrounds are coming to work together and to take common decisions. In Arndt's (2006) work for example, immigrant early childhood teachers are coming with totally different ideals for children which of course differ from the locals' ones. Similarly, Joon Sun Lee (2006) discusses the case of eighteen diverse preschool teachers who share their beliefs about what they think as appropriate school practices and pedagogies for 4-year-olds. On the same wavelength, the results of the current study show that culturally diverse colleagues could be a common difficulty for teachers working in a multicultural environment. As it is showed by their interviews, teachers in the preschool give the impression they understand that when people from different cultures meet up and have to work together, it is inevitable to disagree or having different way of thinking. The most interesting and important in this job, as teachers claimed, is to find a way to overcome these difficulties and maybe the feeling of discomfort that everyone has in the beginning and to communicate effectively in order to take responsible common decisions for their everyday life in the school. Together all the teachers of the group are willing to prepare a warm welcome for everyone in the classroom and to be themselves the greatest example for their students to learn how to work together, to respect, to act and to care for each other. Common research findings regarding the difficulties in communication between the people with different cultural backgrounds can be explained by using sociocultural theory and Rogoff's work (2003). According to Rogoff (2003), as it is extensively analyzed in her book "*The cultural nature of human development*", culture has to do with the organization of a group's everyday life, the tools and the technologies used by this group. When an individual tries to get himself/herself immersed in communities and settings with different cultural practices, such as language, religion, government and legal systems, ways of teaching and learning, gender roles, "culture shock" is experienced. The notion of "culture shock" is used by Rogoff (2003) when trying to understand and explain the feelings of discomfort that an individual faces when coming in contact with different cultural communities. Consequently, based on what Rogoff (2003) says, this difficulty expressed by some of the participants in the study can be explained as following. Communication with culturally diverse colleagues and use of English in the school (which was a language different than the participants' mother tongue) make teachers feel difficulty and discomfort. This is happening because the various cultural communities in which the teachers participate overlap or conflict each other.

The last difficulty indicated by the results of the current study is the lack of appropriate professional support of preschool teachers. Previous research has identified the topic as a problematic relationship between pre-service and in-service education (Bishop, 2010). As Bishop (2010) argues, new teachers begin their careers with great aspirations about implementing a range of alternative and interactive teaching techniques. However, they end up teaching in very traditional ways during at least the first year of their teaching. Teachers strive for students' participation and achievement without having any academic feedback or access to sources of

information and support. Research in education is coming up with so many new findings every day which aim to improve the teaching and learning process. Teachers need to get familiar with educational research findings and to attend seminars, education and training programs during their professional life. In the current study, only one out of five teachers discussed her need for further education and training in the field of special education. In accordance to the findings of the current study, previous research findings indicated that preschool teachers expressed the same need for extra education and training in high percentages (Jensen, 2010). According to Jensen (2010), teachers participated in an international survey conducted in 23 countries who has been asked to talk about their needs for professional development, reported mainly the fields of special education and multicultural education. Regardless of why preschool teachers feel more uncomfortable or unprepared with educational issues concerning multicultural and special education, there is an obvious and demanding need for providing to teachers more education, training and access to sources of information and professional support.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The current study intends to shed light on how multicultural education issues are viewed from the perspective of the educators. Although little work has been done in the field, research has shown several times that ignoring the voices and the thoughts of the classroom teachers leads to unsuccessful and unsustainable attempts to change or improvement preschool education. For this reason, in the current study teachers' voices had the opportunity to be heard through the personal life history interviews that the participants gave.

The research questions posed by the study focused on two focal areas: how the preschool teachers describe their experience of working in a culturally diverse preschool and what kind of difficulties they face in their working place.

As for preschool teachers' description of their experience of working in a culturally diverse preschool, all the participants unanimously described their working experience as interesting and enriching. In a smaller percentage, nearly half of the questioned preschool teachers describe working in a multicultural environment as a challenge for them which helped them to get developed and become better as professionals and as individuals. In addition, most of the teachers interviewed in the current study confessed a sense of belonging in the "international community" of the school and presented themselves as "international" people who feel really comfortable working in such an environment.

As for the second focal area of the study, a number of difficulties that preschool teachers face in a multicultural setting discussed during the interviews. More than half of the teachers found difficult to work according to the new ideology that the

formal Swedish curriculum brings in the preschools. This ideological shift introduces a more academic focused way of working with preschool students as well as designing more structured activities for them. Thus, the European model of learning in preschool which tend to replace the traditional Scandinavian model, seems to make the teachers who have been raised according to the Scandinavian school system, to feel afraid of this ideological change. Another difficulty that the preschool teachers discussed during the interviews was to work and to deal with culturally diverse colleagues. The teachers referred to communication problems caused due to their cultural differences with their colleagues were more than half. Working in a language different from their mother tongue noticed as difficulty by two out of five preschool teachers participated in the study. The last difficulty identified in the study which was marked only by a small minority (one out of five) interviewed preschool teachers was the lack of appropriate professional development and support.

This study embraces the position that teachers' voices, experiences, and difficulties should be heard and become the starting point for any change in education. Life histories of the people participating in teaching and learning process give valuable insights to educational research and offer alternative views to those who design formal school curriculum or decide school policies and practices. Consequently, it is vital more work and research to be conducted in the field so as to give the opportunity for the voices of teachers as well as of students which have often remained silent to be heard. Educational research should take into consideration the fact that studies with focus on students' voices are even fewer compared to studies focusing on teachers' perspective. It would be really interesting to hear also students' life experiences, how they feel being in such diverse classes, how difficult is for them to speak two languages or more, what it means for them to be different, how they see their fellow students, can they really see "differences"? This can unquestionably be a focus for further study.

CHAPTER 9: LIMITATIONS

The current study meets a number of limitations. Firstly, as it follows an inductive approach, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The intention was not to generalize the findings but to do a study explanatory in nature which gives the opportunity for teachers' voices, perceptions and personal lived- experiences to be heard. Thus, one major limitation of this study is its small sample which includes five preschool teachers working in a culturally diverse preschool located in Gothenburg, Sweden. The teachers volunteered to participate and talk about their experiences and difficulties which of course cannot be generalized to preschool teachers in general.

In addition, life- history research, the method used in the current study, has also received a number of criticisms (Dhunpath, 2000). Epistemological considerations arising from the dominant empirical tradition challenge life history research's status

and value. These epistemological considerations are related to relativism of any truth which cannot be measured or quantified. The criticism questions also the role of the researcher in this kind of narrative approaches, which is compared to the role of a journalist. In order to counteract this kind of correlation, the researcher has been committed to a number of ethical guidelines and principles. Consequently, the participants are not risking exposure to experience any emotional harm as they are allowed to talk about what they want, to the extent they want. Moreover, they are aware of their right to leave the study when they want to.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that not all of the participants did use the “time-lines” as they were expected to do. Time lines seem to help the interviewees who used them to organize better their thoughts, to reflect upon them and to prompt their narratives. Although time lines enriched the life-history work conducted in the current study, richer interview data could have probably come to light, if all of the five teachers had used this strategy as they were expected to.

Despite limitations, this study indicates a clear need for further dialogue among preschool teachers and other people involved in preschool education. Teachers’ experiences and difficulties need to be heard and used as a basis for any attempt to change and improve preschool education. Policy makers, researchers, teachers, students and everyone involved in preschool education need to reach a consensus of what can ensure a high quality preschool education.

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WEBSITES

- <http://codex.vr.se/>
- <http://www.scb.se/>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: informative letter which was given to the teachers prior to the interview

Dear teacher,

First of all, I really appreciate your willingness to help me with my research project
and I would like to thank you for giving me some of your precious time. Taking into

consideration that giving an interview can make respondents feel nervous, I want to give you some information in advance so as to make the whole process easier and you feel comfortable.

The interview will be quite unstructured, which means that there are not very specific questions that I want to be answered. My intention is to hear your personal story, your own feelings and experiences concerning your work in an international school. I want to understand how, and why, you choose to work with culturally diverse students and colleagues, what kind of motivations or difficulties you face, what this situation means to you as a person, and as a professional.

Using a time-line of the key events in your life would be really useful in prompting memories and concentrating attention. For that reason I will invite you to construct a time-line prior to the interview. The sort of information that can be included is a personal choice. Time-lines usually include among other information: place and date of birth, family background, parents' occupation, childhood, community and context, education, school experiences, general work history, changes of jobs, types of position and status, marriage and own family, other interests, future ambitions and inspirations.... There is no right or wrong way to construct a time-line. You can include as much information as you want especially if you think it will be useful for me to understand your current identity and your life choices.

Finally, I need to inform you that any kind of information used for the project will be confidential and anonymity will be ensured for the participants. Persons and schools will be anonymised and encoded, so no one can identify cases.

Thank you once again for helping me.

Feel free to contact me for any questions you may have and please let me know when you are available for the interview.

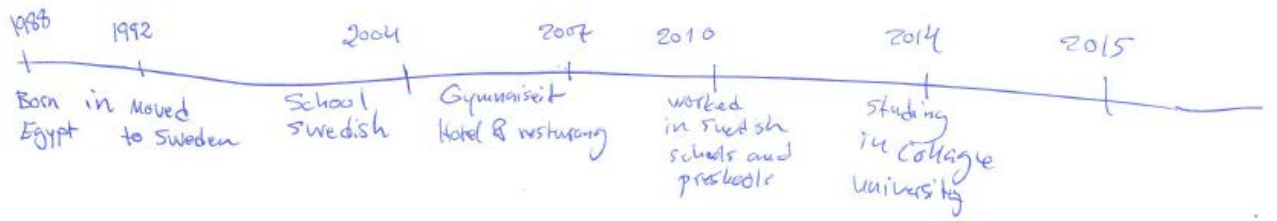
Best regards,

Eleni Tampaki.

E-mail: xxxxxxx@student.gu.se

Appendix 2: Time-lines constructed by the interviewees

SAMPLE 1



SAMPLE 2

Raised on the country side

Parents traveled as often
as we could.

Open minded parents

School (only a few with
margin background)

Travel

Moved

Education

Exchange Comenius Assistant
Program
worked abroad 6 months

Felt more comfortable
with english

Moved back
and wanted to
keep the english.

Interesting, challenging,